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## BJP launches statewide wall-writing campaign ahead of Assembly polls

# Campaign aimed at strengthening mass outreach: Himanta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: The Bharatiya Janata Party on Monday formally launched its statewide wall-writing and wall-painting campaign ahead of the forthcoming Assam Assembly elections, expected to be held in March-April, with senior leaders kicking off the drive simultaneously in Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Jorhat.

The campaign was inaugurated in Guwahati by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma along with Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia.

Painting the party's election symbol, the lotus, on a wall, Sarma said the wall-writing drive would be carried out across the state within a fixed timeframe, with prior permission to be taken from wall owners to strengthen mass outreach.

He said the slogans would highlight the work done by BJP-led governments in Assam over the past several years and reflect the party's ide-



ology.

State election management committee convener Pradan Baruah and Dispur MLA Akon Bora were among those present.

Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal launched the campaign in Dibrugarh, where he painted the lotus symbol on a wall near the

Shani Temple at Thanachariali, carrying the message "Vote for BJP for a Developed Assam."

Addressing party workers, Sonowal said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Centre and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Assam, the pace of development in the state had accelerated and would further gain momentum in the coming days.

Similar wall-painting programmes were organised in other parts of Dibrugarh, including Rotary Road, where Assam Cabinet minister and Dibrugarh MLA Prasanta Phukan, Rajya Sabha MP Rameswar Teli and BJP leader Rituparna Barua participated.

A large number of BJP workers and supporters took part, raising slogans in support of the party.

Speaking to reporters, Phukan said the BJP had formally commenced (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Tea industry braces for legal battle with Assam govt

'Move to acquire tea garden 'labour lines' and grant land pattas to workers driven primarily by electoral considerations'

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 5: The Assam tea industry is preparing for a major legal confrontation with the State government over its decision to acquire tea garden "labour lines" and grant land pattas to workers, a move industry bodies allege was taken unilaterally without consultation.

The escalation follows a recent warning by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma that tea estates opposing the policy would face penalties. Industry insiders, however, cautioned that the decision could have serious implications for the long-term viability of tea gardens.

A senior planter and member of the Tea Association of India said the industry had been left with no



option but to seek legal recourse, alleging that the move appeared to be driven primarily by electoral considerations linked to the tea garden workforce.

He expressed disappointment over the absence of dialogue, stat-

ing that the government had finalised the decision without consulting industry stakeholders even once.

Industry representatives argued that meaningful consultation could have led to (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Guv Acharya inaugurates programme on Indian Knowledge System, AI



GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Monday inaugurated a six-day faculty development programme (FDP) at the Cotton University here.

The programme 'Indian Knowledge System and Artificial Intelligence: A prerequisite blend for 21st Century Education' is being jointly organised by the Inter University Centre for Teacher Education (IUCTE), Varanasi, and Cotton University under the initiative of Lok Bhavan, Assam.

Speaking on the occasion, the

Governor said that teaching is a unique profession that goes beyond the transmission of knowledge and plays a crucial role in shaping personality, values, and social responsibility.

He pointed out that there was a need for a shift towards experiential, learner-centric, and field-based teaching-learning approaches.

Referring to the National Education Policy, the governor said that the new policy is a cornerstone to encourage and promote teachers' research and (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Three injured as 5.1 magnitude quake rocks state

GUWAHATI/MORIGAON, Jan 5: At least three people were injured in an earthquake of 5.1 magnitude, which jolted central Assam in the early hours of Monday, officials said.

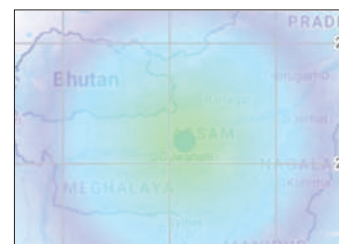
Minor damage was also caused to some houses in Morigaon district, they said.

A National Center for Seismology (NCS) report said the quake was recorded at 4:17 am in Morigaon district on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, at a depth of 50 km.

The exact location of the epicentre of the earthquake is at a latitude 26.37 N and longitude of 92.29 E in central Assam, it added.

People in the neighbouring Kamrup Metropolitan, Nagaon, East Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, Hojai, Dima Hasao, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi, Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar and Goalpara districts also felt the jolt.

Darrang, Tamulpur, Sonitpur,



Kamrup, Biswanath, Udalguri, Nalbari, Bajali, Barpeta, Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Lakhimpur on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra too felt the tremor.

The earthquake could be felt in central-western Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and parts of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and northern West Bengal, the NCS report said.

Central-eastern Bhutan, parts of China and Bangladesh were also shaken, according to the report.

The tremor forced people to scamper out of their homes to open areas from their sleep.

While running out, a few people suffered injuries in Morigaon and

are being treated at different health centres, a senior official said.

Joyoti Dewri (80), a resident of Na Dalbori village in Mikirbhet circle, sustained a head injury while rushing out of her home, a report by the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said.

Her family members immediately took her to Morigaon Civil Hospital for treatment, it added.

Manoj Kumar of the same village also sustained injuries. He has been admitted to the hospital and is stated to be out of danger, Morigaon district PRO S Buragohain said.

An updated report by ASDMA said that one more person sustained injuries in Morigaon district and is under treatment.

Buragohain said that some cracks were visible in a few dwelling units in the bordering areas of Nagaon and Morigaon districts after the quake.

However, no major damage was reported by the District Disaster Management Authority, he added.

Houses (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Himanta welcomes SC's refusal to grant bail to activists Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday welcomed the Supreme Court's refusal to grant bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam for their alleged involvement in the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in New Delhi's Shaheen Bagh in 2020.

During the CAA agitation, they had given the slogan of 'Azadi' and one of them had also issued a threat of severing North East from the rest of the country, the chief minister alleged on the sidelines of a programme here.

'The bail plea of the member of the 'Tukde-Tukde Gang' who had threatened to secede the Northeast from India has been rejected by the Supreme Court and I welcome it,' Sarma said.

This nation shall forever remain united, indivisible and strong, he added. The Supreme Court earlier in the day refused to grant bail to

activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the matter, saying there was a prima facie case against them under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

The apex court, however, granted bail to five others, saying "hierarchy of participation" and saying all accused in the case do not stand on the same footing.

Imam was lodged for a few months in Guwahati Central Jail after he was arrested from Jehanabad in Bihar in January 2020 for his alleged involvement in anti-CAA protests during the COVID pandemic. He had also tested COVID positive and was admitted to a hospital here.

Imam, who was active in the Shaheen Bagh protests, was booked under sedition laws for his speech where he allegedly said that Assam should be cut off from the rest of the country. He was later taken to New Delhi and lodged in Tihar Jail. (PTI)

## Man arrested with suspected heroin at Mariani railway junction

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 5: Police arrested a man identified as Raju Kumar Ram of Bihar from the Vivek Express at Mariani Railway Junction late Sunday night and recovered suspected heroin concealed in eight soap cases from his possession.

According to police sources, the arrest was made by a joint team of Jorhat and Mariani police with the assistance of the Government Railway Police (GRP), Mariani, acting on specific intelligence inputs.

The accused was reportedly carrying the suspected narcotics from Hojai.

Police said further investigation is underway to ascertain the source and intended destination of the seized (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Rongker Karkli observed with religious fervour in Karbi villages

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 5: Several Karbi villages across the hill districts witnessed the observance of Rongker Karkli, a traditional sacrificial worship performed to appease local deities Hemphu, Mukrang and goddess Rasinja, on Monday with deep religious fervour.

Rongker Karkli is one of the most significant indigenous religious practices of the Karbi tribe and continues to be observed by followers of the traditional faith in Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao and parts of the plains of Assam.

There is no fixed date for the ritual, as each village chooses a convenient day, though it is generally observed between January and February after the harvest season, when



agricultural activities come to a halt.

Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang, extended greetings to the Karbi people on the

occasion.

Praying for positive signs from the ritual, he said Rongker Karkli would usher in prosperity, development (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 'India-Bangladesh border fencing must'

SHILLONG, Jan 5: The Meghalaya unit of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has stressed the critical importance of fencing along the India-Bangladesh frontier.

"Fencing along the international border with Bangladesh is very important. We are very concerned about our borders with Bangladesh and we hope speedy completion of the border fencing and people understand that fencing is very important," Meghalaya unit BJP general secretary, Wankitbok Pohshna told reporters today in Shillong.

He pointed out that the Centre had taken the issue seriously only after the BJP assumed power at the national level.

"It is only after the BJP took over the government at the Centre that the border fencing is being taken on a serious note."

Pohshna further noted progress on infrastructure in border areas and said, "If you look at the infrastructure development in border areas, it has been strengthened after the BJP government took over. Work is going on and we expect border fencing will be completed with the passage of time."

The BJP leader also condemned the recent social media threats emanating from Bangladesh, calling



them "unacceptable" and emphasizing that the party remains vigilant.

"We have seen the threats through social media and we cannot accept that because of the threats by those people who are opposing the system in Bangladesh, we should not take part. Yes, we are vigilant."

Pohshna also highlighted the volatile situation in Bangladesh, stating, "Those threats, what to say - the situation in Bangladesh is very volatile as there is no government. I am sure the Central government is taking note of all these." (NNN)

## IIT Guwahati scientists develop sunlight-driven catalyst to convert CO2 into methanol fuel

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati, have developed a photocatalytic material that can convert carbon dioxide (CO2) into methanol fuel using sunlight, according to officials.

The effort is aimed at addressing one of the most essential challenges -- meeting rising energy needs without further harming the environment. The findings of the study have been published in the prestigious Journal of Materials Science.

"The dependence on petroleum-based fuels continues to be a source of carbon dioxide emissions, causing environmental stress and global warming. To address this, researchers are working on designing photocatalytic methods to convert carbon dioxide into clean fuels," said Mahuya De, Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering, IIT Guwahati.

Researchers worldwide have been working on addressing this critical challenge by utilising graphitic carbon nitride, a low-cost, metal-free, non-toxic material. However, due to limitations such as rapid energy loss and low fuel generation, no prominent solution has been developed so far.

To overcome this challenge, the IIT Guwahati research team combined graphitic carbon nitride with few-layer graphene. Known for its electrical conductivity and energy transfer capabilities, this ultra-thin carbon material helped minimise energy loss within the catalyst.

"The present work is expected to contribute towards mitigating environmental problems with simultaneous contribution towards green energy. Converting carbon dioxide to greener fuel using solar energy is a promising technology towards this direction," De said.

The study demonstrated that the incorporation of few-layer graphene improved the photocatalytic energy retention of carbon nitride under visible light or sunlight exposure. It kept the catalyst active for a longer duration, resulting in better light absorption and improved charge generation.

Among the composites tested, the catalyst with 15 weight percentage graphene demonstrated the most efficient conversion of carbon dioxide to methanol. It also displayed strong stability -- an important quality for its practical applications.

"The technology developed by our team holds the potential to be (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 'In addition to film screenings, GAFF 2026 will host a series of masterclasses'

# GAFF 2026 to open with Uzbek film 'Sunday'

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Shokir Kholikov-directed Uzbek film, 'Sunday', will be the opening cinema of the 2nd Guwahati Asian Film Festival (GAFF), scheduled from January 22, officials said on Monday.

The much-talked-about GAFF 2026 is set to take place on January 22-25, bringing together a dazzling array of cinematic brilliance from across Asia.

At a press conference here, the organisers unveiled the lineup of films for the second edition of the festival, to be held at Jyoti Chitran Film Studio.

GAFF Festival Director Monita Borgohain said the opening film of the festival will be the Uzbekistan feature 'Sunday', directed by Shokir Kholikov.

The closing film will be the Iranian feature 'In the Land of Brothers', directed by Alireza Ghasemi and Raha Amirfazli, she added.

"This edition of the festival will be honoured by the presence of legendary Indian filmmaker Girish Kasaravalli,



who will grace the festival as its Chief Guest. Bollywood and Marathi film actress Sonali Kulkarni will be the Special Invitee Guest for the closing ceremony," Borgohain said.

The second edition of GAFF will showcase films from 10 Asian countries -- Vietnam, Mongolia, Uzbekistan,

South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Myanmar, Iran, Kazakhstan and China.

The festival will also present films from across India with screenings in multiple languages such as Marathi, Bajjika, Malayalam, Hindi, Tulu, Nepali, Assamese, Karbi, Bodo, Mish- ing, Manipuri and Bengali, highlighting

the linguistic diversity of the region and the country.

The four-day festival will screen a total of 26 films, including eight competition entries, alongside a strong slate of international titles, the Festival Director said.

"In addition to film screenings, GAFF 2026 will host a series of masterclasses, panel discussions and interactive sessions led by filmmakers, critics and industry professionals from India and other Asian countries," she added.

Positioned as the only Asian film festival of its kind in this part of the country, GAFF has carved a unique space in India's cultural landscape by bringing such regional but global cinema to the Northeast.

"The overwhelming love we received from film lovers during our first edition inspired us to plan an even grander second edition. GAFF 2026 promises to (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

# TraI imposes penalty worth ₹ 150 cr on telecom operators for failure to curb spam calls, messages

**NEW DELHI, Jan 5:** The telecom regulator Trai has imposed a penalty of ₹ 150 crore on telecom operators for their failure to curb spam calls and messages, according to an official source.

The ₹ 150 crore penalty imposed for three years beginning 2020, however, has been challenged by telecom operators.

"Financial disincentives of more than ₹ 150 crore have been imposed on the telecom service providers for wrong closure of customer complaints and not taking action on telecom connections of spammers in accordance with regulations," the source said.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) imposes penalties on telecom operators who fail to comply with regulations that impose financial disincentives.

The regulations provide for a financial disincentive of up to ₹ 50 lakh per month per licensed Service Area for a telecom operator.

"It is important to note that the financial disincentives are imposed on TSPs (telecom service providers) not because someone has sent through their network, but because they fail to take appropriate action, in accordance with the Regulations, on the telecom resources of spammers."

"While action on the consumer complaints is the key to



controlling spam, during audit of complaints, Trai has observed many cases of wrong closures of customer complaints by the TSPs," the source said.

Trai has disconnected over 21 lakh spammers and blacklisted more than 1 lakh entities in the last year.

About 18.8 lakh spammers' connections were disconnected, and more than 1,150 entities were blacklisted in September 2024, consequent to the direction issued by Trai on August 13, 2024.

Although the regulatory framework provides for taking action against unregistered senders by the telecom service providers, which ranges from suspension of connections to dis-

connection of all the connections for one year and complete blacklisting of the sender across all telecom service providers in the country, the trigger for action comes from customer complaints only, the source said.

Trai has rolled out a DND app, which enables users to register complaints in just 4-6 clicks.

"While registered telemarketers have been subject to strict regulations, the majority of spam now originates from unregistered individuals using 10-digit mobile numbers."

"Consumer complaints are the key mechanism to trigger action against spam since a sender is identified as a spammer on the basis of the number of complaints received against them in

a given time. Blocking numbers on phones alone does not stop spam, as spammers frequently change their numbers. Complaints enable action across all operators," the source said.

Trai has tightened rules to curb pesky calls and sms. Consumers can make complaints against unregistered senders without registering their DND preferences.

The regulator also has a complaint window extended from 3 to 7 days, meaning a subscriber can register a complaint against pesky callers within 7 days of receiving a call or SMS.

Trai has also tightened the criteria for taking action against spammers. Now, five complaints without the sender in the last 10 days are sufficient to trigger action against them.

The regulator has mandated the use of 1,600 series numbers as a prefix by entities in the banking, financial services, and insurance sectors for transactional and service calls, and by government entities for calls to citizens.

The rule mandates sending promotional SMS with the suffix P, transactional SMS with the suffix T, service SMS with the suffix S, and government messages with the suffix G.

No promotional calls allowed from regular 10-digit mobile numbers, the source said. (PTI)

# Grand reception for legendary SUV Tata Sierra in the Northeast

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 5:** Tata Motors on Monday unveiled the all-new Tata Sierra for customers at Bimal Cars Sarusajai, marking the return of one of India's most iconic SUV nameplates in a bold and contemporary avatar.

Reimagined to meet the aspirations of modern customers, the new Sierra blends a distinctive SUV design with advanced technology, premium comfort and a strong focus on sustainability, signalling Tata Motors' renewed emphasis on future-ready mobility.

The unveiling ceremony was attended by Bimal Sarawgi, Managing Director, Bimal Cars; Arianth Sarawgi, CEO, Bimal Cars; Anurag Sarawgi, CEO, Bimal Cars; Rishi Khemka, Senior Manager, Tata Motors; Prakhya Baruah, Senior Manager, Tata Motors; and Dipankar Das, General Manager, Bimal Cars.

Staying true to its original legacy while embracing

the future, the all-new Tata Sierra features a commanding road presence, clean surfaces and a modern interpretation of the signature Sierra design elements.

The SUV reflects Tata Motors' evolving design language, combining strength, sophistication and functionality.

The new Sierra offers a bold and modern exterior with a futuristic silhouette, signature lighting elements and muscular proportions, giving it a premium stance.

Inside, the SUV features spacious and thoughtfully designed interiors with high-quality materials and a lounge-like comfort experience for occupants.

In terms of technology, the vehicle is equipped with a large connected infotainment system, a fully digital instrument cluster, intuitive controls and next-generation connectivity features.

Safety remains a key focus, with a strong body structure and advanced safety systems designed to ensure maximum protection for all occupants.

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Campaign aimed at

its election campaign with only 81 days remaining for the polls and claimed that the NDA was preparing to secure victory in 103 Assembly constituencies.

In Jorhat, Union minister of State Pabitra Margherita launched the wall-writing campaign for the Jorhat Assembly constituency under the Jorhat Lok Sabha seat.

Painting the party symbol at Khujurguri on the outskirts of the town, Margherita said the BJP had begun seeking the blessings of the people to form the government for a third consecutive term.

He highlighted infrastructure development, increased investment flow, a violence-free environment, wildlife protection, eviction of encroachers from government land, economic growth, transparency and good governance under BJP rule.

Margherita said the campaign would cover all ten Assembly constituencies under the Jorhat Lok Sabha segment, spanning Jorhat, Majuli, Sivasagar and Charaideo districts.

Earlier in the day, he also inaugurated a model Anganwadi centre at Kolbari and laid foundation stones for the Kolbari Satsang Kendra and the Kolbari Mising Gaonburah road.

Party leaders said that following the launch, BJP MPs, ministers, MLAs, office-bearers and grassroots representatives would simultaneously carry forward wall-writing activities across their respective areas as part of the party's poll outreach programme. (With inputs from PTI)

## Tea industry braces

a more balanced and mutually acceptable solution.

A key point of contention is compensation, with planters terming the proposed payment of ₹3,000 per bigha as grossly inadequate.

Beyond land value, tea garden owners are seeking compensation for decades-old infrastructure developed within labour lines.

A member of the North Eastern Tea Association said estates must be reimbursed for housing, water supply systems and electrical infrastructure created over generations. According to industry sources, preparations are underway for a prolonged legal battle, with funds being mobilised and consultations held with senior legal experts.

Meanwhile, the government has defended the initiative, which aims to grant land rights to around 3.33 lakh tea worker families across 825 estates. The Chief Minister has described the move as a historical necessity, pointing out that tea workers have lived in Assam for nearly 200 years without land ownership. Tea tribes and ex-tribe constitute nearly 18 per cent of Assam's electorate and have emerged as a politically significant demographic over the past decade.

However, the industry's apex body, the Consultative Committee of Plantation Associations, has flagged what it describes as a serious legal obstacle. It noted that under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, labour quarters and line areas are categorised as statutory welfare facilities. According to the industry, these areas are meant exclusively for workers' welfare and cannot legally be converted into transferable private ownership, a position it plans to contest in court.

## Three injured as

were also damaged in Nalbari district, while a primary school was partially damaged in Nagaon, ASDMA said. "The main gate of a temple (Haleswar Dewalai) was partially damaged under Tezpur revenue circle in Sonitpur district," it added.

The Northeastern region falls in the high seismic zone, making earthquakes frequently hit the region. (PTI)

## Guv Acharya inaugurates

innovation for improving educational quality and nurturing intellectually and morally strong students.

"The NEP has been structured to anchor the Indian Knowledge Tradition and modern science and technology," he said.

He stressed on the ethical use of artificial intelligence with technology guided by human values to ensure inclusive and meaningful outcomes.

The region's rich traditional wisdom in culture, ecology, and indigenous practices can offer sustainable solutions when integrated with modern technology, the governor said.

Acharya expressed confidence that the programme would enrich teachers, encourage collaborative research, and promote innovative teaching practices, thereby strengthening the education system and contributing to the national goal of building a knowledge-based society. (PTI)

## Rongker Karkli observed

and mutual understanding, and sought divine protection from illness, negativity and evil forces.

During the tenure of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) in the 1990s, January 5 was fixed to ensure uniform observance of Rongker among Karbis following the indigenous faith.

However, after the Congress returned to power in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, the date was shifted to February 5, following the Karbi New Year celebrated on February 1.

The primary objective of Rongker is to seek divine protection from diseases, natural calamities and evil spirits, while praying for good health, prosperity and a bountiful harvest for the coming agricultural cycle.

The ritual also symbolises unity, as elderly men gather at the Rongker ground, setting aside past differences, while women and young girls prepare food at the residence of the rong sarthe, the traditional village headman, for a common feast.

Festive spirit prevailed in villages observing Rongker, with decorated welcome gates erected at the entrance of Rongker grounds.

Children were seen moving between the residence of the rong sarthe and the ritual ground, watching preparations of rice, vegetables and meat from sacrificial offerings.

Among the villages observing Rongker on Sunday was Chandra Sing Terang village at Rongmonjir along the Lumding Road.

Led by village headman Chandra Sing Terang, elderly villagers assembled at the Rongker ground early in the morning.

Despite cold and gloomy weather, preparations began with the cleansing of the raised mud platform for the ritual, followed by traditional rites.

Various sacrificial offerings were made to different deities by designated elders of the village, following customary practices.

Later in the day, meat from the sacrificial offerings, along with rice and vegetables, was shared during a common feast at the Rongker ground by elderly men and boys, accompanied by traditional rice liquor.

Women and girls held their feast separately at the residence of the rong sarthe, in keeping with Karbi customary norms during sacrificial worship.

## Man arrested with

contraband, as well as to identify possible links with a larger drug trafficking network.

## IIT Guwahati scientists

used in industries such as thermal power plants, cement manufacturing units, steel production facilities, and petrochemical refineries, supporting the transition towards a circular carbon economy and a cleaner energy future," De said.

As the next step, the research team aims to scale the technology for practical use. The team also plans to develop a long-lasting photocatalytic system that can convert industrial CO2 emissions into clean fuels. (PTI)

## GAFF 2026 to

be bigger and better, continuing its celebration of the rich diversity of Asian cinema, with more filmmakers from outside the region joining the event," Borgohain said.

The festival organisers received more than 200 film submissions, including 90 entries from outside India, she added.

GAFF 2026 is being organised by Trending Now Media (TNM) with support from the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Apart from Borgohain, who was the former Festival Director of the Assam government-sponsored Guwahati International Film Festival (GIFF), the Advisory Board boasts several distinguished members from the film fraternity.

Renowned film critic and festival advisor Srinivasa Santhanam, National Award-winning filmmaker Manju Borah, and prominent film critic, music journalist and editor Christopher Dalton are also part of the 2nd GAFF. (PTI)

## Tata Group looking for new chiefs for Air India, Air India Express

**MUMBAI, Jan 5:** The Tata Group has begun scouting for a suitable candidate to head Air India, as the tenure of the incumbent, Campbell Wilson, will end next year, sources have said.

Meanwhile, the Group is also looking to appoint a new Managing Director for its low-cost subsidiary Air India Express. Alok Singh, will also be completing his tenure in the current position in 2027.

"Both sides (Wilson and Tata Group) don't want a renewal of the contract after 2027). So, it is but natural to go to the market to look for suitable candidates for the top job at Air India," said a source privy to the information.

There were no comments from the Tata Group on this issue in response to a PTI query.

Sources, however, said that it would take at least 3-6 months to finalise a suitable candidate for Air India, adding that if an overlap occurs, it would be good because the takeover would then become easier.

The final report on the Air India Boeing 787-8 crash at Ahmedabad is expected around June.

Significantly, Wilson was at Tata House on Monday to attend a scheduled meeting, sources said.

Wilson was appointed as Air India's CEO and MD in July 2022, following former Turkish Airlines Chairman Ilker Ayci's decision not to take up the top job in March 2022 amid a controversy.

Tata Group acquired Air India from the government in January 2022. (PTI)

## Stock markets decline on selling in blue-chips amid fresh tariff hike threat by US



**MUMBAI, Jan 5:** Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Monday, dragged by blue-chip HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and IT stocks amid fresh warning from the US to further raise tariffs against India.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 322.39 points or 0.38 per cent to settle at 85,439.62. During the day, it tanked 446.68 points or 0.52 per cent to 85,315.33.

A total of 2,545 stocks declined, while 1,723 advanced and 203 remained unchanged on the BSE.

After hitting a record intra-day high of 26,373.20, the 50-share NSE Nifty failed to carry forward the momentum and declined 78.25 points or 0.30 per cent to end at 26,250.30.

"The benchmark Nifty index scaled a new lifetime high of 26,373.20 during the session; however, profit-taking emerged near the top, dragging the index lower to test the crucial 26,200 support zone by the close.

"Market sentiment remained guarded, with participants staying largely on the sidelines amid escalating geopolitical tensions following the US attack on Venezuela over the weekend," according to Ashika Institutional Equities.

From the 30-Sensex firms, HDFC Bank, Infosys, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finance, Tata Consultancy Services and Reliance Industries were among the biggest laggards.

In contrast, Bharat Electronics, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Steel and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers.

"Indian equity benchmarks ended lower on Monday after paring early gains, as selling pressure in IT stocks and heightened geopolitical concerns weighed on sentiment," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

The BSE smallcap and midcap indices went up margin-

ally by 0.07 per cent and 0.05 per cent, respectively.

Among sectoral indices, IT declined by 1.37 per cent, oil & gas (1.18 per cent), BSE Focused IT (1.17 per cent), energy (0.95 per cent), telecommunication (0.81 per cent), utilities (0.38 per cent) and financial services (0.25 per cent).

On the other hand, realty jumped 2.16 per cent, consumer durables (1.25 per cent), metal (0.58 per cent), commodities (0.56 per cent), FMCG (0.51 per cent) and PSU bank (0.40 per cent).

Trump, while talking to reporters on Sunday aboard Air Force One en route to Washington from Florida, said, "They (India) wanted to make me happy, basically. Modi is a very good man; he is a good guy. He knew I was not happy, and it was important to make me happy. They do trade, and we can raise tariffs on them very quickly. It would be very bad for them."

Trump's remarks came after US Senator Lindsey Graham, accompanying him on Air Force One, said that the tariffs imposed on India by Trump are the "chief reason" New Delhi is now buying substantially less Russian oil.

Graham spoke about his tariff bill that seeks to impose 500 per cent levies on imports from countries buying Russian oil.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 289.80 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Domestic institutional investors (DIIs) also bought stocks worth Rs 677.38 crore.

"President Donald Trump's renewed remarks on potential tariff hikes against Indian imports linked to India's continued purchases of Russian oil added a layer of geopolitical caution to global markets, keeping risk appetite in check during today's session," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index ended significantly higher, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended marginally up.

Markets in Europe were trading in the green. US markets ended mostly in positive territory on Friday.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dipped 0.13 per cent to USD 60.67 per barrel.

On Friday, the Sensex climbed 573.41 points or 0.67 per cent to settle at 85,762.01. The Nifty went up by 182 points or 0.70 per cent to 26,328.55. (PTI)

## Gold rises ₹ 960 to ₹ 1.4 lakh/10g amid strong global trends



**NEW DELHI, Jan 5:** Gold prices climbed ₹ 960 to ₹ 1,40,400 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, tracking strong global trends amid heightened geopolitical tensions, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹ 1,39,440 per 10 grams on Friday.

Silver prices also extended their sharp rally, climbing by ₹ 2,600 to ₹ 2,44,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) from Friday's close of ₹ 2,41,400 per kg.

Traders said both gold and silver were driven by safe-haven demand as geopolitical risks have intensified.

"Gold and silver advanced on Monday, buoyed by geopolitical risks that continue to underpin safe-haven demand and act as a tailwind for bullion, particularly following heightened US actions against Venezuela," Saamil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

He noted that US President Donald Trump's confrontational rhetoric on Colombia and Mexico has also raised concerns over potential regional instability in Latin America, further increasing demand for tradi-

tional safe-haven assets.

In the international market, spot gold rose by USD 87.74, or 2.03 per cent, to USD 4,418.24 per ounce.

"Spot gold is trading around the USD 4,420 level, buoyed by the geopolitical risk escalation as the US captured and removed the Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

Spot silver also increased by USD 2.35, or 3.24 per cent, to USD 75.02 per ounce.

"Silver prices are trading higher due to strong industrial and investment demand, ongoing supply concerns, and global geopolitical tensions," Satish Dondapati, VP & Fund Manager, Kotak Mutual Fund, said.

Dondapati added that recent price swings in the white metal were mainly caused by higher margin requirements announced by the CME group and China's silver export restrictions that came into effect from January 1.

Renisha Chainani, Head - Research at Augmont, said silver's ascent has been structurally supported by governmental measures across the global supply chain.

In November, the US designated silver as a key mineral due to its extensive use in electrical circuits, batteries, solar cells, and anti-bacterial medical tools.

Washington's move to include silver on its critical minerals list has enhanced its strategic relevance, encouraging long-term investment and policy-backed demand, she said.

Chainani noted that silver prices rallied from around USD 45 per ounce in October to a peak of USD 82.7 in December 2025, and added that the uptrend could extend further towards USD 88.60, USD 99 and USD 107 in the coming few months of 2026. (PTI)

### LOST

I Surajit Borah son of Deva Kanta Borah and Anjali Borah have lost my HS ( AHSEC) Admit Card & Marksheet bearing Roll 680 No-A-31 . And have lost Registration card No. A-112381-2000/21. And I Surajit Borah son of Deva Kanta Borah have lost my HSLC (SEBA) Admit Card,HSLC Marksheet & HSLC Original Certificate bearing Roll N10-084 No- 0121 and Registration Card bearing No- 02912/97. I lost my Caste Certificate also. When way to Diphu from Bakalia two days ago. Anyone find please return to my following address or call me on my cellophane . Surajit Borah, Vill- Mahguri, P.O. Rajapathar P.S.- Bakalia, Dist- Karbi Anglong, Phone- 8011442143.

### NAME CHANGE

I Moktar Hussain Barbhuyan, S/O- Shamsul Hoque Barbhuyan, Vill- Uttar Dimrupar, P.O.-Kapash Bari, P.S.-Murajhar, Dist.-Hojaj, (Assam) That, my actual and correct name is Moktar Hussain Barbhuyan & my father's actual and correct name is Shamsul Hoque Barbhuyan. That, in my all Documents wherein my name has been recorded as Mohammed Moktar Hussain instead of Moktar Hussain Barbhuyan and my name against my father's name Mohammed Samsul Hoque instead of Shamsul Hoque Barbhuyan. That, Moktar Hussain Barbhuyan and Mohammed Moktar Hussain are the names of one and same person i.e. of myself & Shamsul Hoque Barbhuyan and Mohammed Samsul Hoque are the names of one and same person i.e. of my father.

Health Minister launches Swasthyaban Shramik Yojana; lays CHC foundation stones at Sadiya

## Ashok Singhal inaugurates MRI facility at Tinsukia Medical College

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 5:** Minister for Health and Family Welfare and Irrigation Ashok Singhal on Sunday visited Tinsukia district, where he inaugurated the MRI facility at Tinsukia Medical College and Hospital (TMCH) at Makum, launched the 'Swasthyaban Shramik Yojana' at Kehang Tea Estate and laid foundation stones for two Community Health Centres (CHCs) at Sadiya.

Inaugurating the MRI facility at TMCH, the Minister said the initiative would provide major relief to poor and needy patients who earlier had to travel long distances or rely on costly private diagnostic centres. He said the commissioning of MRI facilities by the State Government would enhance diagnostic capacity, ensure early detection of diseases, improve treatment outcomes and reduce the overall cost of healthcare for the public.

The programme at TMCH was



attended by Tinsukia MLA Sanjay Kishan, Mission Director of the National Health Mission (NHM), Assam, Dr Lakshmanan S, Principal of Tinsukia Medical College and Hospital Dr Rupak Gogoi, Additional Secretary of the Health and Family Welfare Department Dr Pra-

nati Gogoi, along with other dignitaries, doctors and students.

Later in the day, the Minister inaugurated the ambitious 'Swasthyaban Shramik Yojana' at a ceremonial programme held at Kehang Tea Estate. The scheme aims to ensure affordable and quality

healthcare services for people residing in tea garden areas. Describing it as a strong and effective initiative, Singhal said the scheme would significantly contribute to the welfare and healthcare security of tea garden workers.

Thereafter, the Minister laid the foundation stones for the Kakopathar Community Health Centre and the Bordirak Community Health Centre at Sadiya. The programme was held in the presence of Sadiya MLA Bolin Chetia.

The event was attended by Joint Secretary of the Health Department Dr Pranati Gogoi, Joint Director of Health Services, Tinsukia district, Dr Nirod Bora, senior officials of the district health department, officials and staff of the National Health Mission from the State Headquarters and Tinsukia unit, as well as local dignitaries, healthcare workers and members of the public from various sections.

## Eviction drive conducted at Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary

Sonitpur administration clears encroached government land under Compensatory Afforestation

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Jan 5:** As part of the state government's continued move against alleged encroachment on government lands, including forest areas, the Sonitpur District administration in association with the Forest Department, conducted a massive eviction drive in the encroached areas of Compensatory Afforestation of Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary under Sonitpur district on Monday.

ADC (Revenue), Sonitpur, Kamal Baruah revealed that an area of approximately 6,200 bighas of land under Tezpur, Thelamara and Dhekiajuli revenue circles, already allocated for Compensatory Afforestation of Burhachapori WLS had recently come under the possession of illegal encroachers in the form of dwelling houses and agricultural activities.

Based on joint verification car-

ried out by Revenue Circle Offices and Forest Department officials, notices were served to encroachers to vacate the land. "But after almost one month of notice period, except a few, the encroachers had not vacated the land until a couple of days back. Hence, as per protocol, an eviction drive was conducted on Monday to free the encroached area from illegal occupants," Baruah said. Around 710 households were identified as encroachers.

He added that around 20 JCBs, 100 labourers, 500 police personnel and a team of magistrates, headed by Sonitpur DC Ananda Kumar Das and SSP Barun Purakayastha were engaged in the operation. "Eviction is still ongoing and it has been proceeding peacefully," he said.

It may be mentioned that in February 2023, the Assam government had launched a massive eviction drive in the WLS to remove

illegal encroachments from around 1,900 hectares of land in the Char Chapori area of Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary. Burhachapori WLS is located on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, covering an area of 44.06 sq km in Sonitpur district. It is a centrally located protected area surrounded by key national parks like Kaziranga National Park to the east, Orang and Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuaries to the west, Pakke-Nameri National Park to the north and reserve forests of Karbi Anglong to the south, serving as a corridor for animal migration between Kaziranga and Orang. The Brahmaputra flows along its northern boundary, creating numerous river islands. The sanctuary's grasslands, woodlands and wetlands, along with its river islands are home to numerous endangered mammals, reptiles and birds.

## Pankaj Chakravarty assumes charge as Kokrajhar DC



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 5:** Pankaj Chakravarty, ACS, formally took charge as the District Commissioner of Kokrajhar on Monday. He was recently transferred from Tamulpur, where he previously served as DC. After assuming office, Chakravarty held an interactive meeting with officers and staff of various departments at the district headquarters. He emphasised teamwork, discipline and dedication to ensure efficient administration and timely delivery of public services.

Chakravarty also highlighted the importance of transparent governance and citizen-friendly administration, urging officers to prioritise the welfare of the common people. He said Kokrajhar has immense development potential, particularly in education, health, infrastructure and social welfare and assured that public grievances would be addressed promptly. Senior officials and staff welcomed and felicitated Chakravarty, pledging support to work together for the district's progress.

## TMC holds workers' meet in Bilasipara

**HT Correspondent**

**BILASIPARA, Jan 5:** A large Trinamool Congress (TMC) workers' meeting was held at Lakshimganj on Sunday, attended by Rajya Sabha MP Sushmita Dev and senior leader Dulu Ahmed.

Sushmita Dev criticised the BJP for exploiting the public over the past decade and accused the AGP of acting as the BJP's minority wing, alleging Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma secured minority votes through AGP.

Dulu Ahmed targeted Dhubri MP Rakibul Hussain, claiming he monetised his son's wedding and resumed collecting money ahead of Assembly elections. Ahmed also announced he will contest against Hussain in the upcoming polls.

## Nath-Yogi organisations demand full reserved status, SAC

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, Jan 5:** Several Nath-Yogi organisations, including Asom Pradeshik Yogi Sammilan (APYS), Sadou Asom Nath-Yogi Chitra Santha (SANYCS), Morigaon Zila Nath-Yogi Sammilani, Yuba Parishad, Yogi Mahila Sammilani, Yogi Purohit Sammilani and Nath Sahitya Sabha have demanded that the State government grant full reserved class status to the indigenous Nath-Yogi community along with a Satellite Autonomous Council (SAC).

Addressing the issue, the organisations claimed that granting full reserved class status and an SAC would help ensure that a maximum portion of land in the state remains confined within tribal belt areas stretching from Sadiya to Dhubri. They alleged that although the indigenous Nath-Yogi community was granted reserved class status through a government notification in 1998, the rights accorded were only partial and not at par with those of other ethnic communities enjoying full reserved status.

The organisations further alleged that migrated ethnic communities, who they claimed arrived in Assam only a few years ago, have been able to avail land rights within tribal belts and blocks. In contrast, the Nath-Yogi community, which has been living in the state for generations has been unjustifiably deprived of such rights.

They demanded that the government rectify the 1998 notification and provide full reserved class status to the indigenous community. Despite repeated demands, the organisations alleged that the government has continued to treat the community with a "step-motherly attitude".

Leaders of the organisations stated that the Nath-Yogi community has been struggling for years to obtain full reserved class status and to live with dignity on their ancestral land. They warned that there was no alternative but to take revolutionary steps if their demands continued to be ignored.

## Alipurduar division achieves 'Eat Right Campus' first in NFR

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 5:** The Alipurduar (APDJ) Division of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has achieved a significant milestone in food safety and hygiene with one railway station and three institutional facilities being awarded the prestigious Eat Right Station and Eat Right Campus certifications by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

Earlier, several stations across NFR including Guwahati, Harishchandrapur, Lumding, Rangiya, Mariani, Samsi, New Bongaigaon, New Jalpaiguri, Kamakhya, New Tinsukia, Jalpaiguri Road, Binnaguri, Dhupguri, Falakata, Dinhat and New Coochbehar had already received Eat Right Station certifications. The latest recognition for the

Alipurduar Division further strengthens NFR's expanding network of certified stations and campuses, reinforcing its commitment to safe and hygienic food services across the zone.

New Alipurduar Railway Station, located in Alipurduar district of West Bengal has been certified as an Eat Right Station for the period from December 4, 2025 to December 3, 2027. The station has received an Exemplary rating for its strict adherence to FSSAI guidelines related to food safety, hygiene, sanitation, waste management and quality control at catering and food vending units.

In addition, three facilities under the APDJ Division have been certified as Eat Right Campuses for the period from December 22, 2025 to December 21, 2027, all with Exemplary ratings.

These include the Rail Coach Restaurants at Rajabhat Khawa and the Rail Museum, Coochbehar, along with the Multi-Disciplinary Zonal Training Institute at Alipurduar Junction. The Rail Coach Restaurants have set an example by serving safe, hygienic and quality food in a unique dining environment, enhancing the overall visitor experience. The Multi-Disciplinary Zonal Training Institute has also demonstrated strong compliance with food safety and hygiene standards.

Together, these recognitions mark the first Eat Right Campus certification in the entire NFR zone. The certifications were granted following detailed audits conducted under the Eat Right India initiative, covering parameters such as food safety, hygiene, cleanliness, waste management

and staff training.

These measures aim to ensure safe and hygienic food for passengers, visitors and railway staff, reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses and encourage improved practices among food vendors. They also help build public confidence in railway food services and enhance the image of stations and campuses as clean and passenger-friendly public spaces.

Northeast Frontier Railway continues to accord high priority to passenger welfare and public health through sustained improvements in amenities and service standards. The Eat Right certifications for the Alipurduar Division reaffirm NFR's commitment to national food safety goals and its vision of providing a safe, healthy and quality travel environment across its network.

## Congress manifesto committee visits Nagaon to seek public suggestions

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Jan 5:** The manifesto committee of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), led by Ripun Bora, visited Nagaon on Sunday to interact with civic bodies and individuals and collect suggestions for preparing a people-centric manifesto ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections.

Bora was accompanied by former minister Atowa Munda, MLA Nurul Huda, State Mahila Congress chief Mira Barthakur, DCC president Runumoni Bora and other party leaders. During the visit, the committee met representatives of various civic bodies and held a closed-door meeting at the Nagaon Tourist Lodge to gather inputs.

Key participants included the Nagaon Muktiyuddha Sammilan, Nagaon Medicine Dealer Association, District Koch-Rajbanshi Sammilan, Nagaon District Cooperative Milk Producing Union, Nagaon Nagarik Sabha, Lachit Sena, AAMSU, Uttar-Pub Parivahan Santha, Garia-Maria-Deshi Jatiya Parishad, Nagaon Traders' Association, Jamiat, Sachetan Nagarik Mancha, Nagaon Gana Natya Sangha, Nagaon Lekhak-Lekhika-Kabi Sammelan, senior citizens, social workers and other individuals and organisations, who shared suggestions aimed at bringing change in Assam politics.

Addressing a press conference, Ripun Bora said the Congress manifesto this time will be prepared based on public suggestions, a step that has received positive responses across Assam.

Responding to media queries, Bora alleged that the BJP government's policies have been anti-people and stated that Assam Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma's claims regarding the trading of Congress tickets were baseless. He said the remarks reflect the BJP's concern over rising opposition support in the state.

Bora further added that Congress-led alliances will jointly contest the elections with full strength to remove the BJP from power in Assam. He also noted that new youth faces would be given top priority by the Congress leadership to contest the 2026 Assembly polls.

## International Me-Dam-Me-Phi 2026 to be hosted in Sivasagar

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Jan 5:** The historic town of Sivasagar will host International Me-Dam-Me-Phi 2026 from January 30 to February 1, 2026 at the Boarding Field, marking a grand celebration dedicated to the ancestors (Dam-Phi-Me) and the timeless legacy of the Tai-Ahom civilisation. The international event will bring together scholars, cultural ambassadors, youth organisations, women leaders, athletes and international Tai representatives from Thailand, Vietnam and Laos, making it one of the most comprehensive cultural and intellectual congregations in recent times.

The programme will commence with ceremonial flag hoisting and Moidam Tarpan, followed by a drawing competition for students. An International Academic Conclave on Tai resurgence in the context of India's Act East Policy will also be held, along with an All Assam Heritage Quiz, an All Assam Debate Competition and a Start-up and Entrepreneur Summit focusing on innovation.

A major highlight of the event will be the National-level Marathon Race on January 31, organised under the supervision of the Assam Olympic Association with a prize pool of over ₹ 2.5 lakh. The same day will also feature the traditional Me-Dam-Me-Phi rituals, a grand cultural procession themed on harmony and an open session to be graced by Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam, along with ministers, legislators and international delegates.

The evening programme will witness the staging of a historic drama on freedom fighter Gomdhar Konwar, reflecting the rich literary and cultural heritage of Assam. On February 1, a Women's Convention will be held under the aegis of the Mahila Samitee, Sivasagar District Tai Ahom Students Union. The convention will be graced by Sangeeta Barooah Pichoraty, president of the Press Club of India. This will be followed by the prize distribution and valedictory function to be attended by Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister, along with representatives of leading socio-cultural organisations.

## Karbi Anglong to host grand Ginger Festival and Buyer-Seller meet

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Jan 5:** The Department of Agriculture, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council in collaboration with the Tourism Department, Krishi Vigyan Kendra and AAU-Zonal Research Station, Diphu, will organise a grand Ginger Festival cum Buyer-Seller meet at the Arboretum cum Craft Centre, Diphu on January 8.

The festival aims to facilitate communication between farmers, traders and market organisations while showcasing locally grown agricultural products. Featured items will include GI-tagged ginger, turmeric, pineapple and other produce, creating unique opportunities for direct trade and partnerships. Participants will have the chance to sample premium quality products and negotiate directly with producers, enhancing the local agri-economy.

Beyond trade, the event will also highlight Karbi Anglong's rich culture and scenic beauty, providing a delightful experience for visitors. Organisers said the festival is expected to pave the way for better benefits for the district's farming community while celebrating the region's heritage. As a prelude to the upcoming festival, a Buyer-Seller meet was successfully conducted on December 8 at the Arboretum cum Craft Centre, providing participants an opportunity to interact and explore trade possibilities.

## BJYM launches wall writing campaign in Margherita



**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Jan 5:** With the Assam Assembly elections just a few months away, political activity has intensified across the state as political parties begin preparations for their campaigns, agendas and manifestos. In this backdrop, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has stepped up its outreach efforts by launching a wall writing programme in several areas.

On Monday, members of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), Margherita, carried out wall writing at around 20 busy locations across the Margherita co-district, marking the formal beginning of the BJP's grassroots-level election campaign in the area.

Addressing party workers during the programme, 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency MLA Bhaskar Sharma expressed confidence ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections. He stated that no political party has the "dare or courage" to defeat the BJP in the state and said the party has begun full-scale preparations to approach the people with its agenda and achievements.

Leaders and workers from various BJP wings, including the Margherita BJP Sadar, Town and Block Mandal units, Mahila Morcha and Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, along with several senior party leaders were present during the wall writing drive.

Party leaders said the wall writing campaign is aimed at strengthening the BJP's connect with the public at the grassroots level and spreading awareness about the party's vision and developmental agenda ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections.

## Jorhat-based venture 'Tsangpo' showcases untapped tourism potential of the river Young entrepreneur pioneers river tourism on Brahmaputra

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Jan 5:** Proving that strong determination, hard work and patience can turn dreams into reality, a young entrepreneur from Assam has initiated a quiet revolution in river-based tourism on the Brahmaputra. Through perseverance and vision, Manas Dihingia of Jorhat has emerged as a pioneer in showcasing the immense tourism potential of the mighty river.

Manas Dihingia, who was earlier working with an international organisation, gave up his job to pursue a long-cherished dream of developing river tourism in Assam. Driven by a vision that would not let him rest, he returned home to explore new possibilities on the Brahmaputra, embarking on a journey marked by struggle, resilience and eventual success.

Over the past seven years, Manas has built his innovative venture "Tsangpo", a resort located on the banks of the Brahmaputra in Jorhat. The resort has now become a major attraction for both domestic and international tourists. Through river cruises, Manas and his team introduce visitors to the rich biodiversity of the Brahmaputra, offering sights of wild and domesticated horses, numerous bird species and the scenic beauty of sandy river islands.



The idea of Tsangpo took shape in 2018, when Manas realised that Assam, particularly the Jorhat region, possessed vast untapped potential for river-based tourism. Despite facing multiple challenges, he continued to pursue his goal, slowly transforming a dream into a sustainable enterprise.

At present, around 70 to 80 foreign tourists visit the Tsangpo resort every month.

While tourist numbers are slightly lower during certain periods, bookings are ongoing and a rise in visitors is expected towards the end of January. The resort also attracts a steady flow of domestic tourists.

Apart from river cruises, Tsangpo offers visitors insights into the flora and fauna of the Brahmaputra. Speaking about the initiative, Manas said that what began as a simple dream gradually revealed the river's vast

possibilities. He highlighted the presence of white sandy islands, forested chars that attract migratory animals and birds, several endangered bird species listed on the IUCN Red List and a significant population of wild horses in the Jorhat area. He also pointed to the nearby man-made forest created by Padma Shri awardee Jadav Payeng as another attraction.

In terms of infrastructure, Tsangpo currently has seven well-equipped guest rooms and offers customised services based on tourist requirements. Generally, three cruises operate daily—a morning cruise at 9.30 AM, a lunch cruise at 12.30 PM and a sunset cruise from 3.30 PM to 5.30 PM. Special dinner cruises for groups are also arranged, sometimes extending till 9 PM.

The venture has become a source of livelihood for at least 18 families, while around eight workers are employed on a daily wage basis.

A highly educated professional, Manas earlier held a well-paid position in the United Kingdom but chose to return to his homeland to pursue his dream. With several plans now in place to further promote river tourism, he remains hopeful that the Brahmaputra will soon gain the recognition it deserves as a unique tourism destination.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

At the touch of love everyone becomes a poet.  
- Plato

## Krishna Godavari Basin compensation claims

As Indian corporates step into the new year buoyed by stronger growth momentum and easing inflationary pressures, a sense of anticipation is spreading across boardrooms and policy circles alike over a dispute that dwarfs most corporate battles seen in the country's history. At the heart of this confrontation lies the Indian government's demand of nearly \$30 billion from Reliance Industries and its erstwhile partner BP, linked to alleged losses caused by underproduction of natural gas from the Krishna-Godavari Basin. The scale alone makes it unprecedented: no earlier compensation claim pursued by the state against a corporate entity comes close, not even the settlement extracted from Union Carbide after the Bhopal gas tragedy, which amounted to \$470 million. The dispute is rooted in the expectations that surrounded the Krishna-Godavari gas discoveries when they were first brought to public attention. At the time, the project was presented as a cornerstone of India's energy strategy, one that would reduce dependence on imported fuels, stabilise domestic energy prices and provide a long-term boost to industrial competitiveness. The vision was compelling: a large offshore basin producing enough natural gas to alter the country's energy balance and insulate the economy from volatile global markets. For policymakers, the KG basin symbolised the possibility of self-sufficiency; for investors, it represented one of the most ambitious upstream energy ventures ever attempted by a domestic private company.

Reality, however, diverged sharply from those early projections. Production from the basin fell well short of promised levels, declining rapidly after an initial peak and settling at a fraction of expected output. Government estimates suggest that actual gas extraction has been less than one-fifth of the volumes that were initially committed. This gap between promise and performance forms the core of the government's argument. Officials contend that valuable natural resources were effectively wasted and that the shortfall forced the country to rely more heavily on costly imports, imposing a broader economic burden. The compensation demand is framed not merely as a contractual claim but as restitution for lost national opportunity. For Reliance and BP, the matter has always been more complex than simple underperformance.

From this perspective, the dispute highlights the risks involved in large-scale energy exploration and the difficulty of holding operators financially accountable for outcomes shaped by nature as much as by management decisions. No matter which side prevails, the decision is poised to become the biggest corporate event of the year, if not the decade. A ruling in favour of the government would mark a landmark assertion of state power in enforcing resource contracts, potentially reshaping the risk calculus for major infrastructure projects.

# How Washington's Venezuela move could reshape energy markets and India's stakes

Oil has long been inseparable from geopolitics, and Venezuela stands as one of the most striking examples of how energy wealth can both empower and destabilise a nation. The recent capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro by the United States on January 3 has once again placed oil at the centre of international controversy. While Washington has publicly justified its dramatic intervention on political and legal grounds, it is difficult to ignore the central role played by Venezuela's vast petroleum reserves. Soon after Maduro's arrest, US President Donald Trump openly declared that the United States would take control of Caracas's oil sector, promising that American oil majors would invest billions of dollars to revive a collapsing industry and repair infrastructure battered by years of sanctions, mismanagement, and economic crisis. The statement made clear what many analysts had already suspected: oil was not merely a background factor, but a driving force shaping Washington's approach to Venezuela.

What Trump did not emphasise, however, is that the revival of Venezuela's oil industry is neither quick nor straightforward. Years of underinvestment, compounded by sweeping US sanctions and a broader economic meltdown, have left the country's oil infrastructure in a state of deep decay. Refineries, pipelines, storage facilities, and export terminals require massive capital infusion and sustained technical expertise to return to optimal functioning. Industry experts point out that even with the participation of the world's largest American oil companies, it would take several years of continuous work before Venezuelan output could rise significantly. Moreover, despite Trump's confident pronouncements, American oil majors themselves have so far remained silent on any concrete long-term commitments, suggesting that the political rhetoric may be running ahead of commercial realities.

The scale of Venezuela's oil wealth makes this situation partic-

ularly striking. The country possesses the largest proven oil reserves in the world, estimated at over 300 billion barrels, roughly a fifth of global proven reserves. In comparison, Saudi Arabia, the world's leading oil exporter, ranks second in terms of reserves. Yet Venezuela's actual production tells a very different story. The country currently produces around one million barrels per day, a negligible figure when set against global oil output of over 100 million barrels per day. As a result, Venezuela accounts for less than one percent of global oil production, a staggering underperformance given its geological endowment. This disconnect between potential and reality lies at the heart of the current debate over the future of Venezuela's oil sector.

One immediate question raised by Maduro's capture is whether it will disrupt global oil markets. On this front, most experts are sceptical. Venezuela's limited current production means that even sudden changes in its output are unlikely to have an immediate or dramatic impact on international oil prices. The global oil market is relatively well supplied, and demand growth remains subdued due to a combination of economic uncertainty, energy transition policies, and efficiency gains. This helps explain why recent US actions against Venezuela, including a blockade and the seizure of Venezuelan oil tankers, failed to significantly move global oil prices. Paradoxically, if the United States succeeds in exerting effective control over Venezuela's oil industry and facilitating higher exports, the long-term effect could actually be bearish for prices, as additional supply enters an already well-supplied market.

For India, the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil, the immediate implications appear limited. Indian refiners currently do not import Venezuelan crude, and with global prices unlikely to face sharp upward pressure in the near term, there is little reason to expect a direct shock to India's energy bill. This is particularly important given

that India depends on imports to meet over 88 percent of its oil needs, making it highly sensitive to price volatility. An oversupplied global market, combined with Venezuela's marginal current role, suggests that New Delhi is well insulated from short-term disruptions arising from events in Caracas.

However, the longer-term picture could be more complex and potentially advantageous for India. If the Trump administration manages to secure a political arrangement with Venezuela's new leadership that leads to the easing or removal of sanctions, Venezuelan oil could once again flow freely into global markets. Such a development would reopen opportunities for Indian refiners, who were once significant buyers of Venezuelan crude. It could also create space for renewed Indian investment in

Venezuela's oil and gas sector, a prospect that has been frozen for years by sanctions and political uncertainty. The story of Venezuela's oil sector over the past decade is inseparable from the impact of US sanctions. These measures, particularly those targeting the oil and gas industry, have severely constrained Venezuela's ability to export energy and attract foreign investment. The sanctions coincided with, and exacerbated, a severe domestic economic crisis marked by hyperinflation, currency collapse, and the breakdown of basic services. As a result, production steadily declined as infrastructure deteriorated and skilled personnel fled the country. Trump's stated ambition to bring American oil majors into Venezuela is explicitly aimed at reversing this decline, injecting capital and expertise to unlock what he has described as enormous untapped value, not only for Venezuela but also for American corporations.

According to industry experts, if these ambitions are translated into a coherent and sustained policy, Venezuela could eventually re-emerge as a much larger oil supplier. Increased investment could

restore production capacity and open the sector to participation by companies from multiple countries, not just the United States. Over time, this would add new supply to the global market, exerting downward pressure on prices. Yet such outcomes are inherently long-term. Reviving Venezuela's oil industry would require billions of dollars in investment, extensive repairs to ageing infrastructure, and a stable political and regulatory environment, conditions that cannot be conjured overnight.

Trump's own words underscore both the ambition and the uncertainty of the project. At a press conference following Maduro's capture, he remarked that Venezuela had been producing almost nothing compared to what it could have produced, and that American oil companies would step in to fix the badly broken infrastructure and start making money for the country. The statement reflects a vision of rapid transformation driven by private capital, but it glosses over the political, legal, and social complexities that have historically plagued Venezuela's energy sector. From India's perspective, developments in Venezuela are being watched with cautious interest. If sanctions are eased, Indian companies could stand to gain significantly. ONGC Videsh, the overseas arm of India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, has over 500 million dollars' worth of dividends stuck in Venezuela due to sanctions. The company holds a 40 percent stake in the San Cristobal project and an 11 percent stake in the Carabobo 1 project, both of which have been effectively frozen. In 2024, ONGC Videsh sought special approvals from the United States to operate these projects, but such approvals have yet to materialise.

ONGC Videsh has expressed interest in operating under what is known in the industry as the Chevron model. This arrangement allows foreign companies to operate in sanctions-hit Venezuela after obtaining specific licences from the US Treasury Department's Office

of Foreign Assets Control. Chevron was the first major company to operate under this framework, which grants foreign firms substantial control over finances, operations, production, and marketing, even though Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA remains the majority shareholder. For companies like ONGC Videsh, this model offers a potential pathway to recover investments and resume operations, albeit under strict US oversight.

India's private sector also has a history with Venezuelan oil. Before sanctions were imposed in 2019, Reliance Industries was a regular buyer of Venezuelan crude, and Venezuela ranked as India's fifth-largest oil supplier that year, exporting close to 16 million tonnes of crude to Indian refiners. Imports ceased following sanctions but briefly resumed in late 2023 when the US eased restrictions for six months, allowing oil exports without limitation. When the waiver expired amid disagreements over Venezuelan elections, imports stopped again. Reliance managed to restart imports later under a specific waiver, only to halt them once more in the summer of 2025 after the Trump administration threatened higher tariffs on countries buying Venezuelan crude. As of now, no Venezuelan oil has entered India for months.

These shifting policies illustrate the uncertainty that continues to surround Venezuela's oil sector. While the capture of Maduro and Trump's subsequent declarations suggest a dramatic reorientation, translating political power into stable energy flows will be far from simple. The future of Venezuelan oil will depend not only on American intentions but also on global market conditions, the willingness of international companies to invest, and the ability of Venezuela's institutions to recover from years of erosion. In this sense, oil remains both Venezuela's greatest asset and its most persistent vulnerability, shaping the country's fate as profoundly today as it has for decades. (The writer can be reached at dipaknurnigpltd@gmail.com)

## Books, Fairs and the Bright horizon of Assamese literature

By: Lalit Nath

Among the invaluable treasures of human life, books hold a unique place. Books are repositories of knowledge, foundations of thought, and mirrors of civilisation. Since ancient times, humanity has been recording experiences, ideas and knowledge in written form through books. Books inspire us to learn from the past, understand the present and dream about the future. They serve not only as sources of knowledge but also as cultural artefacts, wellsprings of inspiration and symbols of intellectual achievement.

The form of books has evolved from the clay tablets of Mesopotamia to the papyrus scrolls of Egypt, yet their core purpose remains unchanged, the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. In the vast world of knowledge, a book is like a window. Through books, we glimpse a nation's history, civilisation, culture, philosophy, customs, festivals and traditions. Ancient texts such as the Vedas, Vedanta, Gita, Bible, Iliad, Odyssey, War and Peace, Das Kapital, and Divine Comedy are not merely scriptural, religious, or literary treasures, they have enriched our society's moral, spiritual and cultural life. This tradition of books is deeply intertwined with the history of human civilisation.

One of the finest mediums for bringing the tradition and grandeur of books to the masses is the book fair. These events go beyond mere exhibitions and sales, through interactions between readers and authors, discussions, seminars and cultural programmes, they instil love and respect for books in the younger generation. Thus, book fairs are the vibrant arenas that keep the legacy of books alive.

After Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press around 1450, books proliferated widely in Europe. The first international book fair was held in Frankfurt, Germany, during the 15th-16th centuries. Later, a full-fledged fair took place in Leipzig in 1927. After World War II, the modern Frankfurt Book Fair resumed in 1949 and has since become the world's largest, held annually in October with participation from over 100 countries. It serves as a



hub for the book trade and cultural exchange.

In India, book fairs began modestly towards the end of the colonial era through small exhibitions. The first major milestone was the fair organised by the National Book Trust in New Delhi's Pragati Maidan in 1972, inaugurated by then-President VV Giri. Later, the 1976 International Book Fair in Kolkata earned recognition as Asia's largest.

Assam too boasts a glorious history of book fairs. They have played a pivotal role in illuminating Assamese literature, publishing and book-loving communities, occupying a special place in the state's cultural life. These fairs are not mere platforms for buying and selling books but vital spaces for author-reader interactions, intellectual discourse and the promotion of Assamese language and literature.

Assam's first notable book fair was held in Dibrugarh in 1972. The second followed in 1978 at Nehru Bali in Nowgong district, organised by Bhaskar Prakashan. In 1984, the Guwahati Book Fair at Judges Field injected new momentum into the movement. From 1987, the Assam Publication Parishad began organising the Guwahati Book Fair independently, turning it into an annual event. The Parishad has played a key role in republishing rare books and promoting Assamese literature through these fairs.

For years, Guwahati hosted two separate fairs, the 'Guwahati Book Fair' by the Assam Publication Parishad and the 'North-East Book Fair' by the All Assam Publishers and Booksellers Association.

Both generated immense enthusiasm among book lovers, though the dual events occasionally caused confusion.

In a historic decision in 2021, the two fairs merged into the unified 'Assam Book Fair', jointly organised by the Assam Publication Parishad and the All Assam Publishers and Booksellers Association. This unification has made the event larger, richer and more popular. Even amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the first joint fair was a resounding success, with increasing participation, visitor numbers and sales each subsequent year.

The 2025-2026 Assam Book Fair has transformed into a vibrant festival. Against the backdrop of the Assam government's declaration of 2025 as the 'Year of Books', this edition holds special significance. Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated the fair on December 24, 2025, at the Veterinary College Field in Khanapara, Guwahati. The 14-day event runs until January 6, 2026.

This year features over 135 stalls, with publishers from Assam as well as Delhi-Haryana, Kolkata, Mumbai and Hyderabad. A vast collection of books in Assamese, Hindi, English, Bengali and other languages has captivated book enthusiasts.

During the inauguration, the Chief Minister honoured 818 young writers with the 'Young Writer Honour', presenting each with a cash award of Rs 25,000. This initiative has encouraged the youth to engage in literary pursuits. Other highlights include a multilingual poets' meet, new book launches, discussion circles, and cultural programmes. Build-

ing on last year's sales exceeding Rs 6 crore, organisers aim to surpass that record this time. From the very first day, massive crowds of book lovers have turned the fair into a festive celebration.

As part of the 'Year of Books', district-level fairs have also been held in Bongaigaon, Lakhimpur, Nalbari, Jorhat, Tinsukia, Silchar and Mangaldoi, spreading the reading culture statewide and boosting local publishers.

The Assam Book Fair is more than a marketplace for books, it is a living reflection of Assamese language and literature, a bridge transmitting knowledge across generations and a cherished tradition. Its future is exceedingly bright. In the first week of the 2025-2026 fair alone, thousands of book lovers have braved the winter fog, with sales exceeding Rs 2 crore. Books on iconic singer Zubeen Garg's life and songs have gained immense popularity, attracting younger readers. Naming the main stage after Zubeen Garg exemplifies beautiful cultural synergy.

Even in the digital age, Assamese readers' enthusiasm for printed books remains evident. The government has harmonised tradition and modernity through digitisation of rare Assamese manuscripts, translation programmes and digital libraries. District-level fairs have extended the reading culture to rural areas.

Book fairs will continue as spaces for cultural convergence, while digital media brings knowledge to the world. The emergence of young writers, government patronage and readers' heartfelt enthusiasm have given Assamese literature a new dimension. The touch and fragrance of printed books still live in the hearts of Assamese readers.

Although e-books and audio-books have opened global access, printed books remain bearers of cultural heritage, offering unparalleled joy in personal collections. The massive turnout and crore-level sales at book fairs prove that both mediums complement each other, propelling Assamese literature forward. This synergy will truly make the future of Assamese books prosperous and enduring. If we maintain balance between depth and breadth, Assamese literary tradition will not only remain vibrant but shine on the global stage.

## The Venezuela Crisis Power over principles and the collapse of Global norms

By: Lalit Garg

The recent American military action against Venezuela and the arrest of President Nicolás Maduro have once again forced the world to confront an uncomfortable and deeply unsettling question: Is the international order truly governed by rules and laws, or has the will of powerful nations become the new definition of global justice? What unfolded in Venezuela is not merely a regional episode confined to Latin America; it is a dangerous global precedent that exposes the growing arbitrariness of great-power conduct and the systematic violation of international law.

The U.S. intervention in Venezuela starkly reflects the unchecked unilateralism of a superpower that claims to defend democracy while simultaneously undermining the very foundations of sovereignty and global norms. The forcible detention of a sitting president of a sovereign nation and his transfer to the United States is not just diplomatic overreach—it is an extraordinary display of international strong-arm tactics. Such actions weaken the credibility of the rules-based world order and normalize the idea that might alone determines what is "right."

Undoubtedly, the Maduro regime has remained controversial. Allegations of economic mismanagement, authoritarian governance, electoral irregularities, and human rights violations have haunted his administration for years. Venezuela's economy collapsed, inflation spiraled out of control, and millions of citizens were forced to flee their homeland. These failures are real and grave. However, to use a country's internal weaknesses as justification for external military intervention is fundamentally contrary to the spirit and letter of international law. If this logic were universally applied, few nations would remain immune from foreign interference.

The greatest contradiction lies in Washington's self-image. The United States and its leadership frequently project themselves as global custodians of peace, democracy, and human rights. Yet, time and again, their policies reveal a mindset driven by regime change, coercion, and domination. President Donald Trump's declaration that Washington would effectively



"oversee" Venezuela until a new government is installed is especially alarming. Such statements echo colonial-era thinking and revive the specter of imposed governance—an approach the modern world supposedly rejected decades ago.

More troubling is the economic subtext behind this intervention. Many geopolitical analysts argue that America's primary concern in Venezuela is neither democracy nor human dignity, but control over resources—specifically oil. Venezuela possesses one of the largest proven oil reserves in the world, and U.S. foreign policy has historically demonstrated a consistent pattern: Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan serve as sobering reminders where "democratic intervention" resulted not in stability, but in prolonged chaos, civil conflict, and humanitarian disasters. Trump's remark that the cost of the operation to capture Maduro would be recovered from Venezuela's oil revenues removes any lingering doubt about the true motivations behind the action. This is imperial ambition disguised as moral responsibility.

The geopolitical repercussions of this crisis are both deep and far-reaching. Russia and China have already condemned the intervention as a direct threat to the rules-based international system. Even some U.S. allies—long critical of Maduro—have expressed unease over the precedent this sets. Such unilateralism risks accelerating global polarization and weakening America's moral authority. When a nation that lectures others on sovereignty openly violates it, on what ethical ground can it demand restraint from rivals? This contradiction may embolden other powers to justify similar actions elsewhere, from Eastern Europe to East Asia. Equally alarming are the economic consequences. Any disruption in Venezuelan oil production or exports threatens global energy markets. A surge in oil prices would ripple across economies worldwide, hitting de-

veloping nations hardest. Countries like India, heavily dependent on energy imports, have a direct stake in stability rather than escalation. India's cautious and balanced response—calling for dialogue, restraint, and a diplomatic solution—reflects both pragmatic wisdom and moral responsibility. War, history reminds us, is never a sustainable solution.

The lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan are painfully clear. Military interventions may topple regimes, but they rarely build nations. America itself ultimately withdrew from these countries in circumstances widely regarded as humiliating, leaving behind fragile states still struggling with violence and instability. Launching a war is easy; nurturing peace, governance, and trust is infinitely harder. Yet this fundamental truth seems repeatedly ignored. The greatest irony of the Trump administration lies in its rhetoric-versus-reality divide. While proclaiming itself a champion of peace, its foreign policy has consistently relied on confrontation, sanctions, and coercive power. This duplicity not only erodes U.S. credibility but also weakens institutions like the United Nations and diminishes respect for international law. When powerful nations violate rules at will, global order inevitably slides toward chaos.

The Venezuela crisis should serve as a warning to the world. It reveals how power politics continues to overshadow humanity, justice, and legality. The international community must respond collectively and decisively against such unilateral interventions. Dialogue, diplomacy, and multilateral engagement—not tanks and bombs—are the only viable paths toward lasting solutions. Ultimately, the right to decide a nation's leadership belongs to its people, not to foreign armies. A "dictator" may be removed by force, but peace, stability, and prosperity cannot be imposed at gunpoint. If the United States truly aspires to global leadership grounded in moral authority, it must abandon its double standards and recommit to respecting international law. Otherwise, Venezuela will not be the last victim of such interventions, and the world will continue drifting toward a more unstable and insecure future.

# Tremors of Warning: Assam's rising seismic reality

By: Satyabrata Borah

In recent years, residents of Assam and the broader Northeast India region have increasingly felt the ground tremble beneath their feet with alarming regularity. People often remark that earthquakes seem to be occurring more frequently, citing events like the moderate tremor of around 5.6 magnitude that shook the region not long ago. This perception raises profound questions: Are earthquakes truly becoming more common in Assam? What do these seismic events signify for a region already classified as one of the most vulnerable on the planet? And perhaps most crucially, what lessons can we draw to safeguard lives and infrastructure in the future? This phenomenon is not merely a matter of fleeting tremors but a reminder of the immense tectonic forces at play beneath the Earth's surface, forces that have shaped the landscape of Northeast India for millions of years.

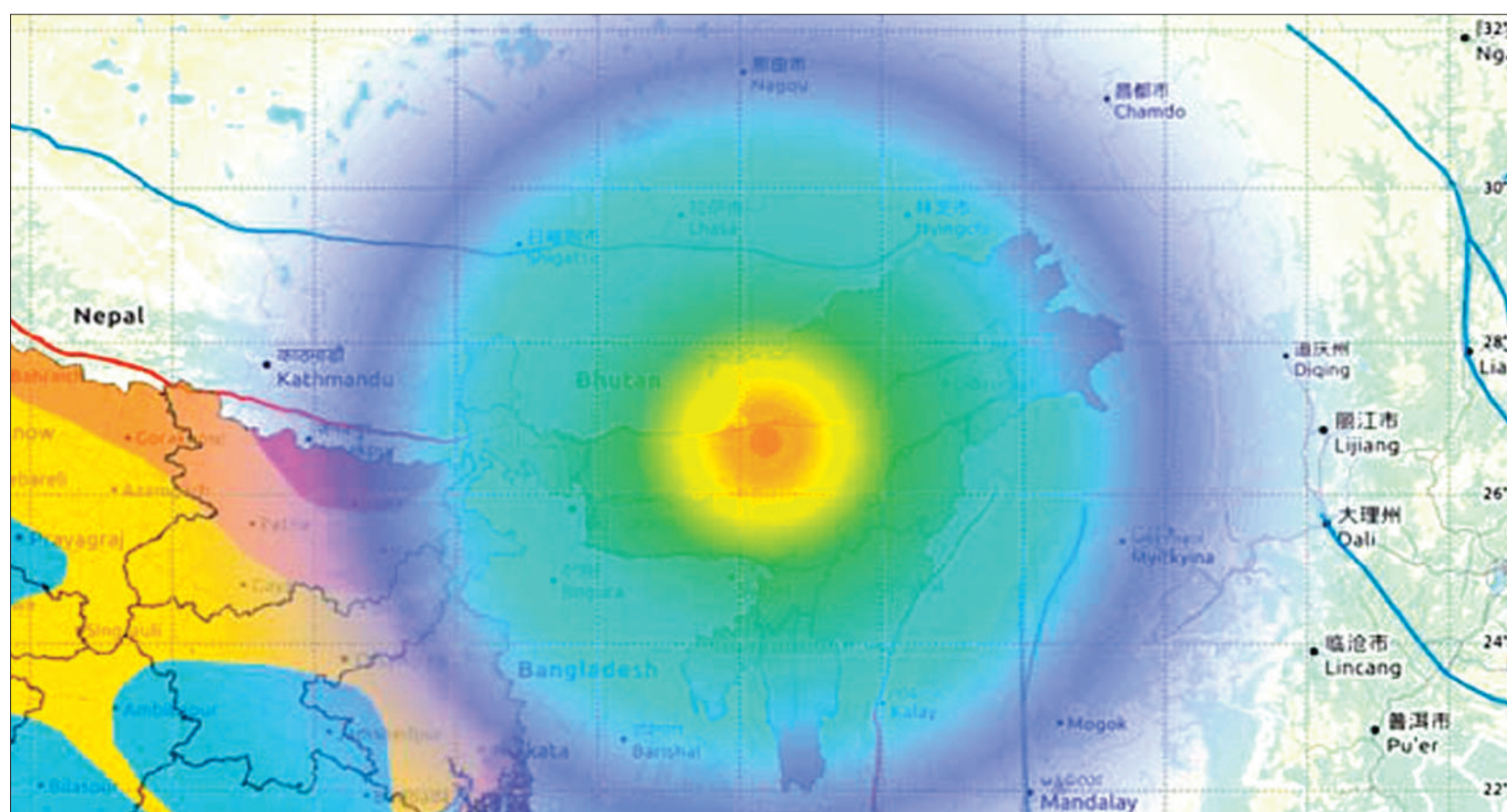
Earthquakes are fundamentally the result of sudden releases of energy accumulated within the Earth's crust. The planet's outer layer is divided into massive tectonic plates that float on the semi-fluid mantle below. These plates are in constant, albeit slow, motion, driven by convection currents in the mantle. When plates interact along their boundaries, stress builds up over time. Eventually, this stress exceeds the strength of the rocks, causing them to fracture or slip along faults. The released energy propagates as seismic waves, shaking the ground and potentially causing devastation. The intensity of an earthquake is measured on the Richter scale or, more accurately today, the moment magnitude scale, where each whole number increase represents about 31 times more energy release. A magnitude 5 event can cause considerable damage in populated areas, while those above 7 are considered major and capable of widespread destruction.

Northeast India, including Assam, sits at the confluence of several tectonic plates, making it one of the most seismically active regions globally. The primary driver is the ongoing collision between the Indian Plate and the Eurasian Plate. The Indian Plate is moving northward at a rate of about 5 centimeters per year, thrusting beneath the Eurasian Plate and uplifting the Himalayas. This subduction and collision create immense compressional forces. In Assam specifically, additional complexity arises from the interaction with the Burma Plate to the east, leading to

a network of active faults. Key structures include the Main Himalayan Frontal Thrust, the Kopili Fault, the Dauki Fault, and the Mishmi Thrust. Assam falls entirely within Seismic Zone V, the highest risk category in India's zoning map, indicating the potential for intensities exceeding IX on the Modified Mercalli scale, where even well-built structures can collapse.

The historical record underscores this vulnerability. Two of the most catastrophic earthquakes in recorded history struck this region. The 1897 Great Assam Earthquake, with an estimated magnitude of 8.1 to 8.3, originated near the Shillong Plateau. It devastated vast areas, killing over 1,500 people, liquefying soils, and altering river courses. Buildings in Shillong were flattened, and the tremors were felt as far as Calcutta. This event provided early insights into fault mechanics, as British geologist Richard Dixon Oldham analyzed global seismograms to identify distinct wave types. Even more devastating was the 1950 Assam-Tibet Earthquake, registering a magnitude of 8.6, one of the largest instrumentally recorded earthquakes ever. Its epicenter lay near the Mishmi Hills on the Assam-Arunachal border. The quake triggered massive landslides that dammed the Brahmaputra River's tributaries, leading to catastrophic floods when the dams burst weeks later. Over 4,800 lives were lost, entire villages vanished, and the landscape was profoundly altered, with rivers changing paths and forests uprooted. Pilots reported seeing the ground "ripple like waves" from the air. These events highlight the potential for mega-thrust earthquakes in the Himalayan arc, where centuries of strain accumulation can unleash in moments.

In more recent times, seismic activity has continued unabated. The region experiences hundreds of small tremors annually, many too minor to be felt. However, moderate events periodically remind residents of the underlying threat. In 2021, a magnitude 6.4 earthquake struck near Sonitpur, causing damage in Guwahati and surrounding areas. But the year 2025 saw a notable uptick in perceptible shakes. On September 14, 2025, a magnitude 5.5 to 5.9 earthquake centered in Udalguri district rattled Assam, with shallow depth amplifying the felt intensity. Tremors spread to Guwahati, where people rushed out of buildings in panic, and extended to neighboring states, Bhutan, and even parts of Bangladesh. No major casualties were reported, but it



sparked widespread concern. Throughout 2025, smaller events dotted the calendar: a 4.5 in Dhekiajuli in December; clusters in November where Assam recorded nine quakes, the highest for any Indian state that month; and various 3 to 4 magnitude shakes in districts like Darrang, Morigaon, and Sonitpur. By late 2025, monitoring stations detected dozens of events within 100 kilometers of key cities like Guwahati and Tezpur. Entering 2026, activity persisted with occasional moderate tremors felt in the region.

This apparent cluster of events leads many to wonder if earthquake frequency is genuinely increasing. Scientifically, the answer is nuanced. Globally and regionally, the long-term rate of earthquakes has remained relatively constant over centuries. What has changed is detection capability. Modern seismographic networks, including those operated by India's National Center for Seismology and international bodies like the USGS, now record thousands of small quakes annually that went undetected in the past. In Northeast India, the expansion of monitoring stations has similarly improved sensitivity. Data from the past

decade shows an average of 70 to 100 earthquakes of magnitude 4 or above within 300 kilometers of Assam each year, a figure consistent with historical patterns when adjusted for detection. Clusters like those in 2025 are normal in active zones; they often represent aftershocks or stress redistribution along faults. However, some studies suggest that ongoing plate convergence is building strain in "seismic gaps" areas dormant since major events like 1950, potentially foreshadowing a larger release. Probabilistic hazard assessments indicate high peak ground accelerations possible in future great earthquakes.

Yet, perception of increased frequency stems from real factors. Population growth and urbanization in Assam have placed more people in harm's way. Guwahati, a rapidly expanding metropolis on alluvial soils prone to amplification of seismic waves, is particularly at risk. Many buildings, especially older ones or those in informal settlements, do not adhere to earthquake-resistant codes. Liquefaction, where saturated soils behave like liquids during shaking, remains a hazard in the Brahmaputra Valley. Climate change may indirectly

exacerbate risks through altered monsoon patterns leading to more landslides that trigger or accompany quakes. These frequent tremors serve as critical warnings. They indicate that the region's faults are active and capable of accommodating slip in small increments or, cumulatively, in catastrophic events. The Kopili Fault, for instance, has been implicated in several recent moderate quakes and is considered capable of producing magnitude 7 events. The "Assam Gap" along the Himalayan front has not ruptured in a great earthquake since 1950, accumulating significant strain. Experts warn that a repeat of 1897 or 1950 could cause tens of thousands of casualties and economic losses in the billions, given today's denser population and infrastructure.

Preparation is thus imperative. India has made strides with the National Earthquake Monitoring Network, early warning systems in pilot stages, and building codes updated post-2001 Bhuj earthquake. In Assam, the state disaster management authority conducts drills and retrofitting programs. Individuals can contribute by securing furniture, preparing emergency kits, and learning

the "Drop, Cover, and Hold On" protocol. Communities should advocate for enforcement of seismic standards in construction, especially in high-rises mushrooming in Guwahati. Schools and workplaces need regular evacuation practices. Research into paleoseismology trenching old faults to uncover past ruptures can refine hazard maps.

The recent earthquakes in Assam do not necessarily signal an imminent apocalypse but underscore a perpetual reality: living in harmony with an active Earth. They signify ongoing tectonic adjustment in one of the world's most dynamic convergent zones. Rather than viewing them with helplessness, we should interpret them as calls to action. Enhanced monitoring, public education, resilient infrastructure, and regional cooperation with neighboring countries sharing similar risks can mitigate future impacts. By heeding these ground-shaking alerts, society can transform vulnerability into preparedness, ensuring that when the next major event strikes, the toll is measured in resilience rather than tragedy. The Earth's plates will continue their inexorable dance, but human foresight can determine how gracefully we endure it.

# The great Indian paradox - GDP is growing high but rupee is sinking

By: T N Ashok

When India overtook Britain to become the world's fifth-largest economy, policymakers celebrated a milestone that had been decades in the making. Official growth numbers showed an economy expanding at 6.5 to 7 percent, far outpacing a global slowdown stuck near 3 percent. Yet even as India's GDP surged, its currency told a very different story.

By late 2025, the Indian rupee had slid toward ₹90 to the U.S. dollar, marking one of the steepest long-term depreciations among major emerging-market currencies. Two decades earlier, when Manmohan Singh was prime minister, the rupee traded near ₹50. The erosion has been steady, persistent, and deeply unsettling.

How does an economy that claims to be among the world's fastest-growing preside over one of its weakest currencies? The answer lies not in a single policy failure but in a convergence of global finance, trade shocks, capital flows, and structural imbalances—many of which intensified between 2023 and 2025, culminating in the return of Trump-era tariffs that reshaped India's export calculus.

In theory, fast-growing economies attract capital, strengthen confidence, and support their currencies. In practice, GDP growth and exchange rates have become increasingly decoupled in a world dominated by mobile capital, geopolitical risk, and U.S. dollar supremacy.

India's growth story in the 2020s was real—but uneven. Consumption rebounded after the pandemic, infrastructure spending accelerated, and corporate profits rose. What growth did not do was resolve India's deep dependence on foreign capital and imported inputs. "The mistake is to treat GDP growth as a currency anchor," said a former IMF economist now advising central banks in Asia. "Currencies are driven by balance-of-payments realities, not headline growth."

India's balance-of-payments problem never disappeared—it merely changed. The most powerful force weighing on the rupee has been the relentless strength of the U.S. dollar. From 2022 onward, global investors piled into dollar assets amid: higher U.S. interest rates, geopolitical instability, and fears of recession in Europe and China.

The Federal Reserve's tightening cycle made U.S. Treasury yields irresistible compared with emerging-market risk. As capital flowed into dollar assets, currencies from Brazil to Indonesia weakened. India was no exception. But India was uniquely vulnerable because of its large financing needs. Every bout of global risk aversion triggered portfolio outflows from Indian equities and bonds, forcing the rupee lower.

Between 2023 and 2025, foreign institutional investors repeatedly exited Indian markets, converting rupees back into dollars and amplifying depreciation pressure. The rupee's decline accelerated sharply after the re-imposition of punitive U.S. tariffs under President Donald Trump's second term. Citing India's purchases of Russian oil and strategic autonomy on sanctions, Washington imposed tariffs that made Indian exports—particularly



in engineering goods, textiles, chemicals, and auto components—less competitive in the American market, India's largest export destination. For Indian exporters already battling weak global demand, the tariffs were devastating. Exports stagnated. Trade receipts softened. And currency markets took notice.

"A currency weakens when future dollar earnings look uncertain," said a U.S. trade analyst who advises multinational manufacturers. "Trump's tariffs told markets that India's access to the U.S. market could no longer be taken for granted."

The irony was stark: India's GDP continued to grow, driven by domestic spending, while its external sector quietly deteriorated. If exports were under pressure, imports were booming. India's growth model remains heavily dependent on imported: crude oil and gas, electronics and semiconductors, and machinery and capital goods.

As domestic demand rose, so did the import bill. Every barrel of oil, every smartphone component, every industrial machine required dollars. The result was a persistent current-account deficit, even during periods of high growth. That deficit had to be financed—either by foreign investment or by drawing down reserves. When capital inflows slowed, the rupee took a hit. "India has not yet built an export engine strong enough to pay for its own growth," said a senior Indian trade economist. "That gap shows up in the exchange rate." Orthodox economics suggests that a depreciating currency should boost exports by making them cheaper. But India's experience exposed the limits of that logic.

Indian manufacturing is deeply embedded in global supply chains. Many exporters import components priced in dollars. When the rupee falls, input costs rise, cancelling out any competitive gain. In sectors like electronics, pharmaceuticals, and chemicals, depreciation increased costs faster than it increased export volumes. The rupee fell—but exports did not surge.

The Reserve Bank of India faced a delicate trade-

off. Defending the rupee aggressively would have required: sharply higher interest rates, tighter liquidity, and slower growth. Instead, the RBI chose managed flexibility—intervening to prevent disorderly swings, but allowing the rupee to find a lower equilibrium. Officials argued that burning reserves to defend a specific level would be futile in the face of global dollar strength. "The central bank's message was clear," said a former RBI official. "We will smooth volatility, not fight markets. That policy avoided a crisis—but it also institutionalised depreciation as a feature, not a bug."

The comparison with the Manmohan Singh era is politically charged but economically revealing. In the early 2000s: India's trade deficit was smaller, capital inflows were more stable, and globalisation was expanding, not fragmenting. Today's world is defined by protectionism, financial volatility, and geopolitical rivalry. India's economy is far larger—but also far more exposed.

The rupee's slide from ₹50 to nearly ₹90 is not simply a verdict on governance. It reflects how emerging economies are priced in a dollar-dominated system, where growth does not guarantee currency strength. The rupee's decline is not a collapse—but it is a warning. It signals: dependence on volatile capital, unresolved trade imbalances, and vulnerability to geopolitical shocks. India's economy may be growing—but it is growing on external terms set elsewhere.

As one European central-bank adviser put it: "India has scale, talent, and momentum. What it lacks is insulation from the dollar cycle. Until that changes, the rupee will remain under pressure—no matter how impressive the GDP numbers look."

The rupee's long fall forces a question policymakers rarely confront openly: Is India willing to redesign its growth model to earn its dollars—or will it continue to borrow them from the world's patience? The answer will determine not just the future of the rupee, but the credibility of India's rise as an economic power. (IPA Service)

# 'Utha-Jaaga-Xaar Powa' and 'Tempest Over Brahmaputra': First novel on Zubeen Garg

By: Himnavana Rajbongshi

Zubeen Garg has never belonged solely to the world of music. For Assam, he has been a cultural force—an artist whose voice carried love, resistance, longing and identity. While his life and work have been discussed through journalism, biography and criticism over the years, fiction had remained an unexplored space. That space has now been claimed with the publication of two novels that place Zubeen Garg at the centre of a deeply emotional literary narrative.

Published by Manikut Prakashan, the 'Utha-Jaaga-Xaar Powa' in Assamese

and the 'Tempest Over Brahmaputra' in English mark the first fictional works based on the life and legacy of the legendary singer. Both novels have been written by Neelam Akash Kashyap, a young novelist who approaches the subject not as a chronicler of events, but as a witness to a collective sense of loss. Together, the books represent a significant moment in contemporary Assamese literature, transforming a cultural icon into a literary presence.

'Utha-Jaaga-Xaar Powa', the first Assamese novel on Zubeen Garg, resists the structure of a conventional biography. Instead, it unfolds as a reflective narrative shaped by memory, music and mourning. Zubeen Garg appears throughout the novel—not merely as a celebrated artist, but as a living presence whose absence continues to define the emotional landscape of Assam. The narrative moves fluidly between his musical journey, the socio-cultural atmosphere of his times, and the silence that followed his departure.

The novel functions as a literary document of a Zubeen-less Assam. Familiar episodes from the singer's life are interwoven with lesser-known and untold moments, allowing readers to encounter both the public figure and the private human being. Fiction becomes a tool to transform known facts into lived emo-

tional experiences, giving depth to grief and resonance to memory.

One of the most striking aspects of 'Utha-Jaaga-Xaar Powa' is the inclusion of the only short story ever written by Zubeen Garg himself—an almost unknown facet of his creative life. The novel also addresses deeply personal chapters, including the untimely death of his sister, Jonkey Borthakur. These moments are handled with sensitivity and restraint, adding emotional gravity without descending into sentimentality.

'Tempest Over Brahmaputra', the English novel, extends this narrative beyond linguistic boundaries. Though rooted in the Assamese original, it is not a mechanical translation. Reworked by the author himself, the English version preserves the emotional core of the story while making its cultural context accessible to a wider readership. Through this novel, readers outside Assam are introduced not only to Zubeen Garg, but also to the emotional world of a society shaped by his music.

Both novels share a common impulse: to document not just the life of an artist, but the collective mourning of a people. They explore how music becomes memory, and how an artist's voice continues to echo even in silence. Rather than mythologising Zubeen Garg, the books choose to humanise him, allowing readers to feel his presence rather than merely understand his legacy.

Since their release, the novels have generated wide discussion among readers and literary circles, drawing attention to the possibilities of fiction as a means of preserving cultural memory. In bringing Zubeen Garg into the realm of the novel, Neelam Akash Kashyap does not attempt to define the legend. Instead, he listens—to songs remembered, to silences endured, and to the quiet grief flowing beneath Assam's cultural consciousness.

In these pages, music turns into memory, and fiction becomes a space where an artist continues to live—not as an icon carved in stone, but as an enduring emotional presence.



# Trump's plan to seize, revitalize Venezuela's oil industry faces major hurdles

WASHINGTON, Jan 5: President Donald Trump's plan to take control of Venezuela's oil industry and ask American companies to revitalize it after capturing President Nicolas Maduro in a raid isn't likely to have a significant immediate impact on oil prices.

Venezuela's oil industry is in disrepair after years of neglect and international sanctions, so it could take years and major investments before production can increase dramatically. But some analysts are optimistic that Venezuela could double or triple its current output of about 1.1 million barrels of oil a day to return to historic levels fairly quickly.

"While many are reporting Venezuela's oil infrastructure was unharmed by US military actions, it has been decaying for many many years and will take time to rebuild," said Patrick De Haan, who is the lead petroleum analyst at gasoline price tracker GasBuddy.

American oil companies will want a stable regime in the country before they are willing to invest heavily, and the political picture remained uncertain Saturday with Trump saying that the United States is in charge — while the current Venezuelan vice president argued, before Venezuela's high court ordered her to assume the role of interim president, that Maduro should be restored to power.

"But if it seems like the US is successful in running the country for the next 24 hours, I would say there would be a lot of optimism that US energy companies could come in and revitalize the Venezuelan oil industry fairly quickly," said Phil Flynn, a senior market analyst at the Price Futures Group. And if Venezuela can grow into an oil production powerhouse, Flynn said "that could cement lower prices for the longer term" and put more pressure on Russia.

Speaking to reporters on Air Force One on Sunday, Trump said oil companies are "going to go in and rebuild this system." A major shift in oil prices wasn't expected because Venezuela is a member of OPEC, so its production is already accounted for there. And there is currently a surplus of oil on the global market. The price of US crude oil fell 23 cents early Monday to USD 57.09 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, gave up 18 cents to USD 60.57 per barrel.

**Proven reserves**  
Venezuela is known to have the world's largest proven crude oil reserves of approximately 303 billion barrels, according to the US Energy Information Administration. That accounts for roughly 17 per cent of all global oil reserves. So international oil companies have reason to be interested in Venezuela. Exxon Mobil didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Saturday. ConocoPhillips spokesperson Dennis Nuss said by email that the company "is monitoring developments in Venezuela and their potential implications for global energy supply and stability. It would be premature to speculate on any future business activities or investments."

Chevron is the only one with significant operations in Venezuela, where it produces about 250,000 barrels a day. Chevron, which first invested in Venezuela in the 1920s, does business in the country through joint ventures with the state-owned company Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., commonly known as PDVSA.

"Chevron remains focused on the safety and well-being of our employees, as well as the integrity of our assets. We continue to operate in full compliance with all relevant laws and regulations," Chevron spokesman Bill Turenne said.

But even with those massive reserves, Venezuela has been producing less than 1 per cent of the world's crude oil supply. Corruption, mismanagement and US economic sanctions saw production steadily decline from the 3.5 million barrels per day pumped in 1999 to today's levels.



The problem isn't finding the oil. It's a question of the political environment and whether companies can count on the government to live up to their contracts. Back in 2007, then President Hugo Chavez nationalized much of the oil production and forced major players like ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips out.

"The issue is not just that the infrastructure is in bad shape, but it's mostly about how do you get foreign companies to start pouring money in before they have a clear perspective on the political stability, the contract situation and the like," said Francisco Monaldi, who is the director of the Latin American energy program at Rice University. But the infrastructure does need significant investment.

"The estimate is that in order for Venezuela to increase from one million barrels per day — that is what it produces today — to four million barrels, it will take about a decade and about a hundred billion dollars of investment," Monaldi said.

**Strong demand**  
Venezuela produces the kind of heavy crude oil that's needed for diesel fuel, asphalt and other fuels for heavy equipment. Diesel is in short supply around the world because of the sanctions on oil from Venezuela and Russia and because America's lighter crude oil can't easily replace it.

Years ago, American refineries on the Gulf Coast were optimized to handle that kind of heavy crude at a time when US oil production was falling and Venezuelan and Mexican crude was plentiful. So refineries would love to have more access to Venezuela's crude because it would help them operate more efficiently, and it tends to be a little cheaper.

Boosting Venezuelan production could also make it easier to put pressure on Russia because Europe and the rest of the world could get more of the diesel and heavy oil they need from Venezuela and stop buying from Russia.

"There's been a big benefit for Russia to see Venezuela's oil industry collapse. And the reason is because they were a competitor on the global stage for that oil market," Flynn said.

**Complicated legal picture**  
But Matthew Waxman, a Columbia University law professor who was a national security official in the George W. Bush administration, said seizing control of Venezuela's resources opens up additional legal issues. "For example, a big issue will be who really owns Venezuela's oil?" Waxman wrote in an email. "An occupying military power can't enrich itself by taking another state's resources, but the Trump administration will probably claim that the Venezuelan government never rightfully held them."

But Waxman, who served in the State and Defense departments and on the National Security Council under Bush, noted that "we've seen the administration talk very dismissively about international law when it comes to Venezuela." (AP)

# Maduro taken to US courthouse for his first appearance on drug trafficking charges

NEW YORK, Jan 5: Deposed Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro is set to make his first appearance Monday in an American courtroom on the narco-terrorism charges the Trump administration used to justify capturing him and bringing him to New York.

Maduro and his wife are expected to appear at noon before a judge for a brief, but required, legal proceeding that will likely kick off a prolonged legal fight over whether he can be put on trial in the US. The couple were transported under armed guard early Monday from the Brooklyn jail where they've been detained to a Manhattan courthouse.

The trip was swift. A motorcade carrying Maduro left jail around 7:15 am and made its way to a nearby athletic field, where Maduro slowly made his way to a waiting helicopter. The chopper flew across New York harbour and landed at a Manhattan heliport, where Maduro, limping, was loaded into an armoured vehicle.

A few minutes later, the law enforcement caravan was inside a garage at the courthouse complex, just around the corner from the one where Donald Trump was convicted in 2024 of falsifying business records.

As a criminal defendant in the US legal system, Maduro will have the same rights as any other person accused of a crime including the right to a trial by a jury of regular New Yorkers. But he'll also be nearly but not quite unique.

Maduro's lawyers are expected



to contest the legality of his arrest, arguing that he is immune from prosecution as a sovereign head of state. Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega unsuccessfully tried the same defence after the US captured him in a similar military invasion in 1990. But the US doesn't recognise Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate head of state particularly after a much-disputed 2024 reelection.

Venezuela's new interim president, Delcy Rodriguez, has demanded that the US return Maduro, who long denied any involvement in drug trafficking although late Sunday she also struck a more conciliatory tone in a social media post, inviting collaboration with President Trump and respectful relations with the US.

Before his capture, Maduro and his allies claimed US hostility was motivated by lust for Venezuela's rich oil and mineral resources.

The US seized Maduro and his wife in a military operation Satur-

day, capturing them in their home on a military base. Trump said the US would run Venezuela temporarily, but Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Sunday that it would not govern the country day-to-day other than enforcing an existing "oil quarantine".

Trump suggested Sunday that he wants to extend American power further in the western hemisphere.

Speaking aboard Air Force One, he called Colombia's president Gustavo Petro "a sick man who likes making cocaine and selling it to the United States. And he's not going to be doing it very long. He called on Venezuela's Rodriguez to provide total access to her country, or else face consequences."

A 25-page indictment made public Saturday accuses Maduro and others of working with drug cartels to facilitate the shipment of thousands of tons of cocaine into the US. They could face life in prison if convicted.

It was unclear as of Sunday

whether Maduro had hired a US lawyer yet. He and his wife, Cilia Flores, have been under US sanctions for years, making it illegal for any American to take money from them without first securing a license from the Treasury Department. While the indictment against Maduro says Venezuelan officials worked directly with the Tren de Aragua gang, a US intelligence assessment published in April, drawing on input from the intelligence community's 18 agencies, found no coordination between Tren de Aragua and the Venezuelan government.

Maduro, his wife and his son who remains free are charged along with Venezuela's interior and justice minister, a former interior and justice minister and Hector Rusthenford Guerrero Flores, an alleged Tren de Aragua leader who has been criminally charged in another case and remains at large.

Among other things, the indictment accuses Maduro and his wife of ordering kidnappings, beatings and murders of those who owed them drug money or undermined their drug trafficking operation. That included a local drug boss' killing in Caracas, the indictment said. Maduro's wife is also accused of accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes in 2007 to arrange a meeting between a large-scale drug trafficker and the director of Venezuela's National Anti-Drug Office, resulting in additional monthly bribes, with some of the money going to Maduro's wife, according to the indictment. (AP)

# A Paris court finds 10 people guilty of cyberbullying France's first lady Brigitte Macron



PARIS, Jan 5: A Paris court found Monday 10 people guilty of cyberbullying France's first lady Brigitte Macron. The court convicted all defendants to sentences, ranging from a cyberbullying awareness training to 8-month suspended prison sentences.

The court pointed to "particularly degrading, insulting, and malicious" comments referring to false claims regarding alleged trans identity and alleged pedo criminality targeting Brigitte Macron.

The defendants, eight men and two women aged 41 to 65, are accused of posting "numerous malicious comments" falsely claiming that President Emmanuel Macron's wife was born a man and linking the 24-year age gap with her husband to pedophilia. Some of the posts were viewed tens of thousands of times.

Brigitte Macron did not attend the two-day trial in October. Speaking on TF1 national television Sunday, she said she launched legal proceedings to "set an example" in the fight against harassment. Her daughter, Tiphaine Auziere, testified about what she described as the "deterioration" of her mother's life since the online harassment intensified. "She cannot ignore the horrible things said about her," Auziere told the court. She said the impact has extended to the entire family, including Macron's grandchildren.

Defendant Delphine Jegousse, 51, who is known as Amandine Roy and describes herself as a medium and an author, is considered to have played a major role in spreading the rumour after she released a four-hour video on her YouTube channel in 2021.

The X account of Aurélien Poirson-Atlan, 41, known as Zoé Sagan on social media, was suspended in 2024 after his name was cited in several judicial investigations. Other defendants include an elected official, a teacher and a computer scientist. Several told the court their comments were intended as humor or satire and said they did not understand why they were being prosecuted. They face up to two years in prison if convicted.

The case follows years of conspiracy theories falsely alleging that Brigitte Macron was born under the name Jean-Michel Trogneux, which is actually the name of her brother. The Macrons have also filed a defamation suit in the United States against conservative influencer Candace Owens.

The Macrons, who have been married since 2007, first met at the high school where he was a student and she was a teacher. Brigitte Macron, 24 years her husband's senior, was then called Brigitte Auziere, a married mother of three.

# Trump says that Ukraine didn't target Putin residence in drone strike as Kremlin claims

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE, Jan 5: President Donald Trump on Sunday told reporters that US officials have determined that Ukraine did not target a residence belonging to Russian President Vladimir Putin in a drone attack last week, disputing Kremlin claims that Trump had initially greeted with deep concern.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov last week said Ukraine launched a wave of drones at Putin's state residence in the northwestern Novgorod region that the Russian defence systems were able to defeat. Lavrov also criticised Kyiv for launching the attack at a moment of intensive negotiations to end the war.

The allegation came just a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had travelled to Florida for talks with Trump on the US administration's still-evolving 20-point plan aimed at ending the war. Zelenskyy quickly de-

nied the Kremlin's allegation.

Trump said that "something happened nearby" Putin's residence, but that American officials didn't find that the Russian president's residence was targeted.

"I don't believe that strike happened," Trump told reporters as he travelled back to Washington on Sunday after spending two weeks at his home in Florida. "We don't believe that happened, now that we've been able to check."

Trump addressed the US determination after European officials argued that the Russian claim was nothing more than an effort by Moscow to undermine the peace effort.

But Trump, at least initially, had appeared to take the Russian allegations at face value. He told reporters last Monday that Putin had also raised the matter during a phone call he had with the Russian leader earlier that day. And

Trump said he was "very angry" about the accusation.

By Wednesday, Trump appeared to be downplaying the Russian claim. He posted a link to a New York Post editorial on his social media platform that raised doubt about the Russian allegation. The editorial lambasted Putin for choosing "lies, hatred, and death" at a moment that Trump has claimed is "closer than ever before" to moving the two sides to a deal to end the war. The US president has struggled to fulfil a pledge to quickly end the war in Ukraine and has shown irritation with both Zelenskyy and Putin as he tried to mediate an end to a conflict he boasted on the campaign trail that he could end in one day.

Both Trump and Zelenskyy said last week they made progress in their talks at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort. (AP)

# 'Still shaken': Trepidation in Venezuela after US captures Maduro

CARACAS, Jan 5: An anxious quiet fell over Venezuela's capital on Sunday as trepidation mixed with joy while a nation waited to see what comes next.

People were slow to resume routines in Caracas after President Nicolás Maduro was deposed and captured in a dramatic US military operation. Dozens of stores, restaurants and churches remained closed. Those on the streets looked shell-shocked, staring at their phones or into the distance. "People are still shaken," said 77-year-old David Leal, who arrived to work as a parking attendant but realised he likely would not have customers. He pointed to the deserted street, a few blocks from Venezuela's presidential palace, which was guarded by armed civilians and military personnel.

**'May God give us strength'**  
Venezuela is no stranger to political tumult, but the the dead-of-night US military operation early Saturday marked a new chapter with no ready script.

US President Donald Trump initially said the US would "run" the country until there was stability, a remark that Secretary of State Marco Rubio seemed to walk back



on Sunday. Rubio insisted in interviews that Washington will use control of Venezuela's oil industry to force policy changes, and called the government currently in place illegitimate. The country is home to the world's largest proven crude oil reserves.

"We want to see Venezuela transition to be a place completely different than what it looks like today. But obviously, we don't have the expectation that's going to happen in the next 15 hours," Rubio said.

Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López, flanked by the high military command, told Venezuelans that Maduro was still the

rightful leader. Presidential duties, however, now belong to Vice President Delcy Rodriguez, whom the high court ordered to assume the role of interim president.

Rodriguez made no public comment Sunday. Maduro's cadre of government officials demanded his release from custody in New York, where his first court appearance is set for Monday. State-controlled media did not air the images of him handcuffed on US soil.

Venezuelans instead saw them on social media, and many could not believe their eyes.

"May God give us strength for what we are experiencing. I'm sad. He is a human being," said Nely Gutiérrez, a retiree, as her eyes welled with tears. "They have him handcuffed, and if he is in the hands of the empire, no one can save him from there, only God, not even God. He will die there."

Gutiérrez had walked to church only to find it closed. She said she would have prayed for peace in Venezuela and for Maduro. She declined to say whether she ever voted for him but said, "The word of God says love your enemy."

**Fear of celebrating**  
In the US and some Latin American countries, Maduro's ouster was celebrated.

In Venezuela, the scene was different, with some supporters burning US flags and holding signs reading "Gringo go home."

Others muted any anti-Maduro feelings for now. Construction worker Daniel Medalla said people did not dare celebrate out of fear of government repression.

"We were longing for it," Medalla, 66, said of Maduro's exit. Memories remain fresh of the government crackdown following the 2024 presidential election, which Maduro claimed to have won despite credible evidence that

he lost by a more than 2-to-1 margin. Protests left 28 people dead, 220 injured and at least 2,000 detained, according to official figures. The presence of police and military personnel across Caracas on Sunday was notable for its smaller size compared with an average day. Soldiers attempted to clear an area of an air base that burned along with at least three passenger buses during the US attack.

Rubio in interviews said no US forces were on the ground in Venezuela but didn't rule out further strikes there.

**Death toll from US operation still unclear**

Venezuelan officials have said Saturday's operation killed civilians and military personnel. But they have not given a toll, and the government's press office has not responded to multiple requests.

In the coastal state of La Guaira, families with houses damaged during the operation were cleaning up debris. Wilman González, left with a black eye from a blast, picked through rubble at home, surrounded by broken furniture. One part of his apartment building was almost entirely blown off, leaving walls gaping. (AP)

# 'Modi knew I wasn't happy, we can raise tariffs very quickly'

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Jan 5: US President Donald Trump has said Prime Minister Narendra Modi "knew he was not happy" with India's purchases of Russian oil and that Washington can raise tariffs on New Delhi "very quickly".

These remarks were made by President Trump while talking to reporters on Sunday aboard Air Force One en route to Washington DC from Florida.

"They (India) wanted to make me happy, basically. Modi is a very good man; he is a good guy. He knew I was not happy, and it was important to make me happy. They do trade and we can raise tariffs on them very quickly. It would be very bad for them," Trump said.

Trump's remarks came after US Senator Lindsey Graham, accompanying him on Air Force One, said that the tariffs imposed on India by Trump are the "chief reason" New Delhi is now buying substantially less Russian oil.

Graham spoke about his tariff bill that seeks to impose 500 per cent levies on imports from countries buying Russian oil.

Graham said that to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict, pressure must be put on Russian President Vladimir Putin's customers.

Trump said that the sanctions are hurting Russia very badly and then mentioned India. Graham then said that the US put a 25 per cent tariff on India for buying Russian oil. "I was at the Indian Ambassador's house about a month ago and all he wanted to talk about is how they are buying less Russian oil. 'Would you tell the President to relieve the tariff?' Graham said. (PTI)

*Large-scale LED adoption reduces electricity costs, supports India's green development goals*

## UJALA scheme brings meaningful change through LED adoption: Arunachal DyCM



**ITANAGAR, Jan 5:** Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Monday highlighted the transformative impact of the Centre's UJALA scheme, saying it has brought 'meaningful change' to the lives of millions across India over the last 11 years by promoting affordable and energy-efficient lighting.

Over the last 11 years, the UJALA scheme has brought meaningful change to the lives of millions across the country, Mein said in a post on X.

The deputy chief minister, who

also holds the Power and Hydro-power portfolios, underlined that the large-scale adoption of LED technology under the programme has significantly reduced electricity consumption, lowered household power bills and delivered substantial savings to citizens.

Mein also stressed the environmental benefits of the initiative, saying that the scheme has curbed carbon emissions.

"At the same time, it has contributed to environmental protection by cutting carbon emissions

and encouraging energy-efficient practices," Mein said, adding that the scheme has helped align economic savings with climate responsibility.

Referring to the broader national impact, he pointed out that the sustained push for efficient lighting reflects India's long-term development vision.

"Through these sustained efforts, India continues to move confidently towards a brighter, greener and more sustainable future," he added.

The Unnat Jyoti by Affordable

LEDs for All (UJALA) scheme, launched by the Centre, aims to make energy-efficient LED bulbs, tube lights and fans available to consumers at affordable prices.

By replacing conventional incandescent bulbs with LEDs, the programme has helped reduce peak electricity demand, ease pressure on power infrastructure and lower energy costs for households, especially in middle- and lower-income groups.

Officials said that beyond direct savings, the scheme has played a key role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, supporting India's climate commitments and promoting a culture of energy conservation across urban and rural areas.

Over the years, UJALA has emerged as one of the country's flagship initiatives linking consumer welfare with sustainable development goals, they added. (PTI)

## BJP clears 26 candidates for ZPC posts in Arunachal



**ITANAGAR, Jan 5:** The Arunachal Pradesh unit of the BJP has approved 26 zilla parishad members (ZPMs) as its official candidates for the post of zilla parishad chairperson (ZPC) across all districts of the state, completing its preparations for the upcoming ZPC elections, party leaders said.

An order issued by the party's state election committee on Sunday stated that the candidates were finalised after detailed organisational consultations, keeping in mind district-wise representation and effective local governance.

Party leaders said the selection aims to strengthen grassroots leadership, improve district-level administration and ensure better coordination between zilla parishads and the state government.

The order was signed by state BJP president Kaling Moyong and has been circulated to all district units for necessary follow-up action.

Polling for the simultaneous panchayat and civic bodies of Itanagar and Pasighat was conducted on December 15 and counting of votes was held on December 20. (PTI)

## Six-day kayaking tournament in Tawang from Feb 10 to 15

**TAWANG, Jan 5:** A six-day kayaking tournament is being organised on fast-flowing Tawangchu river in Arunachal Pradesh, near India's border with China, where two tributaries from Tibet join and flow through Bhutan to finally reach the Brahmaputra.

Scheduled from February 10 to 15, Tawangchu Tides International Kayaking Championship (TTIKC) returns for its second edition and will take place in Tawang's Lungla on Tawangchu river, a release issued by the organiser said.

The championship is being held with support from Arunachal Pradesh government and in association with the Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association (IKCA), Arunachal Kayaking and Canoeing Association (AKCA) and Arunachal Olympic Association (AOA), it said.

Tawangchu is the main river of Tawang. Strategically very significant, Tawang is located above 10,000 feet, close to the border with China in Arunachal Pradesh, which shares a 1,129 km long Line of Actual Control with the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Tawang is also a historic and picturesque town, known for its stunning landscapes and its spiritual heritage. Not only was His Holiness 6th Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso born here, but Tawang also has one of Asia's oldest monasteries, founded in 1680.

The six-day event will feature everything from solemn prayers to



start the festival to race briefings, practice runs and the adrenaline-pumping downriver sprint and kayak slalom races.

The entire Tawang district is known as the basin of the Tawangchu. In addition, two fast-flowing rivers from Tibet, Tsonga

Chu and Nyamjang Chu and several streams join the river within the district.

The combined river flows west into Bhutan from where it enters Assam as the river Manas and later merges with the Brahmaputra. (PTI)

## Fisheries Minister advocates cold-water fisheries focus at NFDB meet

*Wangsu urges special policy and infrastructure support for hill and border states*



**ITANAGAR, Jan 5:** Arunachal Pradesh Fisheries Minister Gabriel Denwang Wangsu on Monday called for a special policy for hill and Border States to promote cold-water fisheries, strengthen infrastructure and improve the livelihoods of rural fishermen.

Addressing the 12th governing body meeting of the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) in Hyderabad, Wangsu supported a proposal to bring Mission Amrit Sarovar under fisheries activities for fish farming, an official communication stated.

He said convergence of fisheries programmes with the mission would help boost inland fish production and generate additional income opportunities for rural communities.

The minister also placed several key proposals before the NFDB governing body, including special

relaxations under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) for hill and Border States, such as higher unit costs, flexible norms and cluster-based implementation.

He emphasised the need to strengthen seed security through expansion of carp and trout hatcheries, brood banks, local feed production units and development of farming clusters.

Wangsu further stressed conservation and sustainable use of indigenous fish species through hatcheries, river ranching and stock enhancement programmes.

He also highlighted the importance of developing value-chain and post-harvest infrastructure, including mini-feed mills, mobile ice plants, cold storages, insulated transport and value-addition units.

The minister proposed resource

mapping and digitisation using geo-spatial technologies and suggested setting up a regional centre of NFDB in Arunachal Pradesh with full logistical support from the state government.

Earlier, Union Minister for Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Rajiv Ranjan Singh, who chaired the meeting, reviewed the progress of fisheries and aquaculture development across the country.

He directed states and Union Territories to ensure optimal and timely utilisation of sanctioned funds and early completion of on-going projects, especially under PMMSY.

The meeting was attended by ministers of state for animal husbandry and fisheries, fisheries ministers from several states, senior officials from states and Union Territories and members of the NFDB governing body. (PTI)

## Army organises national integration tour for Arunachal students

**ITANAGAR, Jan 5:** The Indian Army is organising a national integration tour for the students of Mechuka government higher secondary in Arunachal Pradesh's remote border region of Shi-Yomi district to provide national exposure and strengthen emotional integration with the country's mainstream, an official said.

The tour which began on Monday, seeks to familiarise students from the far-flung frontier area with the country's cultural, historical and institutional landscape, reflecting the Army's sustained commitment to nation-building through youth empowerment, a defence spokesperson said.

The 15-day tour will end on January 19.

As part of the programme, the students will visit Delhi, Pune, Mumbai and Itanagar, gaining first-hand exposure to the nation's



democratic institutions, heritage and diverse socio-cultural fabric, defence spokesperson Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said in a statement.

The itinerary includes visits to key landmarks such as Teen Murti Bhawan, Rashtrapati Bhawan and the National War Memorial, along with interactions at premier educa-

tional and defence institutions.

These engagements are intended to deepen the students' understanding of India's history, values and governance, while also offering insights into opportunities in higher education, public service and the armed forces, the spokesperson added. (PTI)

## Collection exceeded the national growth average of 6.8 per cent, reflecting strong economic activity

### Arunachal GST collection rises 36pc in first 9 months of FY26



**ITANAGAR, Jan 5:** Arunachal Pradesh has recorded a sharp 35.7 per cent rise in Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections in the first nine months of the 2025-26 financial year, compared to the figure in the same period in the previous fiscal, officials said on Monday.

The collection exceeded the national growth average of 6.8 per cent, reflecting strong economic activity and improved tax compliance in the state, they said.

The state collected ₹ 1,519 crore between April and December 2025 as GST, while the collection was ₹ 1,324 crore in the corresponding period of 2024, with an absolute increase of ₹ 195 crore.

According to the central GST Commissionerate here, the significant increase is the result of steady economic performance, better compliance by taxpayers and effective revenue-boosting measures.

Officials said the higher collections indicate expanding business activity, growing markets and improved tax administration across major sectors such as retail, services, tourism, transport and hospitality.

They attributed the growth to policy measures focused on ease of doing business, governance reforms and increased digitalisation, which have helped widen the tax base and improve investor confidence.

Authorities said the rise in revenue has strengthened the state's financial position, allowing for higher spending on infrastructure, healthcare, education and social welfare.

Officials further added that steps are being taken to sustain the momentum, including deeper tax digitisation, closer engagement with businesses, improved revenue tracking systems and enhanced training for both taxpayers and tax officials.

The measures are expected to support continued economic growth and ensure inclusive and long-term development across Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

## Governor extends greetings on Si-Donyi Hilo Festival

*Lt Gen KT Parnaik wishes peace, prosperity and cultural continuity to Tagin community*



**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Jan 5:** The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Par-

naik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), has extended his warm greetings to the people of the State, especially the Tagin community,

on the auspicious occasion of Si-Donyi Hilo. He expressed hope that the sacred celebration would continue to strengthen and enrich the State's cultural heritage, time-honoured traditions and spiritual values.

In his message, the Governor highlighted that nature worship and the reverent invocation of divine forces and ancestral spirits form the foundation of faith among the State's indigenous communities.

He said that Si-Donyi Hilo beautifully reflects this deep-rooted belief system and stands as the most important festival of the Tagin tribe.

"The festival, interwoven with unique customs, rituals and community bonding, is cherished by all and symbolises the Tagins' faith in the omnipotent Si Donyi as the supreme guardian of all living beings on earth. I am confident that our Tagin brethren will continue to celebrate this festival with renewed zeal and devotion while preserving and promoting its sublime philosophy, moral values and age-old traditions," he said.

On this joyous and sacred occasion, the Governor joined his Tagin brethren in offering prayers to Almighty Si Donyi and sought blessings for peace, harmony, good health, abundant harvests and good fortune for every individual, as well as continued prosperity and well-being across Arunachal Pradesh.

## Delhi riots: SC denies bail to Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam

UMAR SAYS THIS IS HIS LIFE NOW

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The Supreme Court on Monday refused bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case but granted it to five others, citing "hierarchy of participation" and putting the two on a "qualitatively different footing".

Khalid and Imam, who have been incarcerated since 2020, were involved in the "planning, mobilisation and strategic direction" of the riots, a bench of Justices Arvind Kumar and N V Anjaria said. While the jail doors shut tighter for the two, activists Gulfisha Fatima, Meeran Haider, Shifa Ur Rehman, Mohd Saleem Khan and Shadab Ahmad got bail from the apex court.

Khalid and Imam can file fresh bail applications after the examination of protected witnesses or after one year from today, the court said in a ruling keenly awaited by the accused, the families of the victims in the riots, rights activists and others. It was not clear when exactly the other five, behind bars in different jails in the city, would be released and how long the process would take. Lawyers were hopeful they would be out on Tuesday.

The February 2020 riots in northeast Delhi broke out during widespread protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), leaving 53 people dead and more than 700 injured. Khalid, cause célèbre and most recently in the news after New York's new mayor Zohran Mamdani sent him a handwritten



empathetic note, was resigned as it were to his life in jail for his alleged role in the communal violence. "Ab yahi zindagi hai (this is my life now)," Khalid told his partner Banojyotsna Lahiri after the Supreme Court ruling came in.

"I am really happy for the others, who got bail! So relieved," she quoted him as saying on the order that polarised public and political opinion.

Khalid was arrested on September 13, 2020 on charges of delivering provocative speeches on February 24 and 25 when Donald Trump, in his first term as president, visited India.

Imam was arrested on January 28, 2020 for speeches made during anti-CAA protests. He was later arrested in a larger conspiracy case in August 2020.

His uncle Arshad Imam told reporters in Jehanabad, Bihar, that he was shocked. "I had high hopes that the court would grant bail this time, as every point during the ar-

guments indicated that Sharjeel is innocent. Still, as an Indian, I respect the verdict of the court," he said, expressing the hope his nephew would eventually be released on bail.

According to the apex court, delay in trial does not operate as a "trump card" which automatically displaces statutory safeguards.

"All the appellants do not stand on equal footing as regards culpability. The hierarchy of participation emerging from the prosecution's case requires the court to examine each application individually," the bench said, adding that the roles attributed to them are different.

"This court is satisfied that the prosecution material disclosed a prima facie allegation against the appellants Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam... This stage of proceedings does not justify their enlargement on bail," the court said. It also said the two stand on qualitatively different footing as

compared to other accused.

Directing the trial court to expedite the process of bail, the bench imposed 12 conditions and said the misuse of liberty would attract cancellation of bail. The Supreme Court ruling divided political parties down the middle.

While the BJP termed Khalid and Imam the "poster boys" of divisive forces in India, opposition leaders raised questions over the denial of bail and several pointed out that it came on a day rape convict Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim left jail on 40-day parole for the 15th time since 2017.

"Satyameva Jayate (truth alone triumphs)," BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla wrote on X.

The BJP also asked the Congress to apologise for supporting the "tukde-tukde gang".

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said she welcomed the court decision. "Those who pushed Delhi into the fire of riots should receive the strictest possible punishment," Gupta told PTI.

Though the Congress did not comment till evening, several other Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP John Brittas said, "The principle that 'bail is the rule, jail the exception' clearly does not apply when it comes to certain individuals... convicted rapist and murderer Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh (sentenced in 2017) has just been granted yet another 40-day parole - his 15th temporary release from prison since conviction. (PTI)

## Mumbai civic polls: JD(S) withdraws complaint against returning officers

MUMBAI, Jan 5: The Janata Dal (Secular) has withdrawn its complaint against returning officers in Colaba area of Mumbai over the alleged irregularities in the nomination process for civic polls amid a row over purported interference by assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar, a party leader said on Monday.

JD (S) leader and former MP Haribhau Rathod said he would pursue his personal complaint against Narwekar regarding alleged interference in the nomination process. He had alleged that Narwekar objected to his presence when he accompanied his son for the latter's nomination on December 30.

Narwekar, the BJP MLA from Colaba segment in south Mumbai, has dismissed the charges as "baseless" and politically motivated.

The controversy pertains to civic wards 225, 226, and 227 in the Colaba constituency, where relatives of Narwekar are contesting the upcoming Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections. His brother Makrand Narwekar, sister Gauri Shivalkar, and his sister-in-law, Harshita Shivalkar, are in the fray from these wards.

Some candidates from opposition parties had alleged that they were prevented from filing nominations to ensure the unopposed election of the speaker's relatives. The JD(S) complaint against local Returning Officers (ROs) alleged that they didn't allow the party candidates to file their nominations from the civic wards in Colaba.

Simultaneously, various Opposition parties had accused Narwekar of violating the model code of conduct, interfering in the nomination process, and tampering with CCTV footage linked to the exercise.

Responding to the latest developments, Narwekar on Monday claimed the Janata Dal (S) withdrew its complaint after the nomination papers of two of its three candidates were accepted.

"The party itself informed the State Election Commissioner that it is withdrawing its complaint as two out of the three nominations have been accepted," Narwekar told reporters.

The JD (S) didn't even know the status of its own nominations and is trying to create a "fake narrative" against me, he added.



"There is no need to dwell further on this issue as the campaign for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation elections is going on. The candidates have filed their forms as per the prescribed framework, and scrutiny has been completed," Narwekar added.

On former MP Rathod's assertion that his personal complaint is still pending, Narwekar said, "Whatever complaint is filed will be looked into by the authorities concerned. If there are no facts in the complaint, which is the reality, appropriate action will be taken."

Asked about Shiv Sena (UBT) president and former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's demand for his suspension, Narwekar said he does not pay any attention to such remarks. "There are some old wounds that pain more in winter," he said sarcastically.

Meanwhile, Rathod accused Narwekar of crying foul. "He first made a mistake and is now blaming me for being in the premises of the (ROs) office. It is evident that he was trying to pressurise officials," the former MP said. He demanded appropriate action against Narwekar for "threatening me and pressuring the government staff."

"Narwekar remained at the office of the returning officer till 5 pm on December 30 and instructed officials to slow down the processing of nomination papers. Several remarks and alleged threats by Narwekar were captured on record," Rathod claimed.

Joining the opposition chorus against the Speaker, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut accused Narwekar of threatening candidates. (PTI)

## Bengal embraced SIR as beacon of hope against TMC's poll malfeasance: BJP



KOLKATA, Jan 5: In a blistering rebuttal to West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's letter urging the CEC to halt the "arbitrary and flawed" SIR, BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari on Monday said her communication reeked of political desperation and amounted to a frantic bid to derail an exercise that could expose electoral malfeasance which the TMC "nurtured and exploited for electoral gains".

In a letter to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, countering Banerjee's communique, Adhikari urged the CEC to continue the SIR of electoral rolls "undaunted, fortified by the unwavering support of the democratic masses".

He maintained that the CM's call to halt the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is an "admission of defeat" in the wake of people of the state embracing "the SIR as a beacon of hope".

"Her narrative of 'anxiety and harassment' is a TMC-orchestrated mirage, drowned out by the chorus of approval from those who reject her politics of patronage and prefer the purity of the ballot," Adhikari wrote.

In her letter dated January 3, Banerjee accused the commission of presiding over an "unplanned, ill-prepared and ad hoc" process marked by "serious irregularities, procedural violations, and administrative lapses". Alleging that the poll body reduced the process to a "farce", Banerjee asserted that the situation on the ground, instead of any corrective course being adopted, had only deteriorated further, despite her two earlier communications to the CEC.

The CM said the undue haste with which the SIR was being carried out, "without adequate groundwork or preparation", had rendered the process fundamentally flawed.

Calling the issues illustrative and by no means exhaustive, she claimed, "These deficiencies demonstrate that the SIR process, as presently conducted, stands deeply compromised and strikes at the basic structural framework of our democracy."

She warned that if corrective steps were not taken immediately, the "exercise must be halted" to prevent "irreparable damage" and "large-scale disenfranchisement".

Adhikari, on the other hand, alleged that Banerjee's "litany of grievances" is not only factually inaccurate, but a deliberate distortion designed to malign the EC as

"politically motivated" and to manufacture a false narrative of widespread discomfort and disenfranchisement.

"The SIR is not, as she falsely portrays, an 'unplanned, ill-prepared, and ad hoc' farce, but a meticulously orchestrated national initiative aimed at purging the system of duplicate, bogus, and ineligible entries that have inflated voter lists and undermined the sanctity of our democracy," Adhikari said. "It is clear as daylight that the Hon'ble Chief Minister's outrage stems from the counterfactual reality: the SIR is proving devastatingly counterproductive to her party's prospects in the upcoming 2026 Assembly Elections, as it lays bare the 'extras' - fictitious voters, ghosts of the deceased, and illegal infiltrators; that her administration and party cadres have systematically shielded and thrived upon," he added.

Dismissal of allegations of undue haste and inadequate preparation, Adhikari said more than 50,000 booth-level officers (BLOs) and electoral registration officers (EROs) in the state had undergone training for the revision exercise.

Adhikari countered Banerjee's allegations of "excessive verifications and complications in hearing processes" by asserting that document checks for "logical discrepancies" (eg spelling or age variances) is a gold standard for accuracy, not a ploy to delay.

"Claims of hardship to the elderly or infirm are only rarest happenings and are basically exaggerated propaganda," he claimed.

Adhikari defended the use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp for urgent clarifications, calling them supplementary to formal circulars and consistent with modern administrative practices. The BJP leader, in turn, accused the state administration and TMC members of attempting to derail the SIR by intimidating field officials and spreading misinformation.

He said the exclusion of booth-level agents (BLAs) from certain hearings was necessary to ensure neutrality and prevent "cadre-led disruptions" during the process.

"The instructions issued from time to time are inconsistent and often contradictory," Banerjee had written, alleging that the lack of clarity and planning at both the national and state levels had "severely eroded public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process". (PTI)

## BMC chief admits mistake in deploying court staff for poll duty; get HC rap

MUMBAI, Jan 5: Admitting it was a "mistake" to overstep his jurisdiction, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) Commissioner Bhusan Gagrani on Monday informed Bombay High Court that he withdrew directives that had asked subordinate court staff to report for election duty.

This decision followed a strong reprimand from the court, which questioned the legal basis for Gagrani's actions. A division bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrasekhar and Justice Gautam Anhad advised the civic chief to "save himself" and find alternative personnel for the upcoming polls.

The entire controversy began in late December 2025, when the commissioner, acting as the District Election Officer, issued letters ordering staff from Mumbai's subordinate courts to report for election duty despite a letter from the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate and the Registrar (Inspection) informing that the High Court had already taken an administrative decision to exempt court staff.

Despite a clear directive, the commissioner shot off another letter to the chief judicial magistrate on December 29, informing that the request for exempting the staff of the subordinate courts had been declined, a move that prompted the High Court to take a suo motu (on its own motion) action.

"From which provision do you draw powers? You cannot summon them. You don't have the powers," the bench asked the BMC commissioner on Monday.

Senior counsel Ravi Kadam, representing Gagrani, admitted that the directives were an error and informed the court that they had been formally withdrawn. He also informed the court that a letter from a returning officer to draw staff from the sheriff's office had also been withdrawn.

Seemingly unimpressed by the persistence of the civic body, the court said, "So now save yourself. You make arrangements from other sources. We will hear (from) you after the elections."

The high court held a special hearing on December 30 and stayed Gagrani's letters directing the staff of

subordinate courts to report for civic polls duty, questioning his power and jurisdiction.

It had also restrained the BMC commissioner, acting as the district election officer, from issuing any letter/communication to the staff of the high court or subordinate courts requisitioning their services for election duty.

On December 22, 2025, the commissioner issued a letter to the staff of all subordinate courts in the city directing them to report for election duty.

The same day, the chief metropolitan magistrate informed the commissioner and the Mumbai city collector that the high court had taken an administrative decision regarding staff members of subordinate courts and made a request to exempt them from election duty.

A similar communication was sent by the Registrar (Inspection) informing the civic chief about the administrative order passed by the HC.

Despite this, the commissioner, on December 29, issued a letter to the chief judicial magistrate, intimating that the request for exempting the staff of the subordinate courts had been declined.

On Monday, the commissioner's counsel said that after the HC order of last week, the commissioner wrote to all officers clarifying that court staff cannot be summoned.

"However, even after that, one returning officer wrote a letter to the sheriff's office requisitioning two staff for poll duty. But that is also rectified now," Kadam told the court.

The high court, in its order of last week, noted that in September 2008, the HC's Administrative Judges' Committee had made a decision that the staff of the high court and all subordinate courts would be exempted from election duty.

Under Article 235 of the Constitution of India, the high court exercises complete control and superintendence over the subordinate courts, including staff, and based on this, the order exempting court staff from poll duty was passed. (PTI)

## With Operation Sindoor, armed forces demonstrated India's resoluteness to world: VP

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan on Monday said the armed forces made India proud with Operation Sindoor as they demonstrated to the world the country's resoluteness while successfully carrying out the military action.

In his address at the National Cadet Corps' Republic Day Camp at Delhi Cantonment, he also hailed the role of the NCC during the operation.

"The NCC made a commendable contribution during Operation Sindoor when nearly 72,000 NCC cadets turned into 'NCC warriors' by volunteering services for civil defence measures," he said.

These cadets helped in emergency drills, blood donation camps and other civil defence-related activities, according to officials.

Operation Sindoor was carried out by the Indian armed forces in the early hours of May 7, 2025, eliminating at least 100 terrorists, in response to the horrific Pahal-gang terror attack that killed 26 innocent civilians.

"Last year, our armed forces made the country proud as they demonstrated to the world India's resoluteness by successfully carrying out Operation Sindoor," the Vice President said.

"Operation Sindoor was a powerful symbol of the unwavering commitment of the Indian armed



forces to protect the nation's honour, sovereignty and its citizens," he asserted.

Vice President Radhakrishnan on Monday formally inaugurated the NCC's Republic Day Camp, which will culminate with a PM Rally on January 28.

A total of 2,406 NCC cadets, including 898 girls, from across the country are participating in the nearly month-long camp.

In his address, the Vice President described the cadets as "not just participants in a Republic Day Camp, but ambassadors of a new India" who will contribute to the making of an "Aatmanirbhar and strong India, a Viksit Bharat by

2047.

"In each one of you, I see a strong foundation of a Viksit Bharat, a foundation of a developed, inclusive and confident country, I see in you," he said. He said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a transformative journey towards building a developed nation has begun.

And, at its centre lies 'Atmanirbharta', a spirit of self-reliance powered by skilled, disciplined and value-driven youths, Radhakrishnan said.

"In today's rapidly changing global environment, India needs youth who can be courageous yet compassionate, technically skilled

WAYANAD (KERALA), Jan 5: Congress Working Committee member Shashi Tharoor, whose recent statements and article had put the party in a defensive mode, on Monday said that he had never deviated from the party line.

He was speaking to reporters after attending the Lakshya 2026 leadership camp organised by the KPCC to chalk out strategies for the upcoming state Assembly elections, held at Sultan Bathery here.

"My question is, who said that I left the party line. Even when I expressed my opinions on various subjects, on most matters, the party and I have stood on the same line," he said.

Tharoor said the questions he raised in Parliament to ministers had a clear direction and that the party should not be troubled by them. He said controversies often arise when media reports are based only on headlines without reading the full content.

"When I ask whether people have read what I actually wrote, most have not. After reading the full text, they realise the real issue," he said.

Tharoor said he had been in the party for 17 years and shared good relations with colleagues. "There is no need for any sudden misunderstanding now," he said.

Asked whether the issues began after he contested for the Congress president's post, Tharoor said the party followed democratic traditions, and many leaders had contested internal elections in the past.

yet rooted in good values, facing challenges with resilience, seizing opportunities with confidence," he said. He told the NCC cadets that they inspire a lot of hope and confidence among the citizens with their spirit of serving the nation with unity and discipline.

In his address, the Vice President praised the Corps and said through its "relentless campaigns and initiatives", the NCC is moving again into a new era of youth development and the nation's progress.

He described the NCC Republic Day Camp as a powerful symbol of India's faith in its youth and its collective commitment to building a strong and united nation.

Highlighting the NCC's motto of 'Unity and Discipline', the VP said the organisation continues to shape confident and values-driven youth who form the backbone of the vision of Viksit Bharat.

He said the NCC's Republic Day Camp reflects constitutional values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, as cadets from diverse states and Union Territories live and train together, embodying the spirit of national unity. He praised the cadets for excelling in adventure activities, international youth exchange programmes, environmental initiatives and disaster relief efforts, including the service rendered during the Wayanad

floods in Kerala. Welcoming the modernisation of NCC training, including the introduction of cyber and drone training and the setting up of a Remote Pilot Training Academy, the Vice President said such initiatives would prepare youth to meet emerging technological and security challenges.

He urged the cadets participating in the camp to uphold the highest ideals of service, discipline and patriotism.

Earlier, on his arrival at the camp, the Vice President was accorded a guard of honour by the NCC cadets.

He also visited the NCC Hall of Fame and was briefed on the NCC's legacy, achievements and evolution.

Radhakrishnan visited exhibition stalls highlighting initiatives such as the YUVA Aapda Mitra Scheme and drone training, and appreciated the organisation's efforts in disaster preparedness and adoption of emerging technologies. A cultural programme was also presented by the cadets. The Vice President later interacted with them, commending their discipline, enthusiasm and spirit of national pride.

NCC's Director General, Lt Gen Virendra Vats, and other senior officials were present on the occasion. (PTI)

## Civil society organisations condemn attacks 2 injured in blasts in Manipur's Bishnupur

**IMPHAL, Jan 5:** Two persons were injured in two consecutive explosions in Manipur's Bishnupur district on Monday morning, police said.

The first explosion, suspected to have been caused by an improvised explosive device (IED), occurred around 5.45 am at an abandoned house in Ngakoun in the Phougakchao police station area, they said.

The house has remained abandoned since ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023, with its owner and his family currently living at a relief camp.

The second explosion occurred nearly 200 metres away around 8.45 am, when locals gathered after getting news of the earlier blast, police said.

Two persons, identified as Sanatomba Singh and Indubala Devi, sustained splinter injuries on their right legs.

They were admitted to a government hospital and are stated to be out of danger.

Police said they have inspected the blast sites and started an investigation.

Meanwhile, irate locals engaged in a war of words with security



forces, who were visiting the site following the blasts, alleging lapses in security despite the presence of a large number of personnel in nearby areas.

The locals also dismantled a makeshift security bunker in the vicinity. Condemning the incident, the BJP demanded the arrest of those responsible for the blast.

"We stand with the affected families and reaffirm our commitment to peace, security, and the rule of law in Manipur," the party said in a statement.

"Justice will prevail. Manipur stands united," it added.

Local MLA Premchandra Singh said the people of Manipur want peace.

"Anyone engaging in acts detrimental to others will eventually get appropriate actions as per the law," he said.

Several organisations, including the Indigenous People Organisation and the All Manipur Students' Union, called for a 24-hour shutdown across the state, starting 12 am on Wednesday, to protest the blast.

Meanwhile, Meitei civil organisation Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) demanded an immediate, transparent

and time-bound investigation into the blasts and sought public disclosure of the findings, including accountability of both the perpetrators and officials whose acts of commission or omission enabled such incidents.

Strongly condemning the attack, COCOMI said in a statement that the incident constituted a grave violation of fundamental human rights, constitutional guarantees and the rule of law.

"This deliberate act of terror against unarmed civilians constitutes a grave violation of fundamental human rights, constitutional guarantees, and the rule of law. The targeting of a civilian household under the cover of darkness reflects a dangerous and recurring pattern of impunity enjoyed by armed narco-terrorist perpetrators operating freely in the region," it said.

Holding the state administration and the security apparatus squarely responsible for their failure to discharge their constitutional duty to protect civilian lives, COCOMI said, "the continued inability or unwillingness to identify, apprehend, and prosecute the perpetrators reflects a disturbing normalisation of terror violence against civilians." (PTI)

## New VB GRAM G Act 2025 to benefit all: Agriculture Minister

### Govt aims for self-reliance through market expansion, says Ratan Lal



**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Jan 5:** The aim of the present state government is to make people self-reliant, and for this purpose more than ₹ 158 crore will be spent on seven new markets across the state, the government does not see political colour in development works.

This was stated by Tripura Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath on Monday while inaugurating a new market stall and a double-storied market complex at Manpathar Bazar under South District.

The Minister also inaugurated development of infrastructure facilities of primary rural market at Santirbazar.

On this day minister also inaugurated the development of infrastructure facilities at the primary rural market in Santirbazar.

Later, the minister visited the Center of Excellence for Vegetables, located at Bir Chandra Manu in the

South District.

He mentioned that out of a total of 60 such centers across the country, the state has two — one at Jumerdhep in Sipahijala and the other at Bir Chandra Manu in the South District.

He stated that this center produces high-quality seedlings of various vegetable varieties throughout the year, using a blend of Israeli and Indian modern technologies, and also cultivates vegetables.

In particular, the center employs advanced soilless seedling production techniques, which are truly commendable.

Later, the minister said that the new VB GRAM G Act 2025 is going to be beneficial for all.

"Earlier, mandays under MN-REGA were 100 days, but now after the new law it will be 125 days. For the North Eastern states, the state government will give 10 per cent and the remaining 90 per cent fund will come from the Centre, while for

other states the Centre will give 60 per cent and the state will give 40 per cent," he said.

The minister said that in the seven years before 2018, the then government spent Rs 20 crore, while from 2018 onwards, the present government has spent Rs 303 crore.

"This year, more markets will be set up and Rs 158 crore will be spent on seven more markets. We do not see political colour in development works. Our main aim is to provide house-to-house employment," said the minister.

He informed that this market is also for farmers, "as agriculture is our main foundation, and everyone must properly maintain the market".

"Around 8 lakh 10 thousand assets were created in Tripura. We must understand these things. The main aim of our government is to make people self-reliant. You must do something so that people come from far away to purchase from you. People want good things, and you must give importance to quality," said the minister.

The minister informed that before the present government, there were 4,160 Self-Help Groups, while now there are 50,054 SHGs.

"We don't only speak, we work for people. During our time, 1.08 lakh didis became Lakhpati Didis, and the highest number is from South Tripura. Not a single government can provide government jobs to each and every person. Therefore, we are providing employment opportunities and making people self-reliant. Due to the present state government, women of the state are becoming self-reliant and earning money," he said.

## Tripura schools to remain closed till Jan 10 due to severe cold

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Jan 5:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha announced on Monday that all schools in the state—including government, government-aided, and private institutions—will remain closed from 6th to 10th January 2026 due to extreme cold weather conditions.

Making the announcement on social media, Saha said, "It has been decided to close all schools (Govt/Govt Aided & Privately managed) from 6th January to 10th January, 2026 due to extreme cold weather condition."

Earlier, the chief minister had stated that the government was closely monitoring the situation.

"I am already looking after the matter, and our government does not want anyone to go to school facing problems. We will take a decision based on the situation. Yesterday, the temperature was around 8 degrees. We are discussing the matter, and if necessary, schools—especially for the primary section—will be closed," he added.

## Draft photo roll for Nagaland's vacant Koridang assembly seat published

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMPUR, Jan 5:** Nagaland chief electoral officer (CEO) on Monday informed that the draft photo roll for 28 Koridang (ST) Assembly constituency in Mokokchung district, where bye-election, is due has been published.

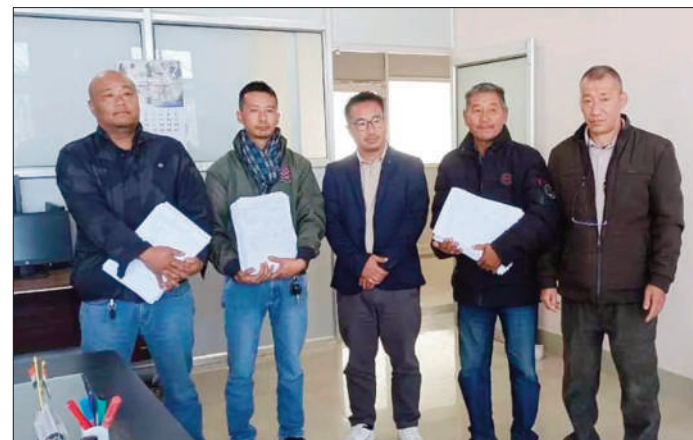
In a notification, the CEO said the period for filing claims and objections has been fixed from January 3 to January 24, while disposal of claims and objections will be on February 2.

Final publication of the electoral roll will be on February 14.

The total number of electors in the constituency as per the draft roll is 21,586, out of which 10,956 are males and 10,630 females.

The seat fell vacant after the death of sitting MLA Imkong L Imchen last year.

The notification said electors/applicants can file claims and objections in Forms 6/7/8 as the case may be with the concerned booth level officer (BLO) or with the assistant electoral reg-



istration officer and electoral registration officer.

It said forms are available for download in ECI and CEO's website. Applications can also be filed/submitted online through [www.voters.eci.gov.in](http://www.voters.eci.gov.in) (links are provided in the ECI and CEO's website).

The draft electoral rolls for the constituency is accessible in the

portal <https://voters.eci.gov.in/download-roll?stateCode=SI7>

There are a total of 30 notified polling stations in the constituency.

The notification said the electoral registration officer of the constituency will share the list of claims and objections with the recognised political parties on a weekly basis.

## HYC criticises Dy CM's remarks

**SHILLONG, Jan 5:** The Hyniewtrep Youth Council (HYC) has sharply criticized Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong's recent remarks that the Meghalaya Residents' Safety and Security (Amendment) Bill, 2020 is being allowed to "die a natural death," attributing its failure to the previous Mukul Sangma-led government.

In a statement, HYC president Roykumar Synrem said the comment "is not a political opinion; it is a self-indictment of the present government's failure."

He emphasised that a law does not lapse on its own; it either moves forward with legislative intent or is abandoned through executive inaction.

"The record is clear and undisputed. The MRSS Amendment Bill was introduced in the Assembly in

March 2020 under the present Chief Minister. In November 2023, the Bill was returned by the Ministry of Home Affairs for review. From that point onwards, the Government repeatedly assured the public of re-examination, legal consultation, and stakeholder engagement. Yet, despite enjoying a clear majority and ample time, no amendment to the principal Act was ever brought before the House," Synrem noted.

The HYC president accused the current administration of shifting responsibility to the prior regime, stating, "Legislative defects, if any, could have been rectified at any stage during the MDA's tenure. The failure to do so is not historical; it is current."

The youth body also highlighted contradictions in the government's stance.

"Repeated claims that the



Centre had 'not rejected' the Bill contrast with the present admission that it has been allowed to lapse. These inconsistent positions reinforce the perception of indecision and lack of seriousness on an issue directly affecting indigenous security and demographic stability," HYC warned that allowing

the Residents' Safety framework to collapse without a replacement sends a "dangerous signal that the protection of indigenous people is negotiable, postponable, and ultimately expendable." The council has demanded clear answers from the government.

"Place on record, without ambiguity, whether it intends to pursue with the Government of India to secure a strong law with enforceable provisions, or whether it has formally abandoned the objective of a statutory entry regulation mechanism altogether. Silence and evasion will only confirm what the Deputy Chief Minister's statement has already revealed," Synrem said. The HYC will pursue the matter through all democratic and constitutional means until the government provides clarity, accountability, and action. (NNN)

## Tripura poised to become a leading tourist destination, says minister



**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Jan 5:** Tripura Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury has announced that in the next two years, Tripura is set to emerge as one of India's premier tourist destinations, with foreign tourist arrivals steadily increasing each year.

The Minister made these remarks while attending the foundation stone laying ceremony for the development of

the Tripura Heritage Village & Sangeet Experience under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 initiative, along with the inauguration of an amusement park at Sachindranagar, Jirania in West Tripura.

Since the formation of the current government, he said, significant efforts have been underway to boost the state's tourism sector.

"We are proudly collaborating with

the Government of India and the Asian Development Bank, who have invested substantial funds across various parts of the state. Today, in Sachindranagar, Chief Minister Manik Saha laid the foundation stone for the Tripura Heritage Village & Sangeet Experience under Swadesh Darshan 2.0 and an amusement park funded by SIDBI and the Government of India," he stated.

Highlighting the state's tourism potential, the minister said, "We firmly believe that Tripura will become a major tourism hub not only in the North East but across the country. Our focus has been to showcase the state to visitors from India and abroad while developing modern infrastructure in every corner of Tripura."

He added, "The Tourism Department, in partnership with the Government of India and other agencies, is working on several projects across the state. Within the next two years, these initiatives will be completed, establishing Tripura as a top tourist destination. Currently, Tripura ranks second in foreign tourist arrivals in the North East, after Sikkim, which is very encouraging. Domestic tourism is also growing rapidly."

## Youth Cong leader arrested in Tripura

**AGARTALA, Jan 5:** Tripura Pradesh Youth Congress (TPYC) leader Shahjan Islam, who had been on the run for the past six months to evade arrest in connection with two FIRs, was arrested by police on Monday, an official said.

Former BJP state committee treasurer Nagadhiraj Dutta had lodged an FIR against Shahjan for allegedly making derogatory remarks against Chief Minister Manik Saha during a live Facebook broadcast and for an alleged attack on BJP workers on June 8, 2025.

Later, BJP's Minority Morcha leader Billal Miah also registered another FIR against the Youth Congress leader for offensive comments against him.

"Based on intelligence inputs, a police team today carried out a special raid at Joypur on the outskirts of the city and arrested Islam", Sadar sub-divisional police officer DP Roy told reporters.

He said two FIRs under various sections of the BNS, including attempt to murder, were lodged against Islam, and he will be forwarded before a local court seeking police remand. Earlier, Shahjan's father Khairul Islam and brother Nazrul Islam were arrested in connection with the same cases and were later granted bail. (PTI)

## 4 militants arrested in Manipur

**IMPHAL, Jan 5:** Four militants were arrested in Manipur's Imphal Valley districts, police said on Monday.

A member of the banned Peoples' Liberation Army was arrested from his residence at Kairembikhok Maiyai Leikai in Thoubal district, they said.

Another member of the outfit, identified as Laishram Kullabi Meitei (35), was arrested from Liwa Road in Kha Maibam Leikai in Imphal West district.

A third cadre of the outfit was arrested from Chingol in Thoubal on Sunday. He was identified as Laishram Jiban Singh (45).

A member of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (Taibanganba) was arrested from the Kongba Khnouou area in Imphal East district. He has been identified as Tensubam Bangkim Singh, police said.

A 9 mm pistol, along with four live rounds, was seized from him, they said.

In a separate operation on Sunday, a huge cache of arms and ammunition was seized from Yairipok Top Ningthounai Lai Ching in Imphal East district, police said.

Among them were an SLR with a magazine, a single-barrel gun, a 9 mm pistol with a magazine, a .32 pistol with a magazine, a .32 automatic pistol with two magazines, two IEDs, and a Chinese hand grenade.

On Friday, security forces recovered two medium-sized rockets, weighing 40 kg each, along with three country-made double-barreled guns from Sejang village in Churachandpur district. (PTI)

অসম পাবলিক সেৱা কমিছন ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION					
No.83PSC/CON/Exam-01/2025-2026					
RESULT					
The Assam Public Service Commission hereby declares today, the 5 <sup>th</sup> January, 2026 the result for recruitment to the post of <b>Adviser (Production) under Industries Commerce &amp; Public Enterprise Department, Janata Bhawan, Dispur, Guwahati</b> (Advt. No. 32/2025 Dated. 17/10/2025).					
The interview for the said post was conducted by the Commission with the assistance of expert/adviser deputed by the Government of Assam on 3 <sup>rd</sup> January, 2026. The Commission recommended the following candidate for the said post, in order of merit:					
No. of post	: 1 (One) reserved for Open Category				
Position	Roll No.	Name of Candidate	Category	Gender	Recommended against vacancy
1.	10003	JNYANADA PRASAD SARMAH	GEN	M	Open Category
Sd/- Principal Controller of Examinations, Assam Public Service Commission, Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22					
<b>DIPR/D/HLT/267/6-Jan-26</b>					

NO. KDB/BTC/NIT/2024-25/2463					Date: 24/12/2025
SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER					
Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable Court Fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty-Five Paise) only with a validity period of 180 (One Hundred Eighty) days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the APWD's printed F-2 forms are invited from the registered contractors of class-II and class-I (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the following works under 6 <sup>th</sup> Finance Commission Fund for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26. The Tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00 P.M. on 17.01.2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.30 P.M. against the scheme shown below-					
Name of Scheme	Estimated Amount	Earnest Money	Cost of Tender paper	Time of Completion	
Construction of Crematorium at Janagaon village (under Titagarh VCDC.	19,99,998.00	19999/- (1% for ST, SC & OBC) & Rs. 39999/- (Gen)	599/-	3 Months	
Details NIT may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent from 25.12.2025 to 17.01.2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment of cost of Tender paper in the form of demand draft/Banker Cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar, payable at Kokrajhar.					
Sd/- Block Development Officer Kokrajhar Development Block, Titagarh					
IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/3557					

# From Zoology to Zenith: The versatile journey of Ishika Borah



By : Mowsam Hazarika

In the fast-paced and fiercely competitive world of Indian entertainment, where countless aspirants arrive in Mumbai each day chasing elusive dreams, only a few manage to carve out a distinctive, multi-dimen-

sional identity. Ishika Borah belongs to that rare league. Today, she stands out as a dynamic force whose work seamlessly bridges high fashion, experimental modelling, web series, and cinema—both national and international. Her journey is not merely one of glamour, but of discipline, reinvention, and artistic courage.

## • A Foundation of Discipline

Ishika Borah's story begins far from the arc lights and red carpets. Educated in Delhi, she completed her B.Sc. in Zoology, a field that demands analytical thinking, patience, and rigorous discipline. For many, such a background would signal a conventional career path. For Ishika, however, it became the foundation for something far more creative.

Driven by an inner calling, she made a decisive shift into fashion by enrolling in a Fashion Designing

course. What appeared to be a bold pivot soon revealed its logic. Her scientific training sharpened her attention to detail, while fashion allowed her to express her innate artistic sensibility. By the time she relocated to Mumbai, Ishika was not just another hopeful face in the crowd—she was a professional with a deep understanding of garments, textures, form, and visual storytelling. This rare combination helped her connect effortlessly with designers, photographers, and creative directors.

## • Redefining the Lens: Modelling and the Runway

Ishika's modelling career reflects her willingness to push boundaries. She first gained widespread attention through her striking appearances on the covers of Debonair Magazine, a milestone that opened the doors to international fashion circuits. What followed was a truly global portfolio.

Her shoots have taken her to Dubai for high-end luxury fashion campaigns, to Mauritius for artistic lifestyle and beach photography, and across Mumbai for national advertising campaigns spanning electronics, jewellery, and lifestyle brands. On the runway, she has become a familiar and trusted presence, regularly featured in Zee TV fashion segments and major industry showcases.

Perhaps most remarkable is her fearless embrace of experimental and avant-garde

projects. From intricate body-painting assignments to conceptual shoots demanding physical endurance and emotional intensity, Ishika has repeatedly demonstrated a level of commitment and boldness that sets her apart in an industry often governed by safe choices.

## • The Silver Screen and Beyond

Moving from the still camera to the

moving frame, Ishika Borah has steadily built an acting career marked by meaningful collaborations and diverse roles. She has worked in web se-

ries alongside acclaimed Bollywood stars such as Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Saif Ali Khan, experiences that have further refined her craft.

Her debut film, Nath – Ek Pratha, showcased her dramatic potential and signalled her arrival as an actress to watch. With upcoming projects like Psycho and The Wallet, her filmogra-

phy continues to expand at a rapid pace. Significantly, she is also venturing into South Indian cinema—a strategic move that often serves as a gateway

to pan-Indian recognition and wider creative opportunities.

## • A Future Without Limits

As she continues to evolve, Ishika Borah shows no inclination to be confined by labels or genres. From print advertisements and live events to festival films like Koutuhal, she approaches every project with the same confidence, curiosity, and professionalism. Her ability to bridge Indian cultural roots with global aesthetics positions her uniquely in an increasingly international entertainment landscape.

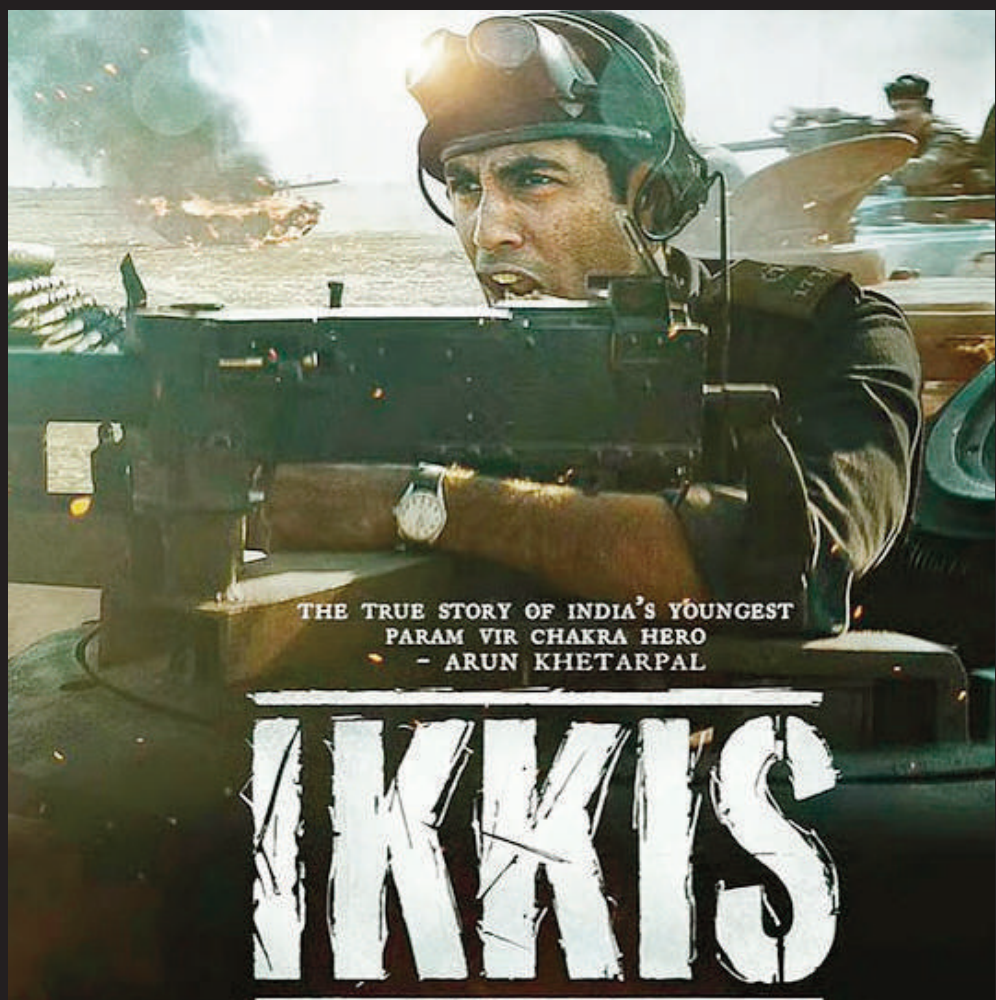
In an industry that often tries to place talent within narrow boundaries, Ishika Borah is steadily dismantling those walls. From zoology to the zenith of fashion and cinema, her journey is a testament to the power of courage, versatility, and unwavering belief in one's own potential.



phy continues to expand at a rapid pace. Significantly, she is also venturing into South Indian cinema—a strategic move that often serves as a gateway

to pan-Indian recognition and wider creative opportunities.

## AGASTYA NANDA-STARRER 'IKKIS' EARNS ₹ 22.05 CRORE AT BOX OFFICE



**“** Ikkis, featuring Agastya Nanda in the lead role, has earned over ₹ 20 crore in three days of its release. Produced under Dinesh Vijan's production banner Maddock Films, the film, which released on January 1, is directed by Sriram Raghavan. It is written by Raghavan alongside Arijit Biswas and Pooja Ladha Surti.

The film features Nanda in the role of Khetarpal, who was martyred at the age of 21 during the Battle of Basantar in the 1971

Indo-Pak war. For his courage and sacrifice, he was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, making him the youngest recipient of India's highest military honour at the time.

The total collection of the film stands at ₹ 22.05 crore at the domestic box office, according to the makers.

Besides Nanda, the film also features late actor Dharmendra alongside Simar Bhatia, Vivan Shah, Sikandar Kher, and Jaideep Ahlawat in pivotal roles. (PTI)

## VIVEK AGNIHOTRI LAUDS ADITYA DHAR'S 'DHURANDHAR': I'VE ALWAYS ADMIRERD YOUR WORK

Filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri penned a lengthy note on social media as he praised Aditya Dhar's directorial "Dhurandhar" and said he is proud of the film, which is the perfect example of "cinema that doesn't happen by chance".

Released on December 5, the film features Ranveer Singh alongside Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna, Arjun Rampal, R Madhavan and Rakesh Bedi. It has already crossed the mark of Rs 1000 crore at the worldwide box office.

Agnihotri shared a post on his X handle on Monday. "Just landed back in India after two months and the first thing we did was watch @AdityaDharFilms 'Dhurandhar'. Mind blown and proud are the only words that come to my mind. Anyone who knows what goes into making a film would understand what it takes to pull something like this off. The vision, the writing, the confidence, the belief in your own instinct... this kind of cinema doesn't happen by chance," he wrote.

"The production design by my friend @sainisjohray is path-breaking, not decorative, but narrative. The extraordinary music by young maestro @shashwatology is not just innovative but deeply rooted. The cinematography by Vikas Nowlakhia is a new textbook for young DOPs," he added.

Agnihotri said every performance in the film was "top-notch". "Performances... yes, some will obviously be more talked about. But the real victory of 'Dhurandhar' is that even the smallest, most insignificant characters have delivered top-notch performances. Every face feels cast, directed, and placed with intention. Most importantly, every department is in rare sync, working as one organism. That kind of cohesion doesn't happen by accident. That's when you know it's purely a writer/director's film.

"@adityadharfilms, I've always admired your work, especially your sense of scale and design, but this is you operating on another



level. I watched the film with genuine pride... proud of you, proud of the craft, proud of Indian cinema... More power to you. Keep going. Keep raising the bar. When the younger generation does work like this, Indian cinema moves forward. Simple. Bravo," he added.

The film is produced by Dhar and his brother Lokesh Dhar through their banner B62 Studios alongside Jyoti Deshpande of Jio Studios. It is set in Lyari town of Karachi, an area known for its history of gang wars and violent turf battles. The makers have also announced the second part of the film, which is set to release in theatres on March 19. (PTI)

## Deepika Padukone announces new initiative for emerging talent in film industry



Actor-producer Deepika Padukone celebrated her birthday on Monday by launching an initiative that she says will empower the next generation of creative talent.

The actor, known for her roles in Chennai Express, Padmaavat, Piku and Pathaan, announced the launch of 'The OnSet Program', the next chapter of her Create With Me platform, aimed at empowering aspiring creative artists to pursue a career in Indian film, television and advertising industry.

Sharing a video on her Instagram handle, Deepika said, "This past year, I've been feeling very strongly about identifying incredible creative talent from across the country and beyond and giving them a platform to be seen, heard and experienced. I am beyond thrilled to announce the launch of The OnSet Program and truly cannot wait to introduce all of you to the next generation of creative talent."

Deepika, who turned 40 on Tuesday, hopes to provide training opportunities to promising talent through the programme, which will also function as a launch play-field for individuals who have the relevant expertise and experience to lead their own projects.

Writing, direction, camera, lighting, editing, sound designing, art direction, costume designing, hair styling, make-up artistry and production are the departments that will be available as part of the programme's first phase, a release stated. (PTI)

## Ranveer Brar, Kunal Kapoor on 'MasterChef India': Brought recognition, knowledge to food industry

Celebrity Chefs Ranveer Brar and Kunal Kapoor, who has joined Vikas Khanna on "MasterChef India" season 9 as judges, believe the reality show brought recognition, respectability and knowledge to everyday cooking.

Brar is vocal about the significant impact "MasterChef India" has had on elevating the status of home cooks.

"Pre-MasterChef, if you were cooking at home, you weren't respected or recognised for it. I think that the beacon of respect and recognition to everyday cooking came through MasterChef. It catapulted into something bigger, like bringing an entire industry together, the whole food media ecosystem, whether it is smaller channels doing stronger food media or food media on social media," he said.

"A lot of food creators, I'd say 50 per cent of them would be associated with MasterChef in some form. It's given recognition and respect to the home kitchen," Brar added.

For Kapoor, "MasterChef India" is a treasure



trove of knowledge, offering insights that extend beyond formal culinary training.

"The moment the doors of MasterChef India opened, you found that there is so much more beyond what you were taught in a culinary college or in your hotels, that the knowledge is

right out there, and one didn't have to travel, the knowledge is coming to you.

"So, you had this curiosity of getting to understand what has come in front of you, the food, the people, the style of cooking, and then go back home and keep researching more, travel

to that place, understand it a little more better, whether it's a custom, a certain food, which is driven by a certain festival or harvest."

Other than cooking and running his own YouTube channel, Brar has also branched out in acting, which, he said, allows him to express in a better way.

Brar has acted in Kareena Kapoor-starrer "The Buckingham Murders" and Prime Video anthology, "Modern Love, Mumbai", both helmed by Hansal Mehta.

He will next be seen alongside Mona Singh in the series, "Ma Ka Sum" and an American production titled, "Such Is Life".

"These are the two acting gigs that I've done, 'Ma Kaasam' has been shot and 'Such Is Life' is mostly going to be shot in the US starting spring. The idea is to do one or two projects every year as it allows me to express myself even better and have a clearer head. Acting clears my head, makes me a better chef as well, and I absolutely enjoy it," Brar said.

Asked if he shares an interest in exploring cinema like fellow judges as Khanna is director while Brar has acted, Kapoor said he wouldn't mind.

"I'm somebody who likes to watch movies. I'm a little particular about which movie I watch; I wait for reviews, I wait who's the actor, director, what kind of story it is and everything.

"I'm super keen to work in movies. Like, Vikas has promised that in his next movie, he's going to cast me. Ranveer said whenever he does his next movie, he will see if there's any role for me in it. I'm super open, I'm putting it out there in the universe (about working in films), why not?"

"MasterChef India" is currently airing on Sony Entertainment Television and on SonyLIV.

This season introduces a unique twist with the 'jodi' format, where contestants, paired as family members, spouses, friends, or even inter-generational duos, will compete to transform into culinary geniuses under the guidance of the show's judges (PTI)

## Liverpool and Man City stunned by late goals

## Amorim raises questions over his role at Man United

MANCHESTER, Jan 5: Liverpool and Manchester City were stunned by late goals to drop points in the Premier League.

Harrison Reed's spectacular strike in the seventh minute of stoppage time earned Fulham a 2-2 draw with Liverpool at Craven Cottage. And Enzo Fernandez poked home an equalizer in the 94th at the Etihad to seal a 1-1 draw for managerless Chelsea that dented City's title hopes.

Second-placed City led through Tijjani Reijnders at halftime, but is now six points behind leader Arsenal, which beat Bournemouth 3-2 on Saturday.

Defending champion Liverpool is fourth in the standings and 14 points adrift of Arsenal after substitute Reed led fly from around 25 meters (yards) to beat Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson.

Manchester United drew 1-1 with Leeds after Matheus Cunha's equalizer at Elland Road. United boss Ruben Amorim appeared frustrated afterward as he raised questions about his role at the club.

#### Slot's struggles go on

Reed's goal saw Liverpool drop yet more points in what has been a difficult second campaign for coach Arne Slot.

The visiting fans were still celebrating after Cody Gakpo had scored what looked like a late winner in the 94th. But they were left stunned by Reed's near instant response once play resumed. The midfielder had only come off the bench in stoppage time.

"I am experiencing this for months now that the first chance the other team

gets, and the only chance they got in the first half, led to a goal," said Slot. "That's one thing we usually see with us. The second thing we see a lot is that the other team scores a goal you don't expect in extra (stoppage) time, so this is then a surprise."

Fulham led 1-0 at halftime through Harry Wilson, who burst through and fired low into the far corner. Florian Wirtz leveled in the 57th.

#### Man United rocked by Amorim's post-match comments

Cunha rescued a point for United at Leeds, but it was the post-match comments by Amorim that created the biggest headlines.

Amorim issued a defiant message while trying to clarify his position in a week when there were reports that figures at the club had questioned his tactics.

"I came here to be the manager of Manchester United, not to be the coach of Manchester United," he said. "And that is clear. I know that my name is not (Thomas) Tuchel, it's not (Antonio) Conte, it's not (Jose) Mourinho but I'm the manager of Manchester United. And it's going to be like this for 18 months or when the board decides to change."

Cunha equalized after U.S. international Brenden Aaronson put Leeds in front in the second half in one of English soccer's fiercest rivalries.

Aaronson opened the scoring in the 62nd, but Cunha leveled three minutes later. The Brazil forward was close to firing a winner late in the match with a curling shot from outside the box that struck



the outside of the post.

United has lost just two of its last 14 games in the league, but six draws during that run have seen Amorim's team struggle to keep pace with the top three in the standings.

"This year I think we are in control of the games more often than last year," Amorim told TNT Sports. "So it was a good game, but of course (I am) a little bit frustrated not to win."

Leeds is unbeaten in seven games and went ahead when Aaronson raced past United defender Ayden Heaven to shoot low into the far corner.

Cunha scored his third goal in his last five games when latching onto a pass from substitute Joshua Zirkzee and sliding a shot past Leeds goalkeeper Lucas Perri.

United has had to cope without injured inspirational captain Bruno Fernandes

over the festive period as well as key forwards Bryan Mbeumo and Amad Diallo, who are playing at the Africa Cup of Nations. Mason Mount and Kobbie Mainoo are also out with injuries.

But Amorim suggested Fernandes and Mount could be close to returning.

#### Fan death

Leeds later said it was "devastated" by the death of a supporter following a "medical emergency" before the game.

"The thoughts of everyone at the club are with the family and friends of the supporter at this exceptionally difficult time," it posted on X.

Chelsea rallied after Maresca exit  
Chelsea bounced back from the departure of Club World Cup-winning coach Enzo Maresca to hurt City's title aspirations.

With Strasbourg coach Liam Rosenior reportedly the favorite to take over, youth coach Calum McFarlane stepped up as interim for Sunday's game. And he made a quick impression with a result that could prove telling in the race for the title.

Reijnders showed good feet before unleashing a powerful left-footed shot to beat Chelsea keeper Filip Jorgensen at his near post.

City had chances to extend the lead and paid the price for not taking them when Fernandez arrived at the far post to level the game.

It was a second successive draw for City after being held by Sunderland earlier in the week.

City was also hit by injuries to defenders Josko Gvardiol and Ruben Dias.

#### Thiago hat trick

Igor Thiago hit a hat trick in Brentford's 4-2 win at Everton.

The Brazilian forward has scored 14 goals in the league this season, behind only City's Erling Haaland.

Newcastle beat Crystal Palace 2-0 and Tottenham was denied victory at home to Sunderland when Brian Brobbey scored an 80th-minute equalizer for a 1-1 draw. (AP)

## Assam shines in National Yoga Competition

### HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 5: Assam's yoga athletes brought laurels to the state by winning medals in the 50th Golden Jubilee National Sub Junior and Junior Yoga Sports Championship held in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

Uditta Rani Bora, Student of Ananda Ram Baruah Senior Secondary School bagged the gold medal in Traditional Yogasana, while Mayur Mandal won silver and Arihan Chakraborty clinched bronze.

In Free Flow Yogasana, Uditta Rani Bora, Luna Kalita, Devakshi Choudhury, Kamalika Kumar, and Kunjana Sarma secured bronze medals.

The Assam team, comprising 30 athletes, participated in the competition, which saw participation from 29 states across India.

The event was organised by the Yoga Federation of India in collaboration with Jharkhand Yoga Association.

Prabhat Chandra Bora, Physical Instructor and Secretary of Assam Yoga Association, officiated as a referee and coach.

The Assam Yoga Association congratulated the medal winners and team officials on their achievement.

## Malaysia Open: Rejuvenated Indian shuttlers eye strong start to new season



KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 5: With renewed vigour, Indian shuttlers, including the experienced duo of Lakshya Sen and P V Sindhu, will eye a strong start to the year when they take on the world's best at the season-opening USD 1,450,000 Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament, beginning here on Tuesday.

Indian badminton endured a difficult 2025 marked by injuries and inconsistent performances at the top level. The focus is now on making an early impact and fine-tune preparations for next week's India Open Super 750 tournament in Delhi.

Lakshya, a 2021 world championships bronze-medallist, was the bright spot last season, returning to winning ways with a title at the Australian Open Super 500 after a lean run following his fourth-place finish at the Paris Olympics.

The 24-year-old from Almora, who also reached the final of the Hong Kong Open, will look to carry that momentum when he opens against Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh.

Youngster Ayush Shetty too showed promise, winning the US Open Super 300, and will aim to address issues of consistency when

he takes on Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia, the Paris Olympics bronze-medallist.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu, however, endured a torrid phase due to fitness concerns and patchy form.

The former world champion, who missed competitions from October onwards while recovering from a foot injury, will be keen to rediscover her best when she opens her campaign against Chinese Taipei's Sung Shuo Yun.

Unnati Hooda, after showing flashes of brilliance in a season highlighted by her second Odisha Open title, will face Tokyo Olympics gold-medallist and fourth seed Chen Yu Fei of China.

Malvika Bansod, returning after a six-month layoff due to a left knee injury, will begin her campaign against seventh seed Ratchanok Intanon of Thailand, a former world champion.

Focus will also be on Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, seeded third, after the two became the first Indian men's pair to reach the semifinals of the season-ending World Tour Finals last year.

The former world No. 1 pair was India's most consistent in 2025, reaching finals of Hong Kong Open and China Masters besides winning a second World Championships bronze and multiple semi-final finishes.

The Asian Games champions will open their title quest against Chinese Taipei's Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan.

Another Indian men's doubles pair of experienced M R Arjun and 22-year-old Hariharan Am-sakarunan will look to step up against elite opposition after a season in which it won four International Challenge titles.

They triumphed at St Denis Reunion Open, Al Ain Masters, Türkiye International Challenge and Telangana India International Challenge.

The world No. 68 pair will face Japan's Hiroki Midorikawa and Kyohei Yamashita in the opening round.

In women's doubles, Gayatri Gopichand, returning after a shoulder injury layoff, and Treesa Jolly recently defended their title at the Syed Modi International.

The duo will now take on Indonesian's Febriana Dwiipuji Kusuma and Meilysa Trias Puspitasari, hoping to continue their upward stride.

Among others, the Panda sisters -- Rutaparna and Swetaparna -- will meet Malaysia's second seeds Pearly Tan and Thinaah Muralitharan, while three Indian mixed doubles pairs -- Dhruv Kapila/Tanisha Crasto, Rohan Kapoor/Ruthvika Shivani Gadge and Ashith Surya/Amrutha Pramuthesh -- will also be in action. (PTI)

## Novak Djokovic cuts ties with the PTPA players' association he co-founded

WASHINGTON, Jan 5: Novak Djokovic is cutting ties with the Professional Tennis Players Association, a group he co-founded that sued the sport's governing bodies last year, writing on social media that "my values and approach are no longer aligned with the current direction of the organization."

The 24-time Grand Slam champion announced at the 2020 U.S. Open that he and now-retired Canadian player Vasek Pospisil were launching the PTPA. They said they were aiming to offer representation for players who are independent contractors in a largely individual sport.

One of the goals made clear along the way was to become a sort of full-fledged union that negotiates collective bargaining agreements like those that exist in team sports, although that sort of thing hasn't happened.

Djokovic said Sunday on X that he had "ongoing concerns regarding transparency, governance, and the way my voice and image have been represented."

The PTPA filed a class-action lawsuit in March against the women's and men's tours, the International Tennis Federation and the sport's integrity agency, accusing the organizations of "systemic abuse, anti-competitive practices, and a blatant disregard for player welfare." The four Grand Slam tournaments were later added as defendants.

Djokovic was not listed as a plaintiff when the suit was filed; Pospisil and other players were.

That's because, Djokovic said in March, "I want other players to step up."

The lawsuit says players should gain access to more earnings, arguing that the governing bodies that oversee the four Grand Slam tournaments — Wimbledon, the U.S. Open, the French Open and the Australian Open — and other professional events "cap the prize money tournaments award and limit players' ability to earn money off the court."

Djokovic said Sunday he "will continue to focus on my tennis, my family, and contributing to the sport in ways that reflect my principles and integrity. I wish the players and those involved the best as they move forward, but for me, this chapter is now closed." (AP)



## David Miller, Bosch bank on SA20 preparation to shine in T20 World Cup

CAPE TOWN, Jan 5: Seasoned South African batter David Miller and all-rounder Corbin Bosch believe that competing in the ongoing SA20 is ideal preparation for the upcoming T20 World Cup as it will help them tackle the pressure of playing in front of huge Indian crowds. South Africa, who lost to India in the 2024 T20 World Cup final, are placed in Group D with New Zealand, Afghanistan, Canada and the UAE. They will play all their group games at the imposing Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad which can accommodate over one lakh spectators.

"For me, game time is always important. Everyone is getting put under pressure during this competition. It is good preparation for the World Cup. There's going to be a lot of pressure over there with Indian crowds," said Miller during a press conference on Sunday.

The Miller-led Paarl Royals beat MI Cape Town by seven wickets at the Newlands here in a SA20 match. But the left-handed batter acknowledged that pressure of international cricket is way more intense than a league.

"There's a lot of pressure over there. I don't think anything can match the same as international standard, especially at a World Cup. But it (SA20) certainly helps a long way to getting into the right space, if that makes sense," he added.

Miller also hoped that South Africa can go a step further this time and win their maiden ICC trophy in the white-ball format.

"I think to say it's just another

World Cup is definitely not the case. For me, every game in the green and gold has been a huge honour and privilege. I don't take it for granted at all. I've just been fortunate to be in quite a lot of World Cups.

"I obviously want to win a World Cup, so that's definitely in our sights. Obviously there's nerves. Everyone's human, so it's just about making sure that we get through this and then start really targeting that bull's eye," he detailed.

Miller was also delighted to see the Royals climbing up to second on the table with a facile win over MI Cape Town, after an initial stutter in the tournament.

The Royals were shut out for 49 by Sunrisers Eastern Cape in their opening match of the competition.

"It was just one of those things to forget about and we kind of just went back to the drawing board and got back to your strengths and committed to your plans and committed to your shots as well."

"I think we've got a lot of young guys in our team, so it's about making sure everyone is contributing at every stage," he said.

#### Bosch eyes WC

Bosch's excitement knew no bounds after his name featured among South Africa's 15 for the T20 World Cup.

"It's been a surreal experience. I don't think you believe it happens until it happens. I've obviously played some nice cricket over the past 12 months, but it's still nerve-racking waiting for that phone call or that message, but it's unbelievable," said Bosch. (PTI)

## World Cups play huge part for Zimbabwe to gain more respect in world cricket: Sikandar Raza



CAPE TOWN, Jan 5: Skipper Sikandar Raza believes that the upcoming T20 World Cup is a perfect chance for struggling Zimbabwe to regain its presence in the cricketing map with a clutch of strong performances.

The African side has been clubbed in Group B alongside former champions Australia and Sri Lanka, and hopefuls Ireland and Oman in the ICC showpiece, beginning on February 7.

"The World Cup is really crucial in every cricketer's life. I always think for Zimbabwe to gain more respect in world cricket, World Cups play a huge part," said Raza in an interaction facilitated by SA20 after the match between Paarl Royals against MI Cape Town here on Sunday.

Raza showed his readiness for the big-ticket event, taking four wickets (4/13) to power Royals to a comfortable seven-wicket victory over MI Cape Town.

"So, we have the mindset to go there and try and do really well so that we can come back with our heads held high, and so that our people back home can have their heads high as well."

"Results are not in our hands and we don't worry about it too much. As long as we're playing a good brand of cricket and doing exactly what the game asks us to do, we'll have the result," he added.

Zimbabwe will play their group matches in Sri Lanka, where pitches are expected to favour spinners, and Raza was confident that his side has the required skill set in that department.

"If the wickets turned out to be that (spin-friendly), then I think we have enough harmony in ourselves to have more hours of spin if we need," he said.

In that context, Raza reckoned that opportunities to play in some competitive leagues such as SA20 and the just-concluded ILT20 will stand Zimbabwe players in good stead ahead of the T20 World Cup.

"Yeah, it certainly helps. I think the more cricket we have before the World Cup, the more match fitness and rhythm we will find ourselves in. So, it was nice to have three Zimbabweans at ILT20. Unfortunately, Blessing (Muzarabani) was supposed to be there as well, but he got injured and he was doing his rehab."

"But he's fit now. So the more Zimbabweans that play cricket, it will be very good for the country and also going into the World Cup, it will be very useful," he explained.

However, Raza braved the recent death of his younger brother Muhammad Mahidi to play in the SA20. The 13-year-old Mahidi died last Monday due to health complications.

The 39-year-old said he was mentally ready to play in a high-intensity tournament despite the personal tragedy.

"I think that part of my life will always be dif-

ficult. But I did say to my team as well, if it wasn't mentally, physically and emotionally ready, I wouldn't be here.

"The fact that I think that I can add value, I've decided to join you and I will take nothing away from you. I'll give as much as I can to the team, the energy, the experience, whatever you ask me to do, I'll do it. So yeah, it's nice to be here," he added.

But Raza, the first Zimbabwe to play in SA20, found a deeper meaning in his presence in the fourth edition of this tournament.

"Yeah, that's the whole idea and that's the point as well. If you look at the last few years, whenever a Zimbabwean has gone to a league and he's done well, it has certainly opened doors for more Zimbabweans as well."

"I really feel blessed by the fact that I'm the first Zimbabwean (to play in SA20) and, hopefully, my performances can open the doors for other Zimbabweans as well," he said.

A much sought after T20 freelancer, Raza has so far played for 37 teams across various T20 leagues, including for Punjab Kings in the IPL.

Despite being the most recognisable face of Zimbabwe cricket, Raza wanted to remain a silent catalyst of change in his country's cricketing fortunes.

"To be honest with you, when cricket is done, I try to stay away from the limelight, from people. I just try to stay indoors. I don't like to hear or speak about myself, but if the conversations are happening, I feel very blessed. But having said that, hopefully, my actions will inspire (people) rather than hearing about what people think of me."

"All I'm looking at is trying to keep doing the things I'm doing to the best of my ability and, hopefully, my performances can inspire the other Sikanders in Zimbabwe and all over the world," he added. (PTI)

## Shreyas Iyer to lead Mumbai in remainder of Vijay Hazare Trophy



MUMBAI, Jan 5: India batter Shreyas Iyer was on Monday named Mumbai's captain for the remainder of the Vijay Hazare Trophy after regular skipper Shardul Thakur was ruled out due to an injury.

Iyer is also coming back after a long injury layoff having suffered a spleen laceration with internal bleeding during the third ODI against Australia in Sydney in October last year.

"Shardul has suffered an injury and has been advised to rest. We have other players such as Shivam Dube and Suryakumar Yadav available, and Shreyas Iyer has been named the Mumbai captain for remaining matches." Mumbai chief selector Sanjay Patil told PTI on Monday without specifying the nature of Thakur's injury.

With his availability subject to fitness, Iyer, who is also the designated vice-captain for India in ODIs, was named in the three-match series starting against New Zealand in Vadodra on January 11.

The other two ODIs against New Zealand will be played on January 14 at Rajkot and January 18 at Indore. (PTI)

# Root and Head's batting mastery highlights Day 2 of 5<sup>th</sup> Ashes test

**SYDNEY, Jan 5:** Joe Root made his second hundred of the series, while Travis Head closed in on his third, as Day 2 of the final Ashes test between Australia and England closed evenly poised on Monday.

England was bowled out just before tea for 384 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, with Joe Root leading with a masterful 160 for his best test score in the country from his four Ashes tours.

At stumps, Australia was 166-2 in reply in its first innings, with Travis Head again in imperious form as he slashed his way to 91 not out from 87 balls and nearing his third hundred of the five-match series.

Ben Stokes had both wickets for the tourists, which struggled to stem the flow of runs in the final session but the wicket of the well-set Marnus Labuschagne late in the day buoyed England's hopes.

**Root's milestone ton**  
Earlier Monday, as wickets fell regularly around him, Root showed all the composure of a 163-test veteran as he notched his 41st century off 146 balls, with 11 boundaries and celebrated with the same shrug gesture as when he broke through for his first ton in four Ashes tours at Brisbane last month.

"I just felt like we've had some amazing support throughout this series and we've not been able to achieve what we set out to as a group, but at no point has that (support) ever wavered," Root said.

"It (the celebration) is a way of saying thank you, really."  
Root's epic innings was finally ended at 160 from 242 balls when



he popped a return catch to Nesar, who dived across the pitch to grasp the ball just inches above the ground.

While his disappointment was evident as he walked from the field, he received a standing ovation from the near-capacity Sydney Cricket Ground in what may be the veteran's last tour of a country that had provided his greatest batting challenge.

"Who knows? We'll see. I'd love to (play until then), but we'll see how things unfold in time," he said.

The England star is now level with former Australia captain Ricky Ponting on the all-time list of test century-makers. Only Sachin Tendulkar (51) and Jacques Kallis (45) have more.

**Bowlers chip away**  
Scott Boland and Mitchell Starc made early breakthroughs Monday after Root and Harry Brook's partnership had moved to 169 runs and

was threatening to take the test away from the hosts, who already have a winning 3-1 lead in the series.

Boland (2-85) ended Brook's equal parts streaky and sublime innings at 84, with Steve Smith taking a sharp catch to bring to a close the best partnership of the series across both teams.

Starc (2-93) removed England skipper Ben Stokes (0) for the fifth time this series with a near unplayable delivery that shaped away from the left-hander which took a thin edge on its way through to Alex Carey.

Jamie Smith made an enterprising, and at times fortunate, 46 before he holed-out to the part-time medium pace of Labuschagne.

Root and Jacks then combined for 54-run partnership before Nesar's (4-60) three quick strikes wrapped up the innings.  
**Aussies' rapid reply**  
Australia's innings got off to a

fast start with Head and Jake Weatherald bringing up the hosts fifty in just the 10th over.

Stokes (2-30) came into the attack to stem the runs and soon had Weatherald (21) trapped leg before wicket to have Australia at 57-1.

Head continued the attack and raised his fifty off 55 balls with nine boundaries and soon after passed 500 runs for the series, at a strike rate above 87, to lead both teams.

"Every ball he (Head) is looking to score," Nesar said. "He is not trying to work it around or grind it out. And most times he creates more opportunities than normal batters, because he is so talented."

Marnus Labuschagne also found form and with Head plundered a 105-run partnership in quick time.

In the fading light, Labuschagne and Stokes engaged in a verbal battle across several overs with the England captain clearly showing and voicing his displeasure at the Australian's delaying tactics.

The England skipper had the last laugh when Labuschagne (48) guided a catch to gully and Australia was 162-2.

Nesar came in as nightwatchman for the final 15 minutes and took a painful blow on the elbow from Stokes in the final over which ended the day's play.

England lost each of the first three tests to allow Australia to remain the Ashes in just 11 days of on-field action.  
England then won its first Ashes match Down Under since 2011 with a four-wicket win in the Boxing Day test. (AP)

# Savita Punia eyes Asian Games gold, direct LA Olympics qualification



**NEW DELHI, Jan 5:** Former India captain and veteran goalkeeper Savita Punia has set her sights on winning the gold in this year's Asian Games and securing direct qualification for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics before hanging up her pads on a high.

Savita said she isn't looking too far ahead to LA 2028 and is focussed on helping India qualify for the quadrennial mega-event through the Asian Games to be held in Aichi and Nagoya, Japan from September 19 till October 4.

"I have started feeling that I want to spend more time with my family. Everyone is going to retire at some point, whenever the day comes, I just want to leave on a good note. It doesn't matter if it's an Asian Games or the LA 2028 Olympics," Savita, a 2002 Commonwealth Games bronze winner and three-time Asian Games medallist, told PTI in an interview.

"LA 28 is a little far for me. I can't say much about it. I have set my own goal for the Asian Games, not looking beyond that as of now. I am contemplating hanging up my boots after the Asian Games on a high note, if we win the tournament and qualify for the Olympics.

ifiers anymore, they can go out and play freely then," the 35-year-old custodian added.

Savita, who is turning out for Soorma Hockey Club in the ongoing women's Hockey India League and is being supported by JSW Sports, said she is going to give her heart and soul to help India qualify for the LA 2028 through the Asian Games. "My next target for the whole year is very important. I have always set my goals in life. So now I have only one goal in my mind, that is we must win a gold medal in the Asian Games and directly qualify for the Olympics.

"Our team has that capacity, and personally I am going to leave no stone unturned as a player and a senior member of the team, I am always there to motivate my team.

"We all have taken a lot of pressure in playing qualifiers already. It would be ideal if we can directly qualify after the Asian Games. Therefore, my personal target is to win the Asian Games and qualify for the Olympics." Having failed to qualify directly to next year's World Cup through the Asia Cup, where they finished runners-up, Savita said winning the FIH World Cup Qualifiers in March this year in Hyderabad is the sole opportunity.

"After that, the World Cup qualifier is very important for all of us. And then the Nations Cup, because I feel that playing the Nations Cup and qualifying for FIH World Cup will be the best chance for us to showcase the best version of our game.

"And then everyone knows about the World Cup and Asian Games. So, this whole year is very important for me and my whole team," she said.

Savita also hasn't completely abandoned the hopes of being a part of the LA 2028 team though she knows it is still far away.

"For me, nothing is impossible. As of now, my body is also very supportive of my game. Whenever any foreign player asks about my age, they get shocked that I am 35 years old. I like to keep myself fit. "As long as I am on the ground, my age does not matter. If you are fit, you can play at the age of 30, 35 or 40. My main goalkeeping task is to have good footwork and agility. If you are fit, you can play at any age.

"I am very blessed that both my families support me. My in-laws also support me. If they didn't support me, I wouldn't have been able to play. It's been 3 years since I got married and I'm still playing." (PTI)

## NADA unveils RTP for 2026 Q1: Smriti, Jemimah, Sable in updated list of 347



**NEW DELHI, Jan 5:** Star Indian women cricketers Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues were among the prominent additions to the National Anti-Doping Agency's Registered Testing Pool for the first quarter of 2026 but athletics accounted for the lion's share of 118 names in the 347-strong list.

In all, 120 names were added to the previous RTP that comprised 227 athletes.

The significant rise is because of Commonwealth and Asian Games scheduled later this year and India's push for more aggressive testing.

Athletes listed in RTP are required to share their whereabouts with the anti-doping agency and be available for testing in a specified window everyday. Three failures to provide whereabouts is considered a doping violation.

Athletes, which accounted for 68 names in the previous NADA RTP, has a markedly higher presence in the new one with big names such as steeplechaser Avinash Sable, hurdler Jyothi Yarraji, decathlete Tejaswin Shankar and sprinter Animesh Kujur included for the first quarter.

Sable is returning to NADA list after being excluded from the World Anti-Doping Agency's RTP, which only features javelin throw duo of Neeraj Chopra and Sachin Yadav now.

Fourteen cricketers have been enlisted with Mandhana and Rodrigues replacing Suryakumar Yadav and Sanju Samson.

Both Yadav and Samson will be seen in action during next month's T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

The other names remain unchanged from cricket with Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill, his ODI deputy Shreyas Iyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant, Jasprit Bumrah, K L Rahul Arshdeep Singh and Tilak Verma among those picked.

From the women's team, which won a historic ODI World Cup last year, all-rounder Deepti Sharma and Shafali Verma continue to be on the list alongside Renuka Singh Thakur.

From hockey, senior stars Manpreet Singh, skipper Harmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas and Hardik Singh are there along with women's team captain Salima Tete, Savita Punia, and Navneet Kaur. (PTI)

# Gauff clarifies comments on American tennis fans just before a surprising loss at the United Cup

**PERTH (AUSTRALIA), Jan 5:** Coco Gauff dropped a post on social media just before she started her United Cup singles match Monday, hoping to add context to her recent comments about American tennis fans.

The issue was clearly a distraction and the match didn't go well for the No. 4-ranked Gauff, who lost the first five games and struggled in a 6-1, 6-7 (3), 6-0 loss to No. 42 Jessica Bouzas Maneiro in Perth.

It gave Spain a 1-0 lead over the defending champion U.S. team in the Group A contest. But then Taylor Fritz saved a match point on the way to winning the men's singles and Gauff combined with Christian Harrison in the mixed doubles to clinch the contest for the Americans.

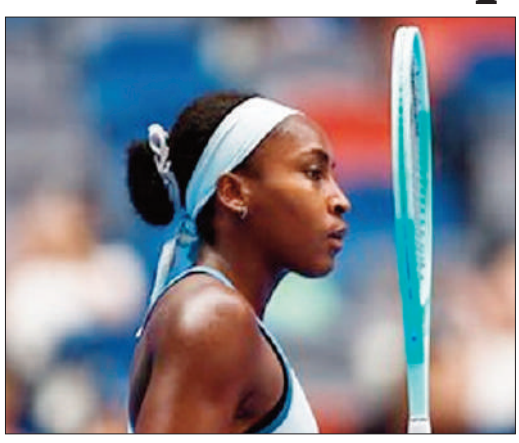
"I'm going to clarify because people are dragging this out of context," Gauff said in a pre-match morning social media post, referring to the "worst" comments she made earlier at the tournament comparing support for players from smaller countries with the kind of support American players receive on foreign soil.

Gauff said she wasn't expecting fans to travel to tournaments specifically to support their compatriots, but instead was talking broadly about the audible and visible support at events — other than the U.S. Open — that attracted American tennis fans.

"Those from smaller countries come with their colors and flags and it is clear on who they are supporting," Gauff said in her post. "I was just speaking from my perspective. I understand the financial aspect of things and know tennis is not accessible for everyone, it was more of a comment for those who are already attending and how I wish they were as passionate as those from other countries." The 21-year-old Gauff, a two-time major winner, said her initial comments were in response to a question at a news conference.

"I was asked and it was simply an observation I noticed about other countries vs. mine that is all," she said. "Nevertheless I am grateful for any support no matter how big or small it is."

In a clip of the news conference posted on X, Gauff said: "I feel like we're definitely in the tennis department the worst when it comes to that."



She added that at previous team events she'd noticed that players from other countries get more animated support from their fans than the American tennis players do, but attributed that to the U.S. sports fans having so many successful teams and athletes to support.

Gauff said there was always good support for the Americans from fans who travel to the Australian Open in Melbourne, "but I would like to see some more Americans if we make it to Sydney (United Cup finals) in Sydney than there were last year."

After Monday's match, Bouzas Maneiro acknowledged the crowd support she received in Perth.

"Thank you for the atmosphere. It was amazing," she said in an on court TV interview. "I just felt the support. I saw flags, Spain, Spanish flags there. Thankyou so much."

**Quarterfinals**  
The U.S. team is 2-0 after wins over Spain and Argentina and has clinched a spot in the quarterfinals.

It was close call against Spain. Fritz, struggling with knee pain, produced a 7-6 (4), 3-6, 7-6 (6) win over No. 38 Jaume Munar. He missed two match points on Munar's serve in the 12th game of the third set and then saved one in the tiebreaker before sealing the win to level the contest. (AP)

## Ex-Australia cricket star Damien Martyn out of coma, speaking to loved ones

**BRISBANE, Jan 5:** Ex-Australia cricket star Damien Martyn has made a sudden turnaround since coming out of an induced coma while in a Gold Coast hospital with meningitis.

Cricketer Australia said the 54-year-old Martyn, a World Cup winner who was admitted to the hospital last week, is expected to be moved out of the intensive care unit.

Australian cricket broadcaster Fox Sports reported during Day 2 of the fifth Ashes test on Monday that "Martyn is now out of a coma and he is speaking to his loved ones."

Adam Gilchrist, a friend and longtime teammate of Martyn's, issued a statement late Sunday to say "it's been an unbelievable turn of events in the last 48 hours. He is now able to talk and respond to treatment."

Gilchrist said Martyn was in good spirits and "overwhelmed by the support" from the global cricket community.

"His wife Amanda just really wants to say to everyone she is convinced that the love, goodwill and sense of care that they felt from everybody, via messages and via the coverage in the press really helped him," Gilchrist said.

Martyn played 67 test matches for Australia, averaging 46.37 with the bat and posting 13 test centuries. (AP)

## Bangladesh bans IPL broadcast in another retaliatory move

**DHAKA, Jan 5:** Bangladesh on Monday banned the broadcast of IPL's upcoming season to protest pacer Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from the world's biggest T20 league on BCCI instructions amid a steady deterioration of the country's diplomatic ties with India.

A statement from the information and broadcast ministry of Muhammad Yunus' interim government here stated that no "logical reason" was given by the BCCI while instructing IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to release Rahman from its 2026 roster.

The IPL is due to start on March 26. The move to ban IPL broadcast came a day after Bangladesh refused to travel to India for next month's T20 World Cup and requested the International Cricket Council to shift all its league games to Sri Lanka, the co-host of the tournament.

"No logical reason for such a decision (Rahman's release) by the BCCI is known, and such a decision has saddened, hurt, and aggrieved the people of Bangladesh," read the government notification.

"In this situation, until further notice, it is requested by order to stop the broadcasting/telecasting of all matches and programs of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

"This order is issued with the approval of the proper authority and in the public interest," said the signed by assistant secretary Feroz Khan. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, while announcing the diklat to release Rahman, had merely stated that it was being done because of "developments all around", without explaining the specifics.

Bangladesh was scheduled to play three T20 World Cup matches in Kolkata and one in Mumbai.

Drawn in Group C, the team was due to face the West Indies in their opening match at Eden Gardens in Kolkata and subsequently compete against defending champions England, Italy and Nepal.

The Indo-Bangladesh relationship has hit a rocky patch after the ouster of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India in August last year following anti-government protests.

She was sentenced to death in absentia by a tribunal for her alleged role in a deadly crackdown during the agitation in which several students were killed. Hindus have been targeted for violent attacks since Hasina's ouster. (PTI)

# Indian racer Atiqa Mir secures landmark top-5 finish on junior class debut



## SPECTACULAR SWITCH

**ABU DHABI, Jan 5:** The 11-year-old racing prodigy Atiqa Mir made a spectacular switch from mini to the much tougher junior S125 category as she became the first Indian to secure a top five finish globally on debut during round seven of the IAME UAE Karting Championship at the fabled Yas Marina Circuit.

Atiqa, the first Indian to be supported by Formula 1 Academy, could have spent another season dominating championships in the mini category (age 8-12) but she has been thrown in at deep end with the move up to the junior S125 category (age 12-14) in the new year.

The karts are 30kg heavier (115kg in mini) to 145kg in junior) and have three times the horse power (10 bhp with top speed 105 kmph to 29bhp with top speed

of 126 kmph). In a clear sign of her rare talent, the Akcel GP backed Atiqa thrived in the unfamiliar territory rather than getting overawed by the occasion.

By finishing fifth out of 35 drivers in a male dominated grid, Atiqa also became the first female to register a top five finish in the history of IAME UAE Championship on debut.

With only a few days of testing to get used to the junior kart, Atiqa once again proved that her fitness and dedication are second to none in a gruelling 21-lap race at the historic Formula 1 Circuit here.

She qualified 18th due to an issue with her kart but that didn't deter her in the races.

In the heat race, she climbed up six places, and in the pre-final she went up eight places to finish fourth, displaying mature race craft and overtaking drivers

with much more experience (in the category as well as age). Starting the final fourth and on the trickier outside lane, Atiqa held her ground and got in the mix of the leading group. She put in some stunning lap times to keep up with the leading pack.

The pace in front was so fast that they came up to lap the back markers but one of them blocked Atiqa and she lost time due to that. If that was not the case, she could have finished two places higher and on the podium. In the end, she lost out on the podium by only four tenths of a second.

"That was a good debut weekend in Junior, it went better than I expected. The karts are so fast compared to the Mini and I absolutely love it. My race could have been much better if the backmarkers had not come in the way," said Atiqa, who aims to reach Formula 1 one day.

"But nonetheless I'm happy with my speed this weekend. I hope to keep learning and improving myself in this new category."

Atiqa's father Asif Mir said the decision to fast-track her daughter to the junior category was vindicated with the performance over the weekend.

"We decided to move Atiqa up to Juniors in a late call in December. I felt she could learn more in the higher category and improve her skill even though she is barely eligible being so young and going up against drivers who are 2-3 years older than her," said Asif, who is also India's first national karting champion.

"She had a stellar debut and deserved a podium for her efforts but just fell short. It is not easy going from a Mini to a Junior kart with the higher G forces and Speed. She even surprised me with her performance," he added. (PTI)