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● Israeli fire kills 11 Palestinians in Gaza, including two children, local hospital officials say
 ● Wish the UN could do more, so we didn't need Board of Peace: Trump

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● India to keep growing 6-8 pc in real terms in next 5 years: Vaishnav
 ● Congress to hold dialogue on MGNREGA issue



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'Viksit Bharat focuses on village-led development revolution'

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on Wednesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 is driving a historic village-led development revolution, placing rural India at the centre of the nation's growth journey.

Addressing reporters here, Sonowal said Viksit Bharat 2047 is not a slogan but a national mission aimed at transforming villages into engines of economic progress.

"When villages prosper, the nation progresses. This vision ensures last-mile delivery, empowers farmers, workers and youth, and builds the foundation of a self-reliant India," he said.

Highlighting the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin), or VB-G RAM G, Sonowal (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Uneasy calm prevails in violence-hit Kokrajhar ● Peace meeting organised

Army conducts flag march, death toll rises to 2

GUWAHATI/KOKRAJHAR, Jan 21: Army conducted a flag march and a peace meeting was held in the presence of two Assam ministers on Wednesday to ensure that the situation returned to normal in violence-hit Kokrajhar district, where two persons were killed in mob violence, leading to arson and clashes between Bodos and Adivasis, officials said.

Army, deployed in sensitive areas of the district, conducted a flag march as a confidence-building measure, a defence spokesperson told PTI.

The Army personnel conducted patrolling in the affected areas of Karigaon and its nearby locations on Tuesday night.

A total of four Army columns have been deployed in the district, the spokesperson said.

Besides the Army, security personnel from the Rapid Action



Force (RAF), CRPF and Assam Police are also patrolling the affected areas, IGP (Law and Order) Akhilesh Singh told reporters.

The overall situation is under control with no fresh incident reported since Tuesday evening and tight security measures have been

put in place in Kokrajhar and neighbouring Chirang district, he said.

The situation is fast returning to normal with security forces patrolling sensitive areas and urging people taking shelter in relief camps to return to their homes.

He said that five relief camps have been set up in different schools and over 1,200 people from the nearby villages have taken shelter there but "we are trying to convince them to have faith in the security system and return to their homes".

Asked if there was any militant link to the incident, Singh said, "The matter will be investigated but as of now there is no such evidence."

The incident happened due to an accident and this led to mistrust between the two communities but normalcy is now returning to the district, he said.

He said that certain sections have been circulating misleading videos on the social media which they should refrain from doing and action has already been initiated against those indulging in such (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

State secures ₹1 lakh cr investment commitments

First-ever WEF participation signals Assam's rise as a high-growth, future-ready investment destination: Himanta



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: Assam's debut at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos has marked a major milestone in the state's economic outreach, with chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announcing that investment

commitments worth around ₹1 lakh crore have already been secured during the visit.

Describing the engagement as historic, Sarma said Assam's participation as part of "Team Bharat" reflected India's evolving growth story, where (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam's power demand seen nearly tripling by 2035-36

Experts stress urgent transmission expansion

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: Assam is heading towards a sharp surge in electricity demand over the next decade, with projections indicating that the state's power requirement will almost triple by 2035-36.

As per the Central Electricity Authority's Resource Adequacy Plan, Assam's peak power demand is expected to rise from 2,812 MW in 2024-25 to 7,969 MW by 2035-36, driven by rapid urbanisation, expanding industrial activity and rising consumption across districts.

While the state plans to scale up its generation capacity to over 17,700 MW by 2035-36, power sector ex-

perts caution that generation alone will not be sufficient to ensure long-term energy security.

They point to transmission infrastructure as the most critical gap, warning that without timely and large-scale expansion of the transmission network, Assam could face frequent shortages despite having adequate power capacity on paper.

Industry expert Saddam Alam, chief consultant associated with Smokeless Power Consulting, said that while power generation can be enhanced or procured from outside the state, transmission development is a far more time-intensive process. "Building transmission (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

3 labourers die while digging well in KA

DIPHU, Jan 21: Three labourers died while digging a well in a remote village of Assam's Karbi Anglong district, officials said on Wednesday.

The daily-wage workers were engaged in digging a well in Disama village when they fell into the pit on Tuesday evening.

State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel rushed to the spot and rescued the labourers, the officials said. They were taken to the Diphu Medical College and Hospital, where doctors declared them brought-dead. The deceased have (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Guwahati Asian Film Fest from today, 26 movies to be screened

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: The second edition of the Guwahati Asian Film Festival (GAFF) will commence on Thursday, with 26 regional, national and international films from across 10 Asian countries to be screened, organisers said.

In a statement, the GAFF on Wednesday said that the opening film will be Uzbekistan's 'Sunday', directed by Shokir Khoklov.

Apart from this, the opening day will also feature Japanese film 'S', directed by Masahiro



Ota, having its India premiere at the festival. Along with that, 'An

Evening Ballad' by Bishal Swargiary in the Indian Showcase

(non-competition) section will be screened during the day.

GAFF Festival Director (honorary) Monita Borgohain said, "GAFF 2026 promises 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."

The overwhelming response the festival received from film lovers during our first edition inspired the organisers to plan an even grander second edition, she added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



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DIPR/D/HLT/280/22-Jan-26

Govt approves equity support of ₹ 5,000 cr to SIDBI

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: The government on Wednesday approved equity support of Rs 5,000 crore to Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), a decision that will increase the flow of credit to Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises.

The decision was taken at the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an official release said.

The equity capital of Rs 5,000 crore will be infused into SIDBI by the Department of Financial Services (DFS) in three tranches.

It will invest Rs 3,000 crore in 2025-26 at the book value of Rs 568.65 as on March 31, 2025 and Rs 1,000 crore each in fiscal 2026-27 and 2027-28 at the book value as on March 31 of the respective previous financial year, the release added.

"This infusion of additional capital would enable SIDBI to generate resources at fair interest rates, thereby increasing the flow of credit to Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) at competitive cost," the release said.

"Post equity capital infusion of Rs 5,000 crore, the number of MSMEs to be provided financial assistance is expected to increase from 76.26 lakh at the end of financial year 2025 to 102 lakhs (approximately 25.74 lakh new MSME beneficiaries will be added) by the end of financial year 2028," it added.

The equity infusion is expected to generate 1.12 crore jobs, adding 25.74 lakh new MSME beneficiaries by the end of 2027-28, according to the official release. (PTI)

Stock markets fall for 3rd day amid geopolitical tensions; Sensex sinks below 82k

MUMBAI, Jan 21: Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty recovered most of their losses to close lower in a volatile session on Wednesday, continuing their weak momentum for the third consecutive day, as heightened geopolitical tensions kept investors away from riskier assets.

However, selective buying activity in some of the market heavyweights helped the indices restrict the losses, traders said.

Slipping below the 82,000 level, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 270.84 points, or 0.33 per cent, to 81,909.63. The benchmark tanked 1,056.02 points, or 1.28 per cent, to 81,124.45 during the day.

A total of 2,831 stocks declined while 1,437 advanced and 137 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 75 points or 0.30 per cent to 25,157.50.

Selling pressure in financial, banking, and consumption stocks amid the rupee diving to its lowest level against the US dollar also added to the pressure, according to traders.

"Domestic markets were gripped by volatility as global risk factors dampened sentiment. However, value buying towards the close helped the market recover some early losses. The weakening rupee and uncertainties surrounding trade ties may prolong this volatility," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms, ICICI Bank, Trent, Bharat Electronics, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro, State Bank of



India and Maruti were among the biggest laggards.

In contrast, Eternal, UltraTech Cement, InterGlobe Aviation and Reliance Industries were among the gainers.

"The persistent weakness was driven by ongoing global trade and geopolitical concerns, including renewed tariff-related fears that weighed on risk assets ahead of the US President's speech at Davos."

"A sharp depreciation in the Indian rupee to fresh lows further dampened sentiment, especially in the absence of any meaningful positive surprise from the earnings season. Continued foreign institutional selling added to the pressure, keeping overall risk appetite subdued and market activity largely stock-specific," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE midcap gauge tanked 1.01 per cent, and the smallcap index declined 0.80 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, consumer durables dropped 1.24 per cent, PSU Bank (1.07 per cent), financial services (1.02 per cent), bankex (0.94 per cent), capital goods (0.92 per cent), industrials (0.91 per cent) and private banks index (0.80 per cent).

BSE commodities, energy,

metal, oil & gas and services were the gainers.

The rupee crashed 76 paise to close at an all-time low of 91.73 (provisional) against the American currency on Wednesday.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 2,938.33 crore on Tuesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 3,665.69 crore, according to exchange data.

"Indian equity markets ended the session on a cautious to negative note as mixed cues from Asian peers and sharp losses in overseas markets, along with continued weakness in the rupee, kept investor risk appetite subdued," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index settled lower, while South Korea's Kospi index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended higher.

Markets in Europe were trading lower.

US markets ended sharply lower on Tuesday. The Nasdaq Composite index tumbled 2.39 per cent, the S&P 500 dropped by 2.06 per cent, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average tanked 1.76 per cent.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dropped 1 per cent to USD 64.27 per barrel.

On Tuesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,065.71 points, or 1.28 per cent, to settle at 82,180.47. The Nifty tanked 353 points or 1.38 per cent to end at 25,232.50. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Army conducts flag

activities, Singh added. IGP (BTC) Vivekraj Singh said that 19 people have been arrested so far for their alleged involvement in the incident while three more have been detained for interrogation.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma deputed his cabinet colleagues Jayanta Malla Baruah and Charan Boro to the district to review the situation and ensure the return of peace.

A peace meeting was organised by the district administration which was attended by the two ministers, Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) chief Hagrama Mohilary and prominent members of the civil society belonging to all communities.

Baruah said that the district administration is conducting surveys in the affected villages to assess the damage and the compensation will be decided upon after it is completed.

Mohilary said that all stakeholders have agreed in the meeting that all communities must live in peace and harmony.

On Monday night, a vehicle with three Bodos onboard hit two Adivasi persons on Mansingh Road in Karigaon area, a home department official said.

The three Bodo persons were reportedly beaten up by neighbouring Adivasi villagers, and the vehicle was torched. One person died, while another succumbed to injuries on Tuesday, he said.

On Tuesday, the situation flared up with Bodo and Adivasi communities blocking a national highway, burning tyres, setting ablaze a government office and attacking the Karigaon police outpost, the official said.

The police baton-charged the protesters and fired tear gas shells to disperse the crowd, in which several people, including a few police personnel, were injured, he said.

The Kokrajhar district administration has set up two relief camps at Karigaon High School and Gwajanpuri Amanpara High School, after several villagers from Karigaon fled their homes fearing attacks.

Prohibitory orders have been imposed across Kokrajhar district under Section 163 of the Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, the official said.

The home department has also suspended internet/mobile data services in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts as a precautionary measure. (PTI)

State secures ₹1 lakh

every region is now positioned as a credible destination for global capital.

Speaking after concluding his engagements at Davos, the chief minister said Assam's presence on the global platform underlined the country's shift towards balanced and inclusive development.

He noted that international investor interest, once limited to a few Indian states, is now widening, with Assam and the Northeast increasingly drawing attention.

When a state like Assam represents India globally, he said, it signals that the nation is speaking for all its regions and not just a select few.

Sarma said India has reached a stage where any state has the capacity to attract, absorb and sustain investments, and Assam's interactions at Davos reinforced this confidence among global investors.

Citing RBI data, he said Assam is currently the fastest-growing state in the country, having recorded over 13 per cent growth consistently over the past five years, with projections of around 15 per cent growth next year.

Though Assam remains a relatively small economy, he said its rapid growth trajectory is making it increasingly visible on the global stage.

Highlighting the state's evolving economic profile, the chief minister said Assam is diversifying beyond its traditional strengths of tea and hydrocarbons into future-focused sectors such as fertilisers and chemicals, semiconductors and allied ecosystems, electronics manufacturing, green and renewable energy, solar storage projects and other new energy solutions.

Many of these initiatives, he added, are being developed by leveraging the state's natural gas resources, with energy emerging as a key priority given Assam's terrain and geography.

During the two-day engagement at Davos, the Assam delegation held extensive meetings with global and domestic investors and signed multiple memoranda of understanding aimed at accelerating economic growth in the coming years.

Sarma said projects such as the large urea plant and greenfield chemical complex, for which the Prime Minister has laid foundation stones, along with the Tata Semiconductor facility that is expected to begin chip production within the next few months, have significantly strengthened investor confidence.

Calling the visit an eye-opening experience, Sarma said Assam and the Northeast have, for the first time, been able to directly present their growth story to a global audience.

He said major Indian industrial houses as well as international investors are now engaging with the state to explore investment opportunities.

While welcoming the ₹1 lakh crore commitment secured so far, he said this should be seen as a base rather than an end goal, stressing the need for consistent global engagement over the next three to four years.

Expressing confidence about the road ahead, the chief minister said the Davos outreach has laid a strong foundation for translating investor interest into tangible projects and long-term economic benefits.

He added that with sustained policy focus and the Prime Minister's active support for Assam and the Northeast, the state is well placed to emerge as a significant investment destination in the national and global landscape. (With Inputs From PTI)

Viksit Bharat focuses

said the new framework guarantees dignified livelihoods for poor and backward families by providing a statutory assurance of 125 days of employment per rural household, along with weekly wage payments to strengthen income security.

"The rural economy of 2005 and that of 2025 are vastly different. Governance must evolve with changing aspirations. VB-G RAM G links employment with water security, infrastructure creation, connectivity and long-term productivity," the minister said.

Sonowal noted that rural poverty has seen a sharp decline over the past decade, falling from 25.7 per cent in 2011-12 to 8.36 per cent in 2023-24, aided by improved connectivity, direct benefit transfer and technology-driven governance.

Referring to MNREGA, he said the scheme has undergone a complete transformation under the Modi government.

"During the Congress era, MNREGA became synonymous with corruption. Today, it is a transparent, technology-enabled system. Of the total ₹11.74 lakh crore spent under MNREGA so far, ₹8.53 lakh crore has been spent by the Modi government — the highest ever by any government," Sonowal said.

He added that real-time monitoring, digital attendance and direct benefit transfers have eliminated middlemen and leakages, restoring public trust and ensuring benefits reach the intended beneficiaries.

Launching a sharp political attack, Sonowal said the Congress' opposition to Viksit Bharat reflects outdated politics.

"Their politics is rooted in dynasty, not development. In contrast, the BJP has ushered in a new political culture of performance, transparency and Garib Kalyan, where governance is focused on empowering the last person in the queue," he said.

Assam's power demand

lines requires years of coordinated planning, land acquisition and right-of-way clearances. Timely expansion of transmission infrastructure is essential to ensure reliable electricity supply and support Assam's overall growth," he said.

Alam noted that a strong transmission network would also help Assam reduce its dependence on costly power purchases during peak demand.

The savings, he said, could be redirected towards welfare and development initiatives.

He warned that inadequate transmission leads to heavy line loading, higher risks of tripping and voltage instability, and over-reliance on a limited number of corridors, increasing the likelihood of outages.

He cited the May 2025 power outage in Guwahati, which affected around 1.5 lakh consumers, and the July 2024 grid collapse that disrupted supply to nearly two lakh people across five districts, as examples of such vulnerabilities.

Frequent power disruptions, experts said, have a cascading impact on the economy, causing operational losses for industries, affecting supply chains, discouraging investment, delaying infrastructure upgrades and disrupting irrigation.

They also contribute to post-harvest losses of up to 20 per cent and adversely affect essential services such as healthcare and education.

According to sector assessments, uninterrupted power supply alone has the potential to generate over two lakh jobs across sectors and unlock new avenues for industrial growth.

Experts believe transmission infrastructure will play a decisive role in Assam's future power scenario, as even contracted or surplus power cannot be effectively utilised without adequate evacuation and delivery capacity. They pointed out that while Assam's electricity demand is growing rapidly, transmission expansion has been relatively slow, creating a structural bottleneck.

Addressing this gap, they said, must form the core of the state's energy security strategy.

The coming decade is seen as crucial in determining whether Assam can align its power infrastructure with its economic ambitions.

Accelerating transmission line construction, upgrading substations, reducing right-of-way delays and developing new high-capacity corridors are viewed as essential steps to ensure the state can meet its rising power needs sustainably.

3 labourers die

been identified as Tissong Terang, Bongtharber Hobi Teron and Longsdab Teron. The district administration is inquiring into the details of the incident, the officials added. (PTI)

Guwahati Asian Film

Over the next four days, GAFF 2026 will showcase films from Vietnam, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Myanmar, Iran, Kazakhstan and China.

Alongside international selections, 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, Mising, Manipuri and Bengali, highlighting the linguistic diversity of the region and the country.

In addition to film screenings, GAFF 2026 will feature a series of masterclasses, panel discussions and interactive sessions led by filmmakers, critics and industry professionals from India and other Asian countries, the statement said.

"GAFF 2026 promises a rich and diverse showcase of Asian and Indian cinema, as the organisers curate selections from over 200 film submissions, including 90 entries from outside India. Positioned as the only Asian film festival of its kind in this part of the country, it has carved a unique space in India's cultural landscape by bringing Asian cinema to the Northeast," it 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. (PTI)

Flipkart deepens marketplace governance framework

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: Flipkart, India's homegrown e-commerce marketplace, is continuing to strengthen its compliance and governance architecture to reinforce trust, transparency and accountability across its platform.

The company said its systems are built on consistent standards, strong internal controls and audit-ready processes, a necessity for managing a marketplace that hosts millions of listings and over 1.4 million sellers.

Flipkart's governance framework follows a proactive, multi-layered approach that combines advanced technology, structured human oversight and clearly defined compliance policies.

This model is aimed at ensuring a fair and well-governed ecosystem where genuine businesses can operate with confidence and customers are assured of safe and quality products.

At the entry point, Flipkart deploys a standardised, risk-based onboarding and monitoring mechanism to prevent non-compliant or fraudulent sellers from accessing the platform.

Seller verification extends beyond document submission, with checks on GSTIN and PAN supported by device, address and pincode verification against historical fraud patterns using internal data models.

GST credentials undergo two-factor authentication to prevent misuse, while fraud linkage analysis helps ensure that sellers previously found in violation cannot re-enter the marketplace under different identities.

Once onboarded, sellers are subject to continuous monitoring through an architecture that blends AI-driven scale with human supervision, supported by documented review processes, audit trails and escalation protocols.

Flipkart's real-time infringement detection systems scan listings for potential text and logo violations, which are then manually reviewed before confirmed infringements are delisted.

The Marketplace Quality Control team also reviews millions of listings every month to ensure compliance with applicable regulations.

These technology-led measures are complemented by on-ground seller inspections, geotagged address verification and surprise audits for sellers flagged for closer observation.

To further strengthen vigilance across the ecosystem, Flipkart has introduced an internal employee initiative that enables teams to identify and report abuse patterns.

These range from fake listings and multi-account misuse to return fraud and promotional manipulation, adding another layer of oversight beyond automated systems.

Transparency and due process form the backbone of Flipkart's seller compliance framework.

At onboarding, sellers are provided with a detailed compliance overview, including the mandatory Seller Terms of Use.

Ongoing awareness is reinforced through regular communication such as monthly compliance updates, webinars, thematic outreach programmes and policy-related advisories.

Sellers are also given visibility into listing takedowns through reason codes on their dashboards and can contest actions by submitting proof of authorisation or purchase.

Dedicated compliance, trust and safety, and marketplace risk teams oversee this framework, with structured reporting to senior leadership.

The company emphasised that its governance efforts focus on early detection rather than reactive enforcement.

Between October 2024 and October 2025, more than 10 million listings were actioned at the source for counterfeit or policy violations, while around 13,000 sellers were removed from the platform.

In parallel, Flipkart's Brand Assure programme allows trademark-registered brand owners to directly flag unauthorised listings or sellers.

These reports are reviewed in real time by the Trust and Safety team. As of December 2025, over 11,000 brands had joined the programme, leading to the resolution of thousands of infringement cases related to brand names, copyrights, designs and logos, and a notable reduction in customer-reported counterfeit issues for participating brands. All enforcement actions are carried out through documented protocols to ensure consistency, proportionality and fairness.

Commenting on the initiative, Sakait Chaudhary, Senior Vice President and Head of Marketplace at Flipkart, said building a trusted and compliant marketplace remains fundamental to the company's operations.

He said continuous investment in a robust compliance framework, powered by technology-led risk detection and real-time monitoring, helps remove friction for genuine sellers while ensuring customers consistently receive safe and authentic products.

Strong governance, he added, is central to creating a resilient and scalable digital commerce platform.

Flipkart said its sustained investment in compliance and marketplace integrity aligns with its broader vision of building a transparent, responsible and well-governed digital commerce ecosystem for the long term.

Blenders Pride unveils limited-edition Zenith Black

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: Blenders Pride, one of India's most iconic names in the premium whisky segment, has announced the launch of the Blenders Pride Zenith Black Edition, a limited-edition offering that blends the brand's signature whisky with a striking all-black design aesthetic to deliver a distinct and elevated experience.

Designed as a tribute to exclusivity and refined taste, the Zenith Black Edition comes encased in a bold black avatar symbolising sophistication, power and elevated luxury.

Crafted for discerning whisky connoisseurs, the edition is limited to just one million bottles, underscoring its rarity and collectable appeal.

NAME CORRECTION

My name Jeremy Engti, and that of my father's Kensing. Engti were wrongly recorded as 'Adre Hmar' and 'Chawnglienkhum Hmar' respectively in my PAN Card bearing No. AMOPH7023G and in my Aadhaar Card bearing No. 6360-0083-9817.

Therefore, the names Jeremy Engti and Adre Hmar is the same and one single person, i.e., me and the names Kensing Engti and Chawnglienkhum Hmar are the names of my father.

Jeremy Engti,

Vill.- Joysing Teron, Lower Dilaji

PO & PS - Diphu, Dist.- Karbi Anglong, Assam

ICICI Pru Smart Insurance Plan Plus targets young earners planning for long-term goals

Plan also allows partial withdrawals to address immediate financial requirements



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: India stands at a demographic crossroads, with its youth poised to shape the country's economic trajectory over the next decade.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, nearly 65 per cent of the population is below the age of 35, underscoring the need for early, disciplined financial planning to help young Indians achieve milestones such as home ownership, wealth creation and even early retirement.

Against this backdrop, ICICI

Prudential Life Insurance has introduced ICICI Pru Smart Insurance Plan Plus, a market-linked life insurance solution aimed at helping young professionals combine long-term wealth creation with financial protection for their families.

The plan, with premiums starting at ₹1,000 per month, is positioned as an accessible entry point for first-time investors and young earners looking to start early and stay invested over the long term.

Explaining the product's proposition, Vikas Gupta, Chief Product Officer at ICICI Prudential Life In-

surance Company Limited, said the plan has been designed to maximise investment efficiency while offering flexibility and security.

He noted that the entire premium is invested based on the customer's chosen asset allocation, with options spanning 25 different funds and four portfolio strategies.

The plan also allows partial withdrawals to address immediate financial requirements and includes a Waiver of Premium add-on benefit, ensuring that family financial goals remain protected even in the face of unforeseen circumstances.

The company highlighted that the inherent structure of ULIPs encourages long-term investment discipline and wealth creation, making them particularly relevant at a time when India is projected to become the world's third-largest economy by 2028, as per Morgan Stanley.

ULIPs also offer customers the flexibility to choose between asset classes and switch allocations without incurring additional costs or tax implications, enabling them to adapt their investment strategy as their life stages and risk appetite evolve. With its combination of affordability, investment choice and protection, ICICI Pru Smart Insurance Plan Plus is being positioned as a forward-looking solution for today's youth preparing for tomorrow's financial goals.

Traditional Jonbeel Mela begins at Jagiroad

Festival features unique barter system, mass fishing and tribute to Zubeen Garg



HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Jan 21: The traditional Jonbeel Mela will be held from January 22 to 24 at Jonbeel Pathar in Jagiroad. Organisers have begun preparations for the annual fair, renowned as one of the world's rarest exchange customs. This year, the mela will also include a collective tribute to Zubeen Garg, celebrated

as a cultural icon of Assam.

The mela will commence with an auspicious puja at Deosal Shiv Mandir. Around 60 villages from Karbi Anglong and 20 villages from Meghalaya are expected to participate this year.

On the second day, the fair will feature the unique traditional barter system. People from the plains will exchange items such as sandah, pitha, laddu and raw fish for hill products like ginger, spinach, garlic, la and dhuna. Concurrently, a mass fishing festival will be held at Jonbeel, open to all regardless of caste, religion, or ethnicity.

The festival will be graced by the Chief Minister of Assam, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, along with several ministers and MLAs. During the Rajdarbar at the fairground, the CM will present Rajbhattachas to 22 Tiwa kings of Central Assam.

The three-day event will conclude with a mass fishing festival at Gobha Raja's Aram Beel and a symbolic collection of taxes by the king's officials at the fairground, continuing the centuries-old traditions of the Jonbeel Mela.

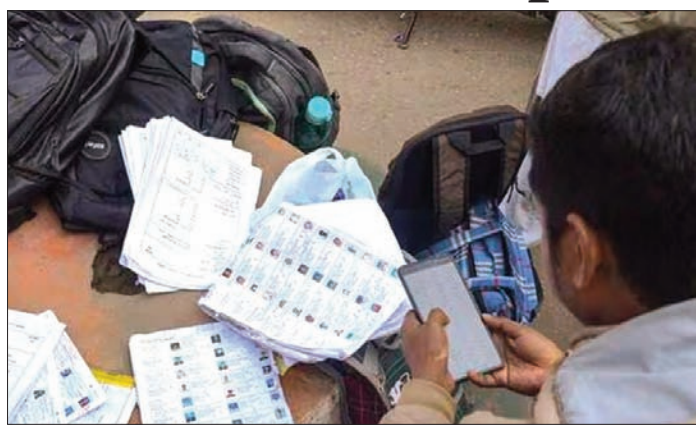
Concerns over rushed hearings, fake objections and possible exclusion of legitimate voters

Alleged conspiracy in Assam electoral roll revision sparks outrage

HT Correspondent

DALGAON, Jan 21: Allegations of harassment and potential exclusion of legitimate voters have surfaced during the ongoing Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls in Assam. Organisations including ITTEHAD Front, AAMSU, NEMSU and MSUA have criticised the acceptance of irregular and false objections without proper verification.

The groups allege that hearing notices are often issued on extremely short notice, sometimes on the same day, leaving affected individuals little time to respond or attend. This, they claim, creates a risk of names being removed from the voter list for non-appearance. The Ittehad Front called it a "deliberate conspiracy" to exclude



genuine citizens.

Reports indicate that in districts such as Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and Kharupetia, bulk objections have been filed by un-

known persons, often using forged signatures. Officials have also reportedly demanded additional documents during hearings beyond those mentioned in the initial no-

tice, causing confusion and unnecessary hurdles.

AAMSU Advisor Ainnuddin Ahmed said, "It is a clear conspiracy to deprive Indian citizens of their fundamental rights by providing insufficient time and fair opportunities during these short-notice hearings." He and other leaders have demanded urgent measures to ensure that no genuine voter is excluded.

The SR process in Assam, distinct from other states' revisions has already been a topic of political debate with opposition parties raising concerns over irregularities in the draft rolls following house-to-house verification. The organisations have called for a transparent and accountable investigation into the matter.

NFR partners with SBI to strengthen cash handling safety

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has taken a significant step to enhance financial efficiency, safety and transparency by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the State Bank of India (SBI) to provide cash pick-up facilities at 400 stations across the NFR network. The MoU was signed at the NFR Headquarters in Maligaon in the presence of Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager of NFR, along with senior officials from SBI and NFR. The initiative aims to modernise cash management practices across the railway system.

Under this arrangement, SBI will provide a secure and organised mechanism for collecting cash

from designated stations and ensuring timely deposits into respective SBI branches. The system will standardise cash handling, improve accountability and enable real-time tracking of cash movement through GPS-enabled vehicles, thereby minimising risks of theft, loss, or misappropriation. The facility is expected to bring significant savings in expenditure on vehicle hiring and security personnel while enhancing the safety of station staff. By relieving employees from manual cash transportation, the initiative allows them to focus on core operational and commercial tasks, reflecting NFR's commitment to modernisation, transparency and improved public service delivery.

Accused escapes from Sootea Police custody

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 21: Tensions continue in and around Sootea after a prime accused in a drug peddling case escaped from police custody on Tuesday at Sootea Police Station.

The accused, Kejang Narbu Thongdok (38) of Arunachal Pradesh, along with his wife Chiring Dema, was apprehended late Monday evening by a joint police team led by ASP (Crime), Biswanath, in coordination with Sootea and Itakhola police. A case (No. 11/2026) under Sections 21(b)/25/29 of the NDPS Act, 1985, was registered and the couple was detained for further investigation. Thongdok, who is posted as head constable at the 3rd IRBN in Arunachal Pradesh, managed to flee custody on Tuesday due to lapses in the custodial procedure. Following the incident, Senior Superintendent of Police, Biswanath, conducted a ground inquiry and found three police personnel on duty negligent. Consequently, LNK John Korad (Santri duty), LNK Biman Das (LC) and WPC Priyanka Baruti (Santri duty) were placed under suspension until further orders, as per order BNS/R/Suspension/2026/486-A dated January 20.

Brick syndicate tragedy at Tipong Colliery claims two lives



HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Jan 21: In Tipong Colliery, Tinsukia district, a new brick syndicate has emerged in place of the earlier coal syndicate with hundreds of stolen bricks being illegally supplied across the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency.

Tipong Colliery, under North-eastern Coalfields (Coal India Ltd, Margherita Tipong), has remained non-operational for several years due to environmental concerns. As a result, the site—including buildings, staff quarters, offices and machinery has fallen into abandonment.

Taking advantage of these abandoned properties, local vested-interest groups initially looted

valuable materials such as iron, copper and brass from the colliery, selling them at minimal prices elsewhere. After depleting these resources, the groups targeted the hundreds of B-Type pucca (permanent) buildings on the premises, stripping tin roofs, iron pipes, doors, windows and British-era bricks. The bricks were reportedly sold at ₹1 each to local workers, who then resold them at ₹5 each to construction sites across the region. This illicit activity has led to the aggressive and continuous demolition of Tipong Colliery buildings.

Tragedy struck on Tuesday at around 1:00 AM when two women, Manju Sah (32) and Sushila Nayak (51), of Tipong staff

line were seriously injured as a wall collapsed while they were breaking a building with hammers. They were immediately taken to Margherita Civil Hospital/FRU by those associated with the brick syndicate, without informing the Lekhapani police, NEC CIL Margherita officials, or the district administration. Manju Sah succumbed to her injuries en route, while Sushila Nayak was referred to Tinsukia Civil Hospital but passed away on Wednesday.

Speaking on the incident, Asom Jatiyotabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) Tinsukia District vice-president Kanchan Borah said that after the illegal coal syndicate at Margherita, local leaders are now dismantling Tipong Colliery's British-era buildings and staff quarters. He described the situation as a reflection of the "irresponsible duty" of NEC CIL Margherita, as the demolition of pucca walls and buildings continues unabated.

AJYCP Tinsukia District Committee has demanded that the local leaders and contractors responsible for looting national property be arrested and that compensation be provided to the families of the deceased.

The incident highlights not only the dangers of illegal demolition but also the urgent need for stricter monitoring and protection of abandoned public properties.

Tezpur University marks 33rd Foundation Day with call for free thinking



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Jan 21: Tezpur University celebrated its 33rd Foundation Day at the KBR Auditorium with a ceremonial programme, beginning with flag hoisting by Prof Amarendra Kumar Das, Vice-Chancellor (Acting) of the university.

In his welcome address, the Vice-Chancellor (Acting) emphasised collective efforts to strengthen the university ecosystem, urging stakeholders to focus on innovation, measurable outcomes such as startups and economic value generation. He also highlighted the importance of transparency, fairness, punctuality and dialogue, calling on the campus community to actively participate in the university's development. Delivering the Foundation Day Oration, eminent scientist, author and popular science communicator Dr Dinesh Chandra Goswami spoke on "Free Thinking and Scientific Temperament," stressing that universities must remain spaces of rational inquiry guided by knowledge. He noted that free thinking requires a foundation of learning and that knowledge should ultimately lead to wisdom—context, judgment and the ability to make appropriate choices.

To illustrate the challenge of communicating new ideas, Dr Goswami recalled an anecdote about Nobel laureate Niels Bohr

and his brother Harald Bohr, highlighting how audiences often prefer familiar ideas over novel ones, yet universities must continue to pursue discovery and innovation. He also referred to Galileo, underscoring the courage and discipline required for free inquiry and emphasised that meaningful research takes time and even a single breakthrough idea can significantly benefit society.

On scientific temperament, Dr Goswami stressed reliance on evidence and testability, noting that claims lacking verification should remain pending until evidence emerges. "A claim should be accepted or rejected only after logical thinking and evidence," he said.

Addressing students directly, he recommended choosing one's own path with conviction, practising tolerance, protecting the environment through responsible habits, respecting others, showing gratitude and reciprocity and making thoughtful life choices. He concluded with a quote often attributed to Albert Einstein: "Only those who attempt the absurd can achieve the impossible," encouraging students to pursue challenging goals with focus and determination. The programme ended with a cultural performance and a formal vote of thanks by Prof Vijay Kumar Nath, Chairperson of the Organising Committee.

7th Annual Children's Bhaona Festival begins at Rongdoi

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 21: The 7th Annual All Assam Children's Bhaona Festival began on January 18 at the Rangdoi D Gaon Bor Namghar premises (Loboram Saikia Public Playground), organised by Rangdoi D Gaon Yuvak Brinda with support from local villagers. The festival aims to introduce children to the Bhaona tradition, the cultural creation of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva.

On the opening day, "Rukmini Haran" was performed by the Jadumoni Cultural Group of Chenijaan. Over the subsequent days, plays by 12 children's Bhaona groups from across Assam were staged, including "Ambar Dehatyag," "Bipra Damodar Akhyani," "Dhruva Charitra," "Dushyanta-Shakuntala Reunion," "Garudar Amrit Haran" and "Daksha Yagna."

The festival will continue until January 24, featuring performances like "Shakuni's Revenge," "Lakshman Barjan," "Shri Shri Rama's Defeat and Sita's Descent to the Netherworld," and concluding with "Bhagavat Darshan" by the host group. The prize distribution ceremony and results announcement will take place on the final day. The festival has attracted large crowds, celebrating Assam's rich Bhaona heritage and encouraging children's participation in traditional performing arts.

Workshop on Assamese letter blending held at Morigaon College

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Jan 21: A workshop aimed at addressing confusion in Assamese letter blending and word formation among students was held at Morigaon College on Tuesday. The programme was jointly organised by the Department of Assamese, Morigaon College, the Morigaon District Sahitya Sabha and the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of the college as part of an initiative to strengthen linguistic accuracy among learners.

Inaugurating the workshop, president of Asom Sahitya Sabha (ASSAM) Xahitya Xabha, Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, expressed concern over the gradual neglect of the Assamese language due to the increasing dominance of English at the preliminary stages of education. He also pointed out that declining reading habits, largely influenced by electronic media, pose a serious threat to the survival and growth of the state's mother tongue.

Dr Goswami emphasised that students must learn Assamese accurately from the beginning to avoid confusion in letter blending and word formation in later stages. He called upon educa-

tional institutions and teachers to take proactive steps to nurture linguistic clarity and cultural pride among students.

The workshop featured Dr Praneta Devi, Professor, Department of Assamese, Gauhati University, as the resource person. She elaborated on common issues related to letter blending in Assamese and suggested pedagogical methods to address these challenges effectively in classrooms. On the occasion, Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami also inaugurated a book titled "Mritur Pisan Kabita" (Poems After Death), authored by the Principal of Morigaon College, Dr Lilakanta Barthakur.

The programme was attended by several distinguished personalities including president of Morigaon District Sahitya Sabha Dr Harmuhan Kalita, Secretary Kushal Kumar Bora, former Secretary Dr Achyut Kumar Das, Assam Sahitya Sabha Central Executive Member Mahendra Nath Hazarika, Vice-Principal of Morigaon College Dr Arunima Sarma, senior journalist Dalim Phukan and noted attendees Reena Deka and Rinarani Saikia, among others.

Pregnant woman dies at Sivasagar Civil Hospital; protests erupt

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 21: Tragedy struck in Sivasagar when Anamika Das Rajput (20) of Batabari, who was expecting twin babies, passed away at Sivasagar Civil Hospital before she could deliver. Anamika was admitted on Monday morning due to labor pain.

According to her family, after an initial check-up, she was sent to the maternity ward. The day proceeded normally, but in the evening she complained of a persistent cough. When she developed severe pulmonary edema, she was shifted to the ICU. A Frukemide injection prescribed by the doctor was administered around 10:30 PM, but at approximately 2:00 AM, Anamika began vomiting and soon collapsed.

Her husband, Bitul Das and mother-in-law, Bina Das, raised allegations of medical negligence,

claiming that she died shortly after receiving the injection. They lodged an FIR at Sivasagar Police Station. Meanwhile, Sangrami Sena Asom demanded action against the hospital staff, citing other alleged cases of negligence and calling for the intervention of the local MLA and MP.

Dr Sadhan Bora, Superintendent of Sivasagar Civil Hospital, refuted the allegations, stating that no wrongdoing occurred. He explained that the case was complicated due to anaemia, pulmonary edema, high blood pressure and the twin pregnancy. Dr Bora also noted that the family should have admitted Anamika at least a week earlier given her pre-existing conditions and that referring her to a distant hospital in a critical state would have been unethical. The MCP report showed that her pregnancy had been regularly monitored at Khelua Block Primary Health Centre.

IAS officer reviews special revision of electoral rolls

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 21: Manvendra Pratap Singh, senior state IAS officer and electoral rolls observer, on Wednesday reviewed the ongoing Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls in Jorhat district. Singh chaired a high-level meeting at the conference hall of Jorhat Circuit House, attended by District Commissioner Jay Shivani, district administration officials, electoral registration officers (EROs), assistant electoral registration officers (AEROs) and representatives of various political parties. The meeting focused on the process of filing claims and objections, making corrections to voter names, deleting names of deceased voters and updating polling station or constituency details. The period for submitting claims and objections, along with necessary corrections is set to conclude on January 22.

Arms, ammunition recovered from 2 persons from Nagaland

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 21: Sixteen rounds of .22 calibre live ammunition, a single barrel gun along with few sharp weapons were recovered from two persons from Nagaland at a hotel at Mariani in Jorhat district on Tuesday night. According to sources, an Eon car with Nagaland registration was also seized from the youths. Legal action was initiated against the two persons and further investigation was on in the case.

Brahmaputra leads Assam's inland water transport push as Kochi meet charts next phase of IWT expansion

IWDC 3.0 to drive green growth in India's inland waterways

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: The third meeting of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC 3.0) will be held on January 23, 2026, in Kochi, Kerala, to review achievements in India's Inland Water Transport (IWT) sector and outline its future roadmap. The session will be chaired by Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, with participation from Minister of State Shantanu Thakur and ministers from several state governments.

During the meeting, the Ministry plans to launch new initiatives to strengthen inland water transport, alongside signing multiple State Support Agreements to enhance Centre-State collaboration for IWT projects.

Key discussions will cover building resilient urban water transport, boosting cargo efficiency, promoting green vessels for passengers, advancing river cruise tourism and implementing digital and sustainable practices. Regulatory frameworks and state concerns regarding ongoing and proposed IWT projects will also be reviewed.

India has a vast inland waterway network, moving over 145 million tonnes of cargo annually. Inland waterways serve as fuel-efficient and eco-friendly alternatives to overburdened road and rail networks, supporting initiatives like Roll-on-Roll-off (Ro-Ro) vehicle transport and river cruise tourism. Of 111 National Waterways across 23 states and four union territories, 32 are operational for cargo and

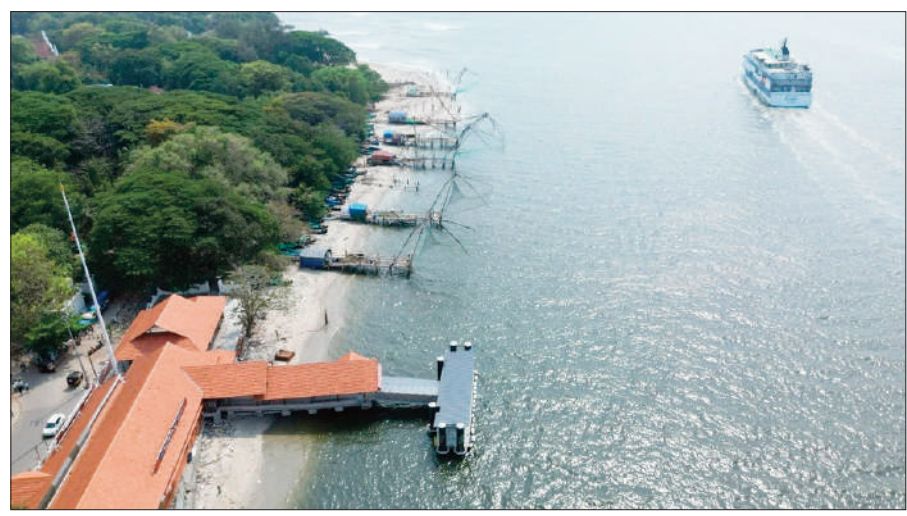
passenger movement, managed by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI). Cargo movement on national waterways increased from 18 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 145.84 million tonnes in 2024-25, while passenger traffic rose to 7.64 crore. Schemes like 'Jalvahak' and 'Jal Samridhi' have encouraged cargo shift to waterways and boosted private sector participation.

"Under Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's leadership, IWDC has become a collaborative platform, aligning Centre-State priorities, translating policies into actionable outcomes, and advancing greener, efficient transport," said Sunil Paliwal, Chairman of IWAI.

Assam's NW2 (Brahmaputra) has

seen steady growth, handling over 98% of the state's inland waterways cargo, including vehicles, construction materials, and over-dimensional goods. Multimodal terminals at Pandu and Jogighopa, permanent terminals at Dhubri and Bogibeel, floating terminals, and assured depth maintenance from the Bangladesh border to Sadiya are redefining sustainable transport in the Northeast.

Investments of ₹ 5,000 crore for inland waterways development in Assam are planned between 2025 and 2030, with projects worth ₹ 1,152 crore already underway. The Kochi meet is poised to serve as a dynamic forum to evaluate the inland waterways sector and chart a clear roadmap for its sustainable expansion nationwide.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

Once you label me you negate me.
—Søren Kierkegaard

Unemployment scenario a concern

December 2025 registered a rise in unemployment rate in India to 4.8 per cent from 4.7 per cent in November despite the seasonal increase in agricultural and allied activity in rural India. Additionally, it should be a matter of concern that unemployment rate in rural India failed to improve in November and December which remained at 3.9 per cent, in spite of the general trend of rise in rural employment every year during sowing of Rabi or winter crops during October-December. Urban unemployment on the other hand rose to 6.7 per cent in December as against 6.5 per cent in November 2025. These should be a matter of serious concern for the Union government. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment for the month of December, the rural Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and Worker Population Ratio (WPR) improved a little. It shows the complexity in the rural job market, which will become worse from now until March, when harvesting of Winter crops would provide increased number of employments to the rural folk.

PLFS data shows a disturbing trend on the unemployment front. Unemployment rate in Current Weekly Status (CWS) was lowest at 4.7 per cent in November, which was 5.2 per cent in September and October, and 5.1 per cent in August. It again has started rising. Unemployment rate among youth in the age group 15-29 worsened to 14.4 per cent in December as against 14.1 per cent a month before. Youth male unemployment rate rose to 13.7 per cent as against 13.4 per cent in November, while female unemployment rate stood at 16.3 per cent in November-December. In rural India, availability of employment is tied with Rainy and Winter crops. Employment rises in July-August, and then October-December. In August, unemployment rate in CWS in rural India was 4.3 per cent which rose to 4.6 per cent in September, and came down to 3.9 per cent in November-December. The data however shows that female unemployment increased from 3.4 to 3.6 per cent while male unemployment remained at 4.1 per cent.

In urban India, unemployment among female stood at 9.1 per cent as against 5.9 per cent for male. Youth unemployment was very high at 18.1 per cent in December as against 17.8 per cent in November. Female youth unemployment stood as high as 24.9 per cent in December while it was 15.8 per cent for male youths which rose from 15.3 per cent a month ago. If the low level of WPR is a clear indication of non-availability of work to our workforce, the low level of LFPR is also an indication of lower level of participation of workforce. Unemployment, worsening unemployment in urban areas, and no improvement in rural areas, is also a signal for difficult days ahead.

Kokrajhar and the anatomy of a mob tragedy

The violence that engulfed Assam's Kokrajhar district in mid-January 2026 did not erupt in isolation. It was the outcome of a lethal convergence of fear, misinformation, fragile social trust, and a long-standing culture of vigilantism that has repeatedly surfaced in parts of the country. What began as suspicion during a late-night journey escalated into mob brutality, arson, multiple deaths, and widespread unrest, forcing the administration to deploy the Army, central forces, and impose an internet shutdown across the district. The tragedy has once again exposed how quickly rumour can overpower reason, and how thin the line is between uneasy coexistence and open violence in socially sensitive regions.

The first spark occurred on the night of January 19, when five men linked to an ongoing road construction project were returning after inspecting a work site in the Aoudang area of Kokrajhar. Travelling along the Gouri Nagar-Mashing Road, their vehicle allegedly drew the suspicion of local villagers who believed the occupants to be cattle lifters. In recent years, cattle theft and the politics surrounding it have become highly charged issues, often leading to instant suspicion and mob action. According to police accounts, villagers attempted to stop the vehicle, leading to a confrontation. Amid the chaos, the vehicle met with an accident and skidded off the road, a moment that proved fatal not only in consequence but also in how it shaped the crowd's reaction.

Instead of allowing authorities to intervene, the mob allegedly dragged the occupants out of the vehicle and assaulted them brutally. The situation turned even more horrific when the vehicle was set on fire, leaving all five men with severe burn injuries. Emergency services rushed them to hospital, but one of the victims, Sikha Jwhlao Bismit, also known as Raja, succumbed to his injuries. He was identified as the son-in-law of contractor Moranda Basumatary, firmly establishing that the victims were not criminals but individuals con-

nected to a development project. The other four, Prabhat Brahma, Jubiraj Brahma, Sunil Murmu, and Mahesh Murmu, were admitted to Kokrajhar Medical College and Hospital, with doctors describing Prabhat Brahma's condition as critical.

The Kokrajhar violence cannot be understood merely as a breakdown of law and order; it is also a reflection of deeper societal anxieties. The recurring suspicion of cattle theft illustrates how vigilantism has gained a disturbing degree of acceptance in certain areas. Once suspicion takes root, individuals are stripped of their humanity and reduced to perceived threats, leaving little room for verification or restraint.

The death immediately triggered unrest across Kokrajhar. Hundreds of people poured onto the streets, blocking the National Highway at Karigaon, burning tyres, and demanding the immediate arrest of those responsible. While police detained a few individuals for questioning and began an investigation, the atmosphere remained tense and volatile. Security forces maintained a strong presence, but the situation was far from stable.

What made matters worse was that the district was already socially sensitive, and emotions were running high on all sides. The incident quickly stopped being viewed as an isolated crime and instead became a symbol of deeper grievances and fears.

Within hours, the situation escalated further following another violent episode near the Karigaon police outpost on Mansingh Road. According to officials, a Scorpio vehicle carrying three Bodo men struck two local tribal residents while passing through the area. The injured locals sustained grievous injuries, instantly provoking outrage among nearby villagers. As stones were hurled at the vehicle, the driver reportedly lost control, causing the car to veer off the road and fall into a ditch. The occupants were dragged out by the crowd, and the driver was again identified as Sikha Jwhlao Bismit, who was lynched, according to police accounts. The two other

passengers were rescued by security personnel and hospitalised.

The violence took an even darker turn when one of the injured locals, identified as Sunil Murmu, died of his injuries on Wednesday morning. His death acted as a catalyst for fresh

messaging platforms could be misused to spread rumours, inflammatory messages, and misinformation, potentially worsening communal tensions. While voice calls and fixed-line broadband services were kept operational, the shutdown highlighted the dual

sponses added another layer to the unfolding crisis. The Bodo National Students Union issued a 24-hour ultimatum to the Assam Government and the Bodoland Territorial Council administration, demanding the arrest of those responsible. The organisation also called for a BTC bandh on January 21, signalling that the agitation could widen further if grievances were not addressed swiftly. Such calls reflect both the depth of anger and the pressure on authorities to act decisively and transparently.

At the heart of the tragedy lies a fundamental question: why does such violence recur despite repeated lessons from the past. Weak trust in institutions, slow justice delivery, socio-economic anxieties, and the normalisation of mob action have created an environment where suspicion easily turns lethal. When people believe that immediate violence is more effective than legal recourse, the social contract collapses, and chaos fills the vacuum.

The challenge before the Assam government and district administration now extends beyond restoring temporary calm. It requires credible investigations, swift prosecution of those involved, and consistent communication with communities to rebuild trust. Internet shutdowns and force deployment may suppress unrest, but they cannot address the underlying causes. Long-term peace will depend on reaffirming the primacy of law, countering misinformation, and ensuring that development and security go hand in hand with social dialogue.

The Kokrajhar tragedy stands as a grim reminder of the cost of fear-driven violence. Lives have been lost, families shattered, and communal wounds reopened. Unless the deeper roots of vigilantism and mistrust are confronted, such incidents risk repeating themselves. For a region striving for stability and development, the lesson is stark: suspicion unchecked can destroy far more than it claims to protect. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpld@gmail.com)*

Act East Policy and the Northeast

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

India's map has always considered the Northeast as a strategic and sensitive region, yet for a long time this area has carried a grievance in the minds of the local people that it has not received the importance it deserved in the central government's policy-making. Geographically connected to the mainland only by a narrow corridor, this region has often felt a kind of economic and psychological isolation. With the aim of removing this isolation and integrating the Northeast with the flow of the global economy, the central government revised the earlier "Look East" or "Looking East" policy and introduced the "Act East" or "Acting East" policy.

The core philosophy of this policy is not limited to establishing diplomatic relations or maintaining good relations with neighbouring countries; rather, it carries a deeper economic and social significance. This policy envisions the region not merely as India's distant periphery but as the gateway to the rapidly growing economies of Southeast Asia. When we delve into the depth of this policy, we see that through it, efforts are being made to transform the region's natural resources, human resources, and geographical location into a strong economic force. The success of this policy will depend on the government's sincere intent, the participation of the local population, and the rapid implementation of infrastructure development. For the Northeast, this policy has emerged as a message of hope, which can fundamentally change the region's economic condition and help build a self-reliant and prosperous society.

The most important aspect under the Act East Policy is the development of communication systems or infrastructure, which is like the heartbeat for the economic development of any region. Historically, the communication system in the Northeast was extremely weak, as a result of which sending locally produced goods to external markets or bringing essential goods from outside was highly expensive and time-consuming. But at present, through this policy, efforts are underway to build a vast network of land routes, rail routes, waterways, and airways. In particular, the steps taken to establish direct connectivity with neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, and Bangladesh have opened a new horizon in the region's trade and commerce. Constructing high-quality roads in hilly and difficult terrains is a challenging task, but using modern technology and engineering techniques, this work is being advanced at a rapid pace. When transportation between one place and another becomes smooth, not only is there an exchange of goods, but the distance between people's minds also reduces, and the path for cultural exchange opens up.

The possibility for the farmers of the Northeast to sell their produced crops in international markets has infused new hope into the rural economy. Moreover,

infrastructure development will help attract investors to the region, because no industry or business can sustain itself without an improved communication system. This communication system will directly connect the Northeast with the markets of Southeast Asia, which will accelerate the region's economic development.

The economy of the Northeast is primarily agriculture-based, and the Act East Policy has provided a special opportunity for the modernization and commercialization of this sector. The fertility of the region's soil and climate are highly suitable for various types of agriculture and horticulture, but due to the lack of proper markets and preservation facilities, farmers have been deprived of fair prices. Now, with the creation of opportunities to send these produced goods to the markets of Southeast Asian countries, the possibility of a new awakening in the agricultural sector has emerged.

In particular, the global demand for organic farming has increased, and the plan to develop the Northeast as a hub or centre for organic agriculture is an important part of this policy. By adding value to locally produced fruits, vegetables, spices, and aromatic plants and bringing them to international markets, a large amount of foreign exchange can be earned. For this, it will be necessary to establish food processing industries and provide essential facilities such as cold storage. The government has taken measures to provide training to farmers along with financial assistance so that they can adopt modern agricultural methods. Along with agriculture, emphasis has also been placed on the development of allied sectors such as animal husbandry, fisheries, and sericulture. The comprehensive development of these will not only strengthen the rural economy but also attract rural youth towards agriculture and help solve the unemployment problem.

In the field of industrial development, the Northeast has always lagged behind, the main reasons being the lack of raw materials, shortage of electricity, and above all, the lack of markets. But the Act East Policy has shown a new path for solving these problems. By utilizing the region's abundant water resources for hydroelectric power generation, not only will the energy demand be met, but there is also a plan to export surplus electricity to neighbouring countries. Once cheap and uninterrupted electricity supply is ensured, new industries will emerge here.

In particular, small and medium industries, which are built on the basis of local resources, can prove to be a boon under the Act East Policy. Industries based on bamboo, cane, wood, and other forest resources have the potential to receive good reception in the markets of Southeast Asia. Moreover, new projects are being undertaken for the proper utilization of mineral resources such as petroleum and natural gas. The government has invited investors through the slogan "Make in North East" and has announced various tax rebates and

other facilities for this purpose. Industrialization will increase employment opportunities in the region, and along with it, people's quality of life will improve. Of course, while setting up industries, it is necessary to keep an eye on ensuring no harm to the environment. Emphasizing green industries or environment-friendly industries to achieve the goal of sustainable development is one of the main objectives of this policy.

The cultural diversity and natural beauty of the Northeast are an inexhaustible resource for the tourism industry, which has not been fully utilized so far. Through the Act East Policy, efforts are being made to realize this potential. Many tribes in the Northeast have cultural and linguistic similarities with the countries of Southeast Asia, which can help attract tourists from those countries to this region. Plans are being made to create a circuit of religious tourism by developing and promoting historical sites related to Buddhism. In addition, the region's wildlife sanctuaries, scenic views of hilly districts, and various festivals and celebrations beckon tourists from around the world. The development of the tourism industry will create sources of income for local people and help establish their art and culture on the world stage.

However, for this, international-standard hotels, transportation systems, and security are required. The government is working in partnership with the private sector to build these infrastructures. The concept of rural tourism or ecotourism has gained popularity nowadays, where tourists can stay in the village environment and get acquainted with the local lifestyle. This system directly impacts the village economy. If tourism can be developed as an industry, it can become a major driving force in the economic progress of the Northeast.

Education and human resource development are the main keys to the progress of any society, and the Act East Policy has also given considerable importance to this aspect. To build the young generation of the Northeast as skilled and capable, high-quality educational institutions and technical training centres are needed. Under this policy, work is underway to establish new central universities, medical colleges, engineering colleges, and management institutions in the region for higher education. Through educational and research exchange programmes with Southeast Asian countries, students are getting opportunities to acquire new knowledge and experiences. If skilled human resources can be built, they will be capable of finding employment not only in the Northeast but also abroad. Special programmes have been undertaken to enhance skills in areas such as language education, tourism management, information technology, and health services.

The government is also encouraging youth to become entrepreneurs through the "Start-up" scheme. When the human resources of a region become strong, no one can stop the comprehensive develop-

ment of that region. This policy has instilled new hope in the minds of the young generation and is helping them grow as global citizens. The development of educational infrastructure will also improve the intellectual environment of the region, which will be helpful in long-term planning.

Nevertheless, there are some challenges or problems in the implementation of the Act East Policy, discussion of which is essential. With the opening of international borders, there is a risk of increased problems such as illegal infiltration, smuggling, drug trafficking, and illegal import of arms. The Northeast has long been plagued by insurgency problems, and although the situation has become much calmer at present, if security is neglected even slightly, old problems may resurface. Therefore, along with development, strengthening border security and internal security systems is very urgent.

Moreover, there is always a fear in the minds of the local population that the arrival of outside investors and businessmen may pose a threat to their own land and culture. To remove this fear, the government must adopt special legal measures to protect the interests of local people. Unnecessary delays in project implementation, corruption, and bureaucratic complexities often hinder the pace of development. The lack of coordination between the central government and state governments sometimes creates problems. Overcoming all these challenges will be the true test of the Act East Policy. Involving the public actively in this process is the only way to build trust.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Act East Policy is not merely a government scheme for the Northeast; it is a document of dreams and possibilities. Its successful implementation can give this region a new identity on India's economic map. When goods produced from the Northeast are appreciated in the world market, when roads and bridges built here bring people from home and abroad, only then will the significance of this policy be proven. For this, firm political will from the government, administrative efficiency, and above all, active cooperation from the public are required.

We can hope that in the coming days, the Act East Policy will bring positive changes in the economic, social, and cultural life of the Northeast and lead this region to new heights of progress. Only when every citizen of the region gets to enjoy the fruits of development will India's development be truly complete. This policy is not just for looking east but a strong step for marching in step with the east and firmly establishing one's place on the world's stage. In the 21st century, when the Asian continent has the potential to become the centre of economic power, the importance of the Northeast is immense, and the Act East Policy is a bold effort to realize that importance in reality. *(The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Samman - 2025' from the Government of Assam. He can be reached at himangshur198@gmail.com)*

Oxfam has shone a spotlight on the threat the rich people pose to democracy

By: Ben Chacko

The "billionaires' decade." That is how charity Oxfam describes the 2020s, having published research pointing to the extreme — and accelerating — concentration of wealth in Britain and worldwide.

The stats alone are alarming — billionaires' wealth grew 16 per cent in 2025, three times faster than the five-year average; in Britain, the richest 56 people own more than the poorest 27 million.

But the report goes further in pointing to the way the super rich are monopolising political power and distorting the political process, both by entering office and by controlling the media.

The administration of Donald Trump — himself a property magnate — in the United States is the most obvious example, with the close association of "tech bro" tycoons with the US government well known.

Several of these — Elon Musk and Peter Thiel being the most famous — are explicitly associated with far-right politics, and intend to use the march of digital surveillance technologies and artificial intelligence to further subordinate societies everywhere to corporate control.

US foreign policy has always served to enrich its capitalists — companies like Halliburton and Blackwater, as well of course as arms companies like Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, made a killing from the Iraq war — but is now more openly directed to resource theft and the personal enrichment of the Trump gang and its allies.

We see in the Big Oil summit hosted by the US president directly after his kidnapping of the president of Venezuela, with demands for corporate access to Venezuelan oil forming part of the public rationale for the outrage.

We see it too in plans to ethnically cleanse the Gaza Strip and develop it as a Mediterranean resort, and in the creation of the so-called Board of Peace, permanent membership of which Trump has now made contingent on down payments of a billion dollars.

Sharp-eyed observers note that the new board's charter makes no specific reference to Gaza and

implies a far wider remit — "to promote stability, restore dependable and lawful governance, and secure enduring peace in areas affected or threatened by conflict" — and, with members including the head of the US-dominated World Bank and Trump's own son-in-law Jared Kushner, may be intended to serve as a Washington-controlled alternative to the UN security council now the United States is increasingly hostile to the United Nations and the framework of international law around it.

Trump's relations with "allies" rest on the same profit-grabbing logic. It's why enriching US drug companies at the expense of our NHS formed a key part of his trade deal with Britain, and why British and European attempts to regulate the internet — dominated globally by US companies — draw threats of retaliation. It's why he wants Greenland, where the extraction of energy and mineral resources is becoming more practical because of global warming.

Trump's new world order will rest not on sovereign states acting, at least in theory, on behalf of their citizens but on undisguised corporate power. But Britain is on the same trajectory, and the interests of parasitical profiteers dominate British policy too. Only that can explain Labour's refusal to act to bring water into public ownership in line with overwhelming majority opinion, or the stubborn persistence of wasteful outsourcing across our public services.

For the left, the great divide between the suffering public and the obscenely wealthy — the many and the few, to take the Corbyn-era slogan — needs to be the overarching narrative when we explain what is wrong with our society and how we change it.

It explains the fundamental continuity between this government and its predecessor — and can spike the guns of a far right that dances to the billionaires' tune.

It makes the case for the expropriation of private wealth for the public good. Not just to fund services, but to protect democracy — overshadowed more than ever by the power of money. (IPA Service)

Seaweed: A climate-resilient future for India's blue economy

By: Poornima Vengapath Bhattathiri

The production of seaweed, a climate-resilient, nutrient-dense, and high-value bioresource for the blue economy, has tripled since 2000, reaching 32.4 million tonnes in 2020, worth US\$13.3 billion. Asia accounts for 97 percent of global seaweed production, driven primarily by China's offshore farming, mechanised processing, and industrial-scale cultivation. Seaweed offers a unique advantage: rapid growth without fertilisers, antibiotics, freshwater, or a large land area, at a rate 10 times that of terrestrial plants, enabling comparable biomass yields with less than one-tenth the land area. It improves water quality, enhances carbon absorption, mitigates ocean acidification, and promotes nutrient uptake.

Nutritionally, seaweed is rich in bioactive compounds with antimicrobial, antiviral, antioxidant, antitumor, anti-inflammatory, and antidiabetic properties. It provides key vitamins, over 54 bioavailable trace minerals, and high protein content, making it useful in the food, feed, pharmaceutical, and cosmeceutical industries, as well as a strategic resource for national health and nutrition missions, including mid-day meal schemes, biofortification, and nutrient supplementation for women and children. Beyond food, seaweed is also utilised in aquaculture as a feed additive, shelter, and a water quality enhancer. After China and Japan, seaweed production is expanding in Europe, with Norway leading its production, aiming to reach 8 million metric tonnes by 2030. Norway has integrated the industry into the Norwegian Fish Export Act in 2023, scaling offshore carbon capture and implementing a licence for seaweed cultivation.

India, despite its long coastline and rich marine resources, contributes less than 1 percent to global seaweed production due to challenges such as fragmented governance, inconsistent markets, and poor infrastructure. However, building on this global surge, India is now developing a comprehensive policy framework to address these challenges and integrate seaweed cul-

tivation into its economy and nutrition targets.

India's Progress and Value Chain Potential

India's seaweed economy has the potential for exponential growth under a strong policy framework. Valued at INR300-500 crore, the sector is targeted to reach 9.7 million tonnes by 2030. This ambition is supported by government schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY 2020) with INR640 crores earmarked for the seaweed value chain, Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC) (2021) Seaweed Mission, and initiatives by individual state fisheries departments and research institutions, including the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT). The sector demonstrates strong socio-economic potential, with an estimated INR2 billion in turnover and 765,000 days of employment, which supports 40,000 coastal families. Techno-economic assessments indicate that an investment of US\$128 million can scale up India's seaweed (kappaphycus) farming potential to 26,000 hectares, generating US\$96 million in revenue and 108,300 full-time jobs. Seaweed farming can also provide up to 63 percent higher economic returns than traditional aquaculture, which provides approximately 17 percent returns. The revised National Biofuel Policy (2018) highlights its potential as a viable feedstock: a 10-million-hectare seaweed cultivation could yield 460 million tonnes of biomass and 6.7 billion litres of bioethanol.

Moreover, the seaweed sector has a high market value globally, including the US\$5 billion seaweed-based food industry, US\$213 million in seaweed-derived hydrocolloids, US\$132 million in agar and US\$240 million in carrageenan. Leading pharmaceutical, agribusiness, and cosmetics companies, including Unilever, Cipla, and The Body Shop, BASF, and Godrej Agrovet, use these compounds in wound dressings, tablets, jellies, toothpaste, gels, shampoos, stabilisers, and thickening agents. Indian startups, such as Zerocircle, are developing biodegradable plastic from seaweed

sourced from the coastal states of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.

However, despite these promising opportunities, India's seaweed industry is yet to realise its full potential.

Scaling India's Seaweed Economy: Challenges and the Way Forward

Achieving the 9.7 million tonne seaweed economy target will risk remaining merely aspirational unless India addresses multiple socio-economic challenges, including poor market integration, limited income sources for farmers, a fragmented value chain, and the absence of an organised governance framework. Currently, seaweed falls under multiple ministries, each with different rules and priorities.

A key constraint of India's Kappaphycus seaweed farming is its focus on a single product, such as carrageenan or biofuel, instead of maintaining a diverse product portfolio, which creates financial risk. Similar initiatives in Bangladesh show the same tendency. A more resilient model, followed by Algea (company) and Utari Seaweed Cooperative, diversifies revenue by targeting byproducts in biofuel, food, feed, pharma, and nutraceuticals. Scaling up such diversification requires a policy framework emphasising coordinated governance, state-of-the-art infrastructure, research and innovation, and stable markets.

The following measures could help advance India's seaweed economy:

- o Establishing a cohesive policy framework: India's seaweed sector requires a governance framework that integrates infrastructure, innovation, finance, and community development, and is supported by strong institutional coordination. Learning from successful attempts in Odisha, the expansion plan for seaweed cultivation across 384 coastal sites demands state-specific policies that adapt to social and ecological variations, clear guidelines for cultivation zones and permanent anchoring systems, and a regulatory framework tailored to local coastal communities. These policies must adopt a multistakeholder approach that involves industries, local communities, and government. As algal foods and bioactives emerge as a prominent cate-



gory, a dedicated regulatory framework must also address composition, quality, yield, processing, and market regulations. For effective translation of policies, a strong interdepartmental coordination across multiple ministries is essential.

- o Building efficient infrastructure: To achieve the national target of 9.7 million tonnes of production by 2030, seaweed farming must be expanded to offshore and large-scale facilities with climate-resilient designs, improved post-harvest technologies, processing systems, and decentralised cold chain facilities. Strengthening the seaweed supply chain would require establishing designated cultivation zones, decentralised nurseries for high-quality seeds, climate-resistant strains, aggregation points, efficient storage, and farm-to-factory logistics. Sustained funding must be directed to research institutions such as CSIR-CSMCRI, NIOT, and ICAR-CMFRI to encourage the development of improved seaweed varieties and value addition technologies, coupled with environmental safety measures, including waste-disposal protocols and Life Cycle Assessment (LCA). Coastal communities, particularly women, must be supplied with appropriate and affordable equipment such as bamboo, nets, and ropes.

- o Creating a stable market: The lack of standard pricing, an unstable market, reliance on import pricing, and a buy-back mechanism drive significant price volatility in the seaweed sector, leading

to instability in farmers' incomes. Establishing a minimum procurement price (MPP), along with relaxed export restrictions, sustainability safeguards, biosecurity measures, and climate adaptation frameworks, would ensure economic stability and reduce market fluctuations. Developing a standard Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) framework is vital for tracking seaweed quality and quantity and securing funding. Targeted investments in coastal value-addition clusters, micro-enterprises, processing hubs, and startups are essential for a stable market environment.

- o Deploying state-of-the-art technologies: India's capacity to produce high-value seaweed-based products is constrained by limited access to infrastructure for the extraction, processing, and purification of bioproducts, underscoring the need for policies that promote advanced technologies. Scientific seaweed farming has demonstrated the potential to provide a stable monthly income of INR25,000-30,000 for coastal communities. Policies must thus support the development of stress-tolerant seaweed varieties and scientifically managed, climate-resilient farm designs, suitable for India's coastal areas. Planning tools such as hydrodynamic modelling and transport studies can reduce climate risks, while appropriate site selection can help scale operations and improve productivity. Dedicated innovation funds, research grants, and academia-industry collabo-

ration can bridge the funding gap, which remains a key barrier. In parallel, a data-driven approach that geotags seaweed cultivation sites and geospatially tracks biomass from farm to factory can effectively advance seaweed farming.

- o Strengthening community engagement: Strengthening coastal community engagement is central to building an inclusive and resilient seaweed sector. Coastal communities should be actively involved in seaweed farming and value addition activities, with targeted policies for skill development and technical training, particularly for coastal youth and women. In Chilika Lake, Odisha, 100 trained individuals, mostly women, are involved in seaweed cultivation, earning up to INR10,000 per month from a 10-acre area. Establishing institutional mechanisms such as self-help groups (SHGs), cooperatives, and community-based initiatives across coastal regions can promote community-owned, value-added centres to support local enterprises.

Conclusion

Initiatives such as PMMSY and import guidelines are positive steps towards regulating imports and ensuring quality. With the right policies and community-led growth, India can unlock the full potential of its seaweed industry. Advancing this sector will drive economic growth, enhance nutrition security and climate resilience, and foster inclusive growth for the blue economy. (Courtesy: ORF)

Humanifying nature: The ontological crisis in Ladakh

By: Mohammad Asim

Contemporary discourse on Ladakh is increasingly dominated by a visual economy that privileges the aesthetic over the existential. We observe a proliferation of digital artefacts that frame the trans-Himalayan region as a pristine playground for the weary urban soul. This mediated gaze is not merely a benign appreciation of geography but represents epistemic reduction.

It systematically strips the landscape of its complex socio-ecological history, rendering it a passive backdrop for modern consumption.

We are witnessing a paradigmatic shift where the wild is not engaged with but is instead subjected to a process I term humanising. This mechanism forces the non-human world to conform to the logic of industrial utility and anthropocentric convenience. It stands in violent contrast to the indigenous praxis of humanising the landscape, a mode of existence where the earth is accorded the dignity, agency, and relational rights typically reserved for human subjects.

The current developmental trajectory favours the former, creating a fissure in the very ontology of the high desert.

Epistemologies of Erasure

The manner in which knowledge regarding Ladakh is produced and disseminated reveals a structural bias deeply rooted in colonial empiricism. Bureaucratic and academic assessments frequently approach the high desert through a lens of deficiency, categorising the region by what it lacks in terms of vegetation, industry, or population density.

Such a perspective constitutes a form of epistemic violence that silences the rich, invisible architectures of indigenous knowing.

For the Ladakhi inhabitant, the apparent void is saturated with meaning, populated by spirits of the soil and guardians of the glacial streams. When external experts replace these local cosmologies with quantitative metrics, they commit a specific kind of erasure.

The river is stripped of its sentient character and reduced to a calculated volume of hydroelectric potential. This intellectual manoeuvre is the essence of humanifying nature, for it denies the landscape its sovereignty and subordinates it entirely to the demands of human extraction.

Infrastructural Hegemony and Spatial Conquest

One cannot analyse the transformation of Ladakh without critiquing the aggressive expansion of infrastructure that seeks to tame the verticality of the terrain. The construction of all-weather tunnels and arterial highways is celebrated as the triumph of civil engineering, yet these projects function as instruments of domination that fundamentally alter the human relationship with time and space.

The historical engagement with the moun-

tain pass was one of negotiation and humility, a friction that reminded the traveller of their fragility in the face of the sublime. Modern connectivity eliminates this friction, compressing the journey into a predictable logistic equation and thereby humanifying the wild by rendering it docile.

The mountain is no longer a formidable entity to be respected but an obstacle to be bypassed. This shift creates a psychological distance between the inhabitant and the habitat, transforming a sacred geography into a mere corridor for the transit of capital and military logistics.

The Fracturing of Nature and Culture

Anthropological theory has long scrutinised the Western tendency to create a binary opposition between nature and culture, a dichotomy that is historically alien to the Himalayan worldview.

Traditional Ladakhi life is predicated on a fluid continuum where the domestic sphere of the village and the wild sphere of the pasture are imbricated in a reciprocal web of obligation.

Current governance models emanating from metropolitan centres impose a cartographic violence by enforcing rigid zones of conservation distinct from zones of habitation. This policy framework erroneously suggests that nature is a museum piece to be preserved in isolation rather than a living system co-constituted by human wisdom.

We require a robust intellectual movement that empowers the youth to articulate a future where modernity does not necessitate the abandonment of their cosmic roots.

The Anthropocene and the Agency of the Non-Human

The accelerating ecological instability in the region, manifest in receding cryospheres and erratic precipitation, should be interpreted as the landscape asserting its agency against the project of humanification.

These environmental ruptures are not passive symptoms but active responses from a biosphere that has been pushed beyond its metabolic limits. The techno-optimist belief that we can engineer our way out of this crisis is a dangerous fallacy that ignores the systemic nature of the collapse.

We must acknowledge that the attempt to fully humanify the earth, to make it entirely subservient to human will, is an act of ecocide. The solution requires a strategic retreat and an acknowledgement of planetary boundaries.

Governance needs to shift from an anthropocentric model to a biocentric jurisprudence that recognises the legal personality of rivers and mountains. This is not a romantic regression but a pragmatic necessity for survival in the Anthropocene.

Reclaiming the Narrative Sovereignty

The ultimate struggle for the future of Ladakh is a contestation over narrative sovereignty and the power to define the meaning

of progress. Indigenous knowledge systems are frequently relegated to the temporal space of the past, viewed as archaic remnants incompatible with the teleology of development.

We must vigorously challenge this temporal bias by asserting that traditional ecological knowledge is a sophisticated technology of survival perfectly adapted to the high-altitude context.

The decolonisation of the Ladakhi mind involves a refusal to accept the label of backwardness and a reclamation of the intellectual heritage that sustained civilisation in this desert for millennia. The youth must emerge not as passive recipients of state planning but as the architects of a new developmental imagination.

They must possess the critical consciousness to reject projects that violate the sanctity of their habitat, effectively bridging the chasm between ancestral wisdom and contemporary challenges.

We stand at a critical juncture where the distinction between humanifying and humanising represents the definitive ethical choice for the Himalayan region. To continue on the path of humanifying is to disenchant the world, reducing the sublime to data and the sacred to resources, a trajectory that leads inevitably to exhaustion and collapse.

To choose the path of humanising is to re-enchant the world, restoring the mystery and agency of the non-human, which leads to renewal and resilience. The tension between these two modes of being is palpable in every policy decision and every concrete pour. The outcome is not preordained. We possess the agency to alter the course. We can persist in the hubris of forcing the land to serve the human, or we can learn the humility of being human in the presence of a sentient land.

Conclusion

The developmental paradox unfolding in Ladakh offers a microcosm of the global ecological crisis, illustrating the perils of a civilisation that has forgotten its kinship with the earth. We are systematically dismantling the biosphere to render it accessible, stripping the spirit to sell the spectacle.

The urgency of this moment demands a cessation of the machinery of humanification and a deep, attentive listening to the silence of the high desert. This silence is not empty; it is a language older than our industrial ambitions, one that demands a radical shift in consciousness.

We must transition from an ego-centric worldview to an eco-centric ethics. The mountains are not territories to be conquered but kin to be honoured. The survival of Ladakh depends on our capacity to remember this fundamental truth. We must decolonise our minds to safeguard our habitat. The time to humanise the landscape is immediate. The alternative is a sterile silence, permanent and irrevocable. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

What's happening with the volcanoes?



By: Mike Cassidy

The next global volcanic disaster is more likely to come from volcanoes that appear dormant and are barely monitored than from the likes of famous volcanoes such as Etna in Sicily or Yellowstone in the US.

Often overlooked, these "hidden" volcanoes erupt more often than most people realise. In regions like the Pacific, South America and Indonesia, an eruption from a volcano with no recorded history occurs every seven to ten years. And their effects can be unexpected and far-reaching.

One volcano has just done exactly that. In November 2025, the Hayli Gubbi volcano in Ethiopia has erupted for the first time in recorded history (at least 12,000 years that we know of). It sent ash plumes 8.5 miles into the sky, with volcanic material falling in Yemen and drifting into air space over northern India.

You don't have to look far back in history to find another example. In 1982, the little-known and unmonitored Mexican volcano El Chichón erupted explosively after lying dormant for centuries. This series of eruptions caught authorities off-guard: hot avalanches of rock, ash and gas flattened vast areas of jungle. Rivers were dammed, buildings destroyed, and ash fell as far as Guatemala.

More than 2,000 people died and 20,000 were displaced in Mexico's worst volcanic disaster in modern times. But the catastrophe did not end in Mexico. The sulphur from the eruption formed reflective particles in the upper atmosphere, cooling the northern hemisphere and shifting the African monsoon southwards,

causing extreme drought.

This alone would test the resilience and coping strategies of any region. But when it coincided with a vulnerable population that was already experiencing poverty and civil war, disaster was inevitable. The Ethiopian (and East African) famine of 1983-85 claimed the lives of an estimated 1 million people. This brought global attention to poverty with campaigns like Live Aid.

Few scientists, even within my field of Earth science, realise that a remote, little-known volcano played a part in this tragedy.

Despite these lessons, global investment in volcanology has not kept pace with the risks: fewer than half of active volcanoes are monitored, and scientific research still disproportionately focuses on the well-known few.

There are more published studies on one volcano (Mount Etna) than on all the 160 volcanoes of Indonesia, Philippines and Vanuatu combined. These are some of the most densely populated volcanic regions on Earth – and the least understood.

The largest eruptions don't just affect the communities around them. They can temporarily cool the planet, disrupt monsoons and reduce harvests across entire regions. In the past, such shifts have contributed to famines, disease outbreaks and major social upheaval, yet scientists still lack a global system to anticipate or manage these future risks.

To help address this, my colleagues and I recently launched the Global Volcano Risk Alliance, a charity that focuses on anticipatory preparedness for high-impact eruptions. We work with scientists, policymakers and humanitarian

organisations to highlight overlooked risks, strengthen monitoring capacity where it is most needed, and support communities before eruptions occur.

Acting early, rather than responding only after disaster strikes, stands the best chance of preventing the next hidden volcano from becoming a global crisis.

Why 'quiet' volcanoes aren't safe

So why do volcanoes fail to receive attention proportionate to their risk? In part, it comes down to predictable human biases. Many people tend to assume that what has been quiet will remain quiet (normalcy bias). If a volcano has not erupted for generations, it is often instinctively considered safe.

The likelihood of an event tends to be judged by how easily examples come to mind (this mental shortcut is known as availability heuristic). Well-known volcanoes or eruptions, such as the Icelandic ash cloud from 2010, are familiar and can feel threatening, while remote volcanoes with no recent eruptions rarely register at all.

These biases create a dangerous pattern: we only invest most heavily after a disaster has already happened (response bias). El Chichón, for instance, was only monitored after the 1982 catastrophe. However, three-quarters of large eruptions (like El Chichón and bigger) come from volcanoes that have been quiet for at least 100 years and, as a result, receive the least attention.

Volcano preparedness needs to be proactive rather than reactive. When volcanoes are monitored, when communities know how to respond, and when communication and coordination between scientists and authorities is effective, thousands of lives can be saved.

Disasters have been averted in these ways in 1991 (at Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines), in 2019 (at Mount Merapi in Indonesia) and in 2021 (at La Soufrière on the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent).

To close these gaps, the world needs to shift attention towards undermonitored volcanoes in regions such as Latin America, south-east Asia, Africa and the Pacific – places where millions of people live close to volcanoes that have little or no historical record. This is where the greatest risks lie, and where even modest investments in monitoring, early warning and community preparedness could save the most lives. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Cine

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More than 470 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire, according to the strip's health ministry

Israeli fire kills 11 Palestinians in Gaza, including two children, local hospital officials say

CAIRO, Jan 21: Israeli forces on Wednesday killed at least 11 Palestinians in Gaza, including two 13-year-old boys who were collecting firewood, three journalists and a woman, hospitals in the war-battered enclave said. The Israeli military did not immediately comment on any of the incidents.

The two boys were killed in separate incidents. In one strike, the 13-year-old, his father and a 22-year-old man were hit by Israeli drones on the eastern side of the central Bureij refugee camp, according to officials from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah, which received the bodies.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the men had crossed into Israeli-controlled areas.

The other 13-year-old was shot and killed by troops while collecting firewood in the eastern town of Bani Suheila, the Nasser hospital said, after receiving the body. In footage circulated online, the boy's father is seen weeping over his son's body on a hospital bed.

Later Wednesday, an Israeli strike on the central town of Zahraa hit a vehicle carrying three Palestinian journalists who were filming a newly established displacement camp managed by an



Egyptian government committee, said Mohammed Mansour, the committee's spokesman.

The bodies of two journalists were taken to the Shifa hospital in Gaza City, while the third body was taken to Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital.

Mansour said the journalists were documenting the committee's work in the newly established camp in the Netzarim area in central Gaza. He said the strike occurred about 5 kilometres (3 miles) from the Israeli-controlled area.

He said the vehicle was known to the Israeli military as belonging to the Egyptian committee.

Video footage circulating online showed the charred, bombed-out vehicle by the roadside, smoke still rising from the wreckage, with debris scattered about.

Nasser Hospital officials also said they received the body of a Palestinian woman shot and killed by Israeli troops in the Muwasi area of the southern city of Khan Younis, which is not controlled by the military.

In a separate attack, three brothers were killed in a tank shelling in the Bureij camp, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, where the bodies were taken.

The deaths were the latest

among Palestinians in Gaza since the ceasefire that stopped the war between Hamas and Israel went into effect in October.

More than 470 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire, according to the strip's health ministry. At least 77 have been killed by Israeli gunfire near a ceasefire line that splits the territory between Israeli-held areas and most of Gaza's Palestinian population, the ministry says.

The ministry, which is part of the Hamas-led government, maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by UN agencies and independent experts.

The ceasefire paused two years of war between Israel and Hamas militants and allowed a surge in humanitarian aid into Gaza, mainly food.

But residents say shortages of blankets and warm clothes remain, and there is little wood for fires. There's been no central electricity in Gaza since the first few days of the war in 2023, and fuel for generators is scarce. More than 100 children have died since the start of the ceasefire in October — a figure that includes a 27-day-old girl who died from hypothermia over the weekend. (AP)

Wish the UN could do more, so we didn't need Board of Peace: Trump

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Jan 21: US President Donald Trump wished the UN, which has "never lived up to its potential", could do more so there would be no need for 'Board of Peace' on Gaza that he said "might" replace the world organisation.

The newly-created 'Board of Peace' has been established by Trump to support the reconstruction of Gaza.

"Well, it might. The UN just hasn't been very helpful. I'm a big fan of the UN's potential, but it has never lived up to its potential," Trump said at a press conference while responding to a question on whether he wants the Board of Peace to replace the UN.

Trump addressed a packed White House press briefing room on Tuesday on the one-year anniversary of his second term in office.

In his remarks at the press conference, which lasted 105 minutes, Trump said the US has just created the Board of Peace, "which I think is going to be amazing."

"I wish the United Nations could do more. I wish we didn't need a Board of Peace," he said.

Trump said he settled eight wars in the first year of his second term, but the United Nations never helped him in one war.

"I mean, I guess I'm not blaming them. I didn't call them to help,



but I got, you know, the Presidents and Prime Ministers together, we knocked heads, we got along, and they liked me," Trump said.

"The UN should have settled every one of the wars that I settled. I never went to them. I never even thought to go to them. They should be able to settle those wars. They don't. I believe you got to let the UN continue, because the potential is so great," he said.

During the press conference, he again repeated the claim that he settled eight wars, including between India and Pakistan, Kosovo and Serbia, the Congo and Rwanda and others.

Trump has invited several global leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to join the Board of Peace, seen as a rival to the United Nations, that will work to-

wards bringing lasting peace to Gaza and embark on a "bold new approach" to resolve "global conflict".

On Thursday, on the margins of the World Economic Forum, Trump will participate in the "Board of Peace Charter announcement", where nations would be invited to sign the charter, joining the body aimed at Gaza's redevelopment under his comprehensive plan to end the conflict. A spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that the UN has coexisted alongside any number of organisations.

"There are regional organisations, subregional organisations, and various defence alliances around the world. Some of them, we have relationship agreements with," Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, had said Monday.

"Some of them, we don't. We would have to see in terms of details what the Board of Peace becomes as it actually is established to know what sort of relationship we would have with it," Haq said.

When asked whether the Secretary-General has received any invitation to be on the Board, Haq had said, "I'm not aware of any communication that we've received on any of this." (PTI)

EU lawmakers vote to hold up Mercosur trade agreement over legal concerns

BRUSSELS, Jan 21: European Union lawmakers on Wednesday voted to hold up ratification of a major free trade agreement with the Mercosur group of South American countries over concerns about the legality of the deal.

In a vote in Strasbourg, France, lawmakers narrowly approved sending the EU-Mercosur agreement to Europe's top court to rule on whether it is in line with the bloc's treaties. The result was 334 votes in favour to 324 against, with 11 abstentions. The assembly cannot vote to approve the pact until the European Court of Justice has ruled, and this could take months.

The long-sought-after free trade agreement was signed into effect on Saturday. Twenty-five years in the making, it aimed to strengthen commercial ties in the face of rising protectionism and trade tensions around the world. The deal was seen as a central priority of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who shepherded it through a key vote on Jan. 9 among the EU's 27 leaders. "The more trading partners we have worldwide, the more independent we are," von der Leyen said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, pointing to Mercosur and another trade deal in the works with India.

Supported by South America's cattle-raising countries and European industrial interests, the accord is aimed at gradually eliminating more than 90% of tariffs on goods ranging from Argentine beef to German cars, creating one of the world's largest free trade zones and making shopping cheaper for more than 700 million consumers.

France, Europe's major agricultural producer, wanted stronger protections for farmers and has sought to delay the pact. Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot welcomed the parliament's vote, saying in a social media post that the assembly "expressed itself in line with the position that we have defended." (AP)

Iran's top diplomat issues most direct threat yet to US as crackdown over protests squeezes nation

DUBAI, Jan 21: Iran's foreign minister issued the most direct threat yet Wednesday against the United States after Tehran's bloody crackdown on protesters, warning the Islamic Republic will be "firing back with everything we have if we come under renewed attack."

The comments by Abbas Araghchi, who saw his invitation to the World Economic Forum in Davos rescinded over the killings, comes as an American aircraft carrier group moves westward toward the Middle East from Asia. American fighter jets and other equipment appear to be moving in the Mideast after a major US military deployment in the Caribbean saw troops seize Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro.

Meanwhile, an Iranian Kurdish separatist group in Iraq claimed Iran targeted one of its bases in a drone and missile attack that killed at least one fighter. Iran did not immediately acknowledge the attack, which would be the first foreign operation Tehran has launched since the protests started.

Araghchi makes threat in column
Araghchi made the threat in an opinion article published by The Wall Street Journal. In it, the foreign minister contended "the violent phase of the unrest lasted less than 72 hours" and sought again to blame

armed demonstrators for the violence. Videos that have slipped out of Iran despite an internet shutdown appear to show security forces repeatedly using live fire to target apparently unarmed protesters, something unaddressed by Araghchi.

"Unlike the restraint Iran showed in June 2025, our powerful armed forces have no qualms about firing back with everything we have if we come under renewed attack," Araghchi wrote, referring to the 12-day war launched by Israel on Iran in June. "This isn't a threat, but a reality I feel I need to convey explicitly, because as a diplomat and a veteran, I abhor war."

He added: "An all-out confrontation will certainly be ferocious and drag on far, far longer than the fantasy timelines that Israel and its proxies are trying to peddle to the White House. It will certainly engulf the wider region and have an impact on ordinary people around the globe."

Araghchi's comments likely refer to Iran's short- and medium-range missiles. The Islamic Republic relied on ballistic missiles to target Israel in the war and left its stockpile of the shorter-range missiles unused, something that could be fired to target American bases and interests in the Persian Gulf. Already, there have been

some restrictions on US diplomats travelling to American bases in both Kuwait and Qatar.

Mideast nations, particularly diplomats from Gulf Arab countries, had lobbied Trump not to attack. Last week, Iran shut its airspace, likely in anticipation of a strike.

The USS Abraham Lincoln, which had been in the South China Sea in recent days, had passed through the Strait of Malacca, a key waterway connecting the South China Sea and Indian Ocean, by Tuesday, ship-tracking data showed.

A US Navy official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the aircraft carrier and three accompanying destroyers were heading west.

While naval and other defence officials stopped short of saying the carrier strike group was headed to the Middle East, its current heading and location in the Indian Ocean means it is only days away from moving into the region. Meanwhile, US military images released in recent days showed F-15E Strike Eagles arriving in the Mideast and forces in the region moving a HIMARS missile system, the type used with great success by Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion in the country in 2022. (AP)

Twin Pandas to return to China amid diplomatic tensions with Japan

BEIJING, Jan 21: Twin pandas loved by the Japanese public are due to be sent back to their Chinese habitat next week amid the Beijing-Tokyo diplomatic spat, even as China on Wednesday hinted that it is unlikely to send replacements.

Based on the agreement between China and Japan, giant pandas Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei, living in Ueno Zoo in Tokyo, will return to China as scheduled before February, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing here.

"I know giant pandas are loved by many in Japan, and we welcome Japanese friends to come visit them in China," he said in apparent indication that Beijing, which is angry over remarks on Taiwan by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, will unlikely send any replacements.

With two fluffy bears to be repatriated to China, Japan may have to be without its much-loved pandas for the first time since 1972.

The twin pandas at a zoo in Tokyo will depart for China on January 27, the Tokyo government announced on Monday, marking for the first time in about half a century that Japan will be without any pandas -- long viewed as a symbol of Japan-Sino friendship.

Xiao Xiao and his sister, Lei Lei, will be transported from the Ueno Zoological Gardens and will arrive at a facility in China housing their elder sister, Xiang Xiang, on January 28, Japanese news agency Kyodo reported.

Online applications to view Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei have already closed, with demand for the final viewing day on Sunday reaching 24.6 times the available slots.

The twin pandas were born in 2021 to their mother Shin Shin and her mate, Ri Ri, both of whom were on loan to Japan for breeding research. Ownership of the cubs was left with China despite their birth in Japan.

Since the first pair of giant pandas arrived in Japan from China in 1972 to commemorate the normalisation of diplomatic ties, the iconic bears have won the hearts of many in Japan and brought economic benefits as tourist attractions.

However, Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei became casualties of the escalating war of words between Beijing and Tokyo over Takaichi's remarks in parliament on November 7 that a Taiwan contingency could be a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan that may lead to action from the country's defence forces in support of the United States. (PTI)

Bangladesh court sets Feb 9 for charge framing in sedition case against ousted PM Hasina

DHAKA, Jan 21: A Bangladesh court on Wednesday set February 9 as the date for holding another hearing on charge framing in a sedition case filed against ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 285 others.

The case relates to allegations that Hasina and several hundred Awami League members took part in a virtual meeting of a group called the 'Joy Bangla Brigade' in December 2024, during which they allegedly plotted to overthrow the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government.

Judge Md Abdus Salam of Dhaka Special Judge Court-9 passed the order, allowing separate pleas from the defence in this connection, state-run Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported.

Of the 286 accused, 259, including ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, are still at large and are tried in absentia.

On October 14 last year, the court ordered

publication of notices in newspapers asking the fugitives, including Hasina, to appear before the court.

According to the case statement, on December 19, 2024, a virtual meeting titled "Joy Bangla Brigade" was held, where participants allegedly vowed to wage a civil war to reinstall Hasina as the country's prime minister.

A total of 577 individuals at home and abroad joined the Zoom meeting, expressing their commitment to follow her directives.

The CID investigation found that the online meeting, hosted by US Awami League leader Dr Rabbi Alam, contained discussions that aimed to resist the lawful government and incited rebellion against the state, BSS reported.

CID ASP Md Enamul Haque filed the sedition case against Hasina and 72 others with the court on March 27, 2025. (PTI)

Man who assassinated former Japanese Prime Minister gets life in prison

TOKYO, Jan 21: A Japanese court sentenced a man who admitted to assassinating former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to life imprisonment on Wednesday. The case has revealed decades of cosy ties between Japan's governing party and a controversial South Korean church.

Tetsuya Yamagami, 45, was earlier admitted to killing Abe in July 2022 during his election campaign speech in the western city of Nara.

Abe, one of Japan's most influential politicians, was serving as a regular lawmaker after leaving the prime minister's job when he was killed in 2022 while campaigning in the western city of Nara. It shocked a nation with strict gun control. Yamagami pleaded guilty to murder

in the trial that started in October. The Nara District Court announced Wednesday that it had issued a guilty verdict and sentenced Yamagami to life in prison, as prosecutors requested.

Takashi Fumimoto, one of the defence lawyers, said the decision did not take into consideration their request for clemency and was "regrettable," adding that Yamagami's legal team would consider an appeal after consulting with him. The shooter said he was motivated by hatred of a controversial church.

Yamagami said he killed Abe after seeing a video message the former leader sent to a group affiliated with the Unification Church. He added that his goal was to hurt the church, which he hated, and expose its ties with Abe, investiga-

tors have said. Prosecutors demanded life imprisonment for Yamagami, noting the seriousness of the attack and the danger it caused at a crowded campaign venue. His lawyers sought a sentence of no more than 20 years, citing his troubles as the child of a church adherent. Japanese law authorises the death penalty in murder cases, but prosecutors do not usually request it unless at least two people are killed.

The revelation of close ties between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the church caused the party to pull back from the church. It also prompted investigations that ended with a court decision that stripped the church's Japanese branch of its tax-exempt religious status and ordered it dissolved. (AP)

In their words: Trump's threats over Greenland draw warnings and profanities at global forum

DAVOS (SWITZERLAND), Jan 21: There were grave warnings from European leaders and expletives from California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Tuesday as leaders at the World Economic Forum grappled with the Greenland crisis and heightened concerns over global trade.

The gathering in Davos, Switzerland, comes as US President Donald Trump continues to push for the seizure of Greenland and the imposition of related trade tariffs.

French President Emmanuel Macron, wearing aviator sunglasses because of an eye infection, warned of a "new colonial approach" that would undermine decades of collaboration.

Mark Carney, the Canadian prime minister and former central banker, urged countries below the top tier of global power to continue multilateral cooperation with a new, "dense web of connections."

And in the forum's entrance hall, Newsom was the most blunt, telling European leaders: "It's time to get serious and stop being complacent. It's time to stand tall and

firm — have a backbone."

Here's a look at what attendees said:

Gavin Newsom

"I can't take this complicity. People rolling over. I should've brought a bunch of knee pads for all the world leaders," the California governor and prominent Democrat said. "I hope people understand how pathetic they look on the world stage. I mean, at least from an American perspective, it's embarrassing." He added: "Diplomacy with Donald Trump? He's a T-Rex. You mate with him or he devours you. One or the other ... Wake up! Where the hell has everybody been? Stop with this (expletive) diplomacy of sort of niceties and somehow we're all going to figure it out, saying one thing privately and another publicly. Have some spine, some goddamn (expletive)."

Emmanuel Macron

Before expressing his concern, the French president began his address with a joke: "It's a time of peace, stability and predictability."

Warning major powers against the temptation of modern colonial

adventures, he added: "It's a shift towards a world without rules. Where international law is trampled underfoot and where the only law that seems to matter is that of the strongest, and imperial ambitions are resurfacing."

Then he took aim at the Trump administration, denouncing "competition from the United States of America, through trade agreements that undermine our export interests, demand maximum concessions, and openly aim to weaken and subordinate Europe, combined with an endless accumulation of new tariffs that are fundamentally unacceptable, even more so when they are used as leverage against territorial sovereignty."

Mark Carney

"Great powers can afford for now to go it alone. They have the market size, the military capacity, and the leverage to dictate terms. Middle powers do not," the Canadian prime minister said.

"In a world of great power rivalry, the countries in between have a choice: compete with each other for favor or to combine to create a third path with impact," he



said. "(We) argue the middle powers must act together because if we're not at the table, we're on the menu."

Carney strongly opposed US aspirations to expand its Arctic territory. "We stand firmly with Greenland and Denmark and fully support their unique right to determine Greenland's future."

Scott Bessent

With President Trump not due to address the elite global gathering until Wednesday, it fell to his treasury secretary to take up his defense

in Switzerland. "I think our relations have never been closer," Scott Bessent said, playing down the rift among Western countries over Greenland. "Calm down the hysteria. Take a deep breath."

He added: "We are in the middle of President Trump's policies. And of course, Europe is an ally, the US-NATO membership is unquestioned. We are partners in trying to stop this tragic war between Russia and Ukraine, but that does not

mean that we cannot have disagreements on the future of Greenland."

Bart De Wever

Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever said that with Trump's Greenland provocations, "so many red lines have been crossed" in Europe.

"Being a happy vassal is one thing. Being a miserable slave is something else. If you back down now you're going to lose your dignity," he said during a Davos panel discussion on redefining Europe's place in the world.

De Wever said that he and Belgium's King Philippe will meet with Trump on Wednesday when they will plan to press for a return to the old military alliance between Brussels and Washington.

"We either stand together or we will stand divided, and if we are divided, there is the end of an era, of 80 years of Atlanticism, really drawing to a close," he said.

The former mayor of Antwerp, quoting the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, said that in a time of great transformation that it is up to US president if the alliance

holds. "It's up to him (Trump) to decide if he wants to be a monster — yes or no."

Ursula von der Leyen

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said a diplomatic "downward spiral" in the West would only embolden its adversaries.

"The proposed additional tariffs are a mistake, especially between long-standing allies. The European Union and the United States have agreed to a trade deal last July. And in politics, as in business, a deal is a deal," the EU's top official said.

The Commission president said Europe was obliged to respond to international pressure.

"My point is: if this change is permanent, then Europe must change permanently too. It is time to seize this opportunity and build a new independent Europe," von der Leyen said. "We consider the people of the United States not just our allies, but our friends. And plunging us into a downward spiral would only aid the very adversaries we are both so committed to keeping out of the strategic landscape." (AP)

Emphasises citizen-centric governance, role of civil servants in Viksit Bharat Governor interacts with APCS probationers



HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, Jan 21: The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), interacted with the Arunachal Pradesh Civil Service (APCS) probationers at Lok Bhavan, Itanagar on Tuesday. During the interaction, the Governor shared his concerns on key issues such as land management, public transport, waste disposal and encouraged the young officers to understand these challenges from the

perspective of the common citizen.

Advising the officer trainees to adopt a citizen-centric approach rooted in the spirit of service, the Governor said that compassion, dignity and the needs of the people must remain at the heart of governance. He exhorted them to view themselves not merely as administrators, but as architects of Viksit Bharat, contributing towards building a strong, self-reliant and confident nation.

The Governor emphasised that

Civil Service officers should imbibe the passion to move beyond control-oriented regulation and evolve as facilitators of growth, innovation and opportunity. He stressed the importance of ensuring that every policy and welfare scheme reaches the last mile, particularly citizens living in remote, border and underserved areas. Effective governance, he noted, must go beyond files and reports to active listening on the ground, understanding real challenges and

resolving issues with sensitivity and urgency.

Highlighting the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, the Governor urged the probationers to align every action with the goals of inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for all sections of society.

He advised them to leverage technology to improve efficiency, monitoring and transparency, while anchoring decisions in empathy, ethics and sound human judgment. He also underlined the need to continuously strengthen institutional and individual capacities by fostering professionalism, adaptability and a culture of life-long learning in public service.

Earlier, the Director, Administrative Training Centre, Naharlagun, Pate Merik, briefed the Governor on the training courses being imparted to the probationers. A total of 47 officers from the 2025 batch of APCS participated in the interaction. The Governor later hosted a High Tea for the probationers.

Phurpa Tsering appeals youths to excel professionally

HT Correspondent
DOIMUKH, Jan 21: DIRANG MLA and Advisor to the PWD Minister, Phurpa Tsering, appealed to the youths of the state to become good professionals and bring name and fame to their family, community and society, so that Arunachal Pradesh can reach new heights. He was addressing the grand finale of 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Papum Pare Season-1', a singing talent hunt show, held at Doimukh in Papum Pare district on January 20.

Phurpa Tsering said that all efforts made today are for securing a better future and stressed that youths must perform well in the present so that their future does not get spoiled. He noted that several talent hunt shows and youth-oriented programmes have been declared as calendar events and are gaining immense popularity among youths. Due to such platforms, many talented artists have emerged and achieved recognition in prestigious competitions like Indian Idol, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa and Miss India. He urged youths to be professional in their chosen fields and above all, become good human beings to serve society and the state.

He further emphasised the importance of learning from seniors and community leaders and leading society from the front for better living, social change, peace, progress and development. He also appealed to the gathering to discard the use of plastic and replace it with local products in daily life. Phurpa Tsering expressed hope that artists from the state would perform better and reach zonal and national levels, shine on national television and become role models for others. Nyishi Elite Society (NES) vice president Lokam Kani attended the programme as Guest of Honour. Sa Re Ga Ma Arunachal Pradesh's Nabam Abo and businessman Nabam Tadop were present as Special Guests. Chairman of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Papum Pare Season-1, Tana Doll, along with others, also addressed the gathering.

In the competition, Nangbia Elizabeth was declared the winner, while Tadar Tagi secured the first runner-up position. Tana Tach emerged as the second runner-up and consolation prizes were awarded to Tana John and Paul Jamoh.

5th Arunachal Yuva Samanvay 2026 begins

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, Jan 21: The 5th Edition of Arunachal Yuva Samanvay 2026 commenced with enthusiastic participation of youth representatives from 24 districts of the state. The four-day event aims to foster youth leadership, cultural awareness and positive social engagement among young people of Arunachal Pradesh.

The programme was inaugurated by the Chief Guest, Minister of Sports & Youth Affairs, SJETA, Law, Legislative & Justice, Kento Jini, who formally launched the event by lighting the ceremonial lamp. Addressing the gathering, the Minister encouraged the youth of Arunachal Pradesh to channel their energy in the right direction to achieve success in life. He also emphasised the importance of preserving the rich culture and traditions of the state while progressing towards modern aspirations.

Guest of Honour, Mutchu Mithi, HMLA and Advi-

sor to the Minister of Home & Education, urged the youth to become responsible citizens and positive role models for society.

He particularly highlighted the need to stay away from drugs and other negative influences, stressing that a healthy and disciplined lifestyle is essential for personal and societal growth.

Special Guest Chau Zingnu Namchoom, HMLA-cum-Advisor to the Minister of Sports & Youth Affairs and RWD, spoke on the unity in diversity of Arunachal Pradesh. He highlighted the state's rich cultural heritage and encouraged active participation of youth in social, cultural and developmental initiatives to strengthen communal harmony and collective progress.

The programme concluded with the declaration and inauguration of Yuva Kriti stalls, showcasing creativity, culture and skills of young participants.

NGT flags alleged illegal road work in Arunachal's Papum Pare district

ITANAGAR, Jan 21: The eastern zonal bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in Kolkata has taken suo motu cognisance of an alleged illegal road construction in environmentally sensitive catchment areas of Papum Pare district in Arunachal Pradesh, following a report published in a local daily last year.

The bench, comprising judicial member Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and expert member Dr Afroz Ahmad, examined the report of April 22 last year, which alleged that road construction activities were being carried out in sensitive catchment stretches between Ganga-Taipu and Ganga-Tago without proper environmental safeguards.

Taking note of the seriousness of the allegations, the tribunal observed that the presence of the state of Arunachal Pradesh through the principal secretary of the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department and the Public Works Department through its secretary and commissioner, was necessary for effective adjudication.

Accordingly, both were impleaded as respondents No 5 and 6 in the matter.

The tribunal directed all respondents to submit their replies within a month.

On an interlocutory application filed by S D Loda and Tech Tat seeking to be impleaded as co-applicants, the bench clarified that since the case was initiated suo



motu, co-applicant status could not be granted.

However, it allowed them to assist the tribunal by placing relevant materials on record and making oral submissions during the hearings.

The matter has been posted for further consideration on March 27. According to the news report, the alleged road construction had raised concerns among environmental observers and residents due to the fragile nature of the catchment areas involved.

The report highlighted fears of landslides, disruption of natural water flow and long-term ecological damage if such activities continue without statutory clearances.

The publication had also underscored the need for strict compliance with environmental norms in hill districts like Papum Pare, where unregulated infrastructure projects can have severe consequences. (PTI)

ULB conducts training for urban SHGs, distributes water testing and park management kits

Several kits and equipment were distributed to all participating SHGs, who will now return to their respective districts to begin the assigned work

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 21: The Urban Local Body (ULB) Department conducted a day-long training programme for 50 selected urban Self Help Groups (SHGs) from various districts of Arunachal Pradesh and distributed kits and equipment related to water testing, cleaning and park management. The programme was held with the objective of strengthening community participation in urban water management, sanitation and public space upkeep.

Addressing the selected SHG members, ULB Director Hano Taka appealed to them to become leaders in their respective areas and take ownership of the activities assigned to them. He said that SHGs should act as friends of the community and play a proactive role in improving the quality of urban life through their work in water management, cleanliness and park maintenance.

Interacting with the media, Director Taka stated that the training was organised to ensure robust sewerage networks and improved water supply as part of urban transformation. He emphasised that access to clean and sustainable water is a fundamental human right and is crucial for ensuring the health,

wellbeing and prosperity of urban communities. The training, he said, aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals by enhancing water-use efficiency, promoting responsible water withdrawal and ensuring a continuous and sustainable supply of freshwater.

The Director highlighted that the training also focused on prioritising sustainable water management practices. He said that urban SHGs have emerged as powerful instruments of social and economic change, particularly women-led groups who, through collective efforts and shared resources are contributing significantly to livelihoods, empowerment and the overall socioeconomic fabric of urban communities. These SHGs, he added, demonstrate the transformative capacity of grassroots movements in reshaping the urban environment, especially in the area of water management.

The selected 50 urban SHGs were trained in garden and park cleaning, water source and water body cleaning, hygiene management and water quality testing. Taka said that SHG women can play a vital role as 'AMRUT Mitra' in water demand management, water quality monitoring

and water infrastructure operations. This initiative, he noted, would help uplift their socio-economic status and improve their quality of life, while park management activities would benefit the community and society as a whole.

Several kits and equipment were distributed to all participating SHGs, who will now return to their respective districts to begin the assigned work. An incentive of Rs 6,200 per SHG per month will be provided for one year, for which a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with all the SHGs during the programme. The best-performing SHGs will be awarded at the state level and their names will also be recommended to the Central Government for recognition and honour, the Director added.

Nodal Officer-cum-ULB Executive Engineer Chokio Pordung was the resource person for the programme. He delivered the keynote address and explained the motto of 'AMRUT Mitra', emphasising the role of SHGs in maintaining designated parks, testing water quality and reporting findings to the district ULB authority and PHED for timely rectification and correction of water quality issues in their localities.



HT Correspondent

NAMSAL, Jan 21: As part of the 10th Edition of the Pangsu Pass International Festival-2026 and the 80th commemoration of the end of World War-II, a World War-II vintage jeep & bike rally was organised under the chairmanship of Dy CM Chowna Mein. The rally commenced from Pasighat, passed through Roing, Alubari (Tezu) and Namsai, and is scheduled to culminate at Nampong in Changlang district. The rally comprised more than 20 vintage World War-II jeeps, 20 bikers, along with official vehicles, symbolising remembrance and historical continuity. On the third day of the rally, January 20, the convoy halted at Namsai. The participants assembled at Hotel Kinnara, where a flag-off programme was organised to mark the next leg of the historic journey.

The Chief Guest of the programme, Mutchu Mithi, HMLA and Advisor to the Home and Education Minister in his address observed that while the world has undergone immense change, it continues to be shaped by the lessons of the past. He emphasised

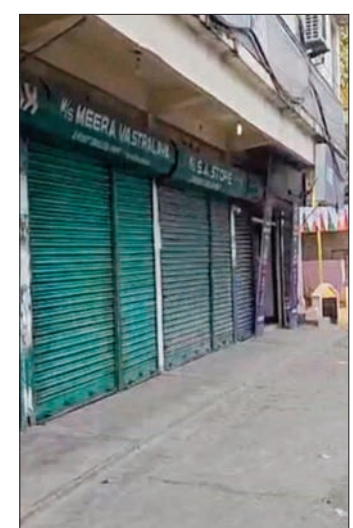
that remembering World War-II is an act of gratitude and reflection, as the past guides the future. Highlighting Arunachal Pradesh's strong historical connection with World War-II, he stressed the importance of honouring and acknowledging this legacy for future generations.

Delivering the keynote address, Oken Tayeng, HMLA and Vice Chairman of the 80th Commemoration of the End of World War-II Committee, spoke about the uniqueness of Namsai's culture, hospitality and cuisine, describing it as distinctive in the entire Northeast. He underlined the historical importance of the Ledo Road and stated that the core idea behind the rally was to highlight its history and develop it as a heritage tourism destination. Terming the rally a "Remembrance Tour," he expressed the intent to include other historic locations of Assam in future editions and wished the participants a safe and memorable journey. Tsetan Chombay, HMLA of Kalaktag, also addressed the gathering and described the initiative as a new and meaningful ex-

perience for Arunachal Pradesh. He spoke on the deep relevance of World War-II to Arunachal Pradesh and Assam and shared that riding in vintage World War-II jeeps created a profound connection with history. He noted that Eastern Arunachal is steadily gaining attention in the tourism sector and expressed confidence that the rally would further promote tourism in the region.

Deputy Commissioner, Namsai, CR Khampa highlighted that Namsai has emerged as an important destination for tourism and heritage. He described the rally as a moving act of remembrance and referred to Namsai as a historic battlefield where courage continues to echo across the mountains and plains. He emphasised that such initiatives help educate younger generations about heritage and culture, while symbolically carrying forward the valuable lessons of the past and the message of peace. The programme concluded with the official flag-off of the rally from Namsai towards Jairampur, marking the next phase of the historic journey towards Nampong.

Bandh in Arunachal's Lower Subansiri over alleged illegal construction of mosques



ITANAGAR, Jan 21: A 24-hour bandh called over alleged illegal construction of mosques brought normal life to a standstill in parts of Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Subansiri district on Wednesday, even as police said the shutdown was being observed peacefully. The bandh, called by the Ziro unit of the ST Bachao Andolan Committee, began at 5 AM.

According to police, almost all shops are closed and offices registered thin attendance. Vehicles also remained off the roads.

Lower Subansiri SP Keni Bagra said the shutdown is going peacefully and no untoward incidents have been reported from the valley.

Protestors are demanding the demolition of two mosques currently under construction at Suluya in Old Ziro and at Pare Ami in Hapoli. Police claimed that there were no proper documents for the constructions and that the works were being carried out through deeds of agreement entered into with landowners.

The SP said the protestors were cooperating with the district administration and police. "They have stayed away from the highway, which is being kept open for commuters. The highway passing through Ziro is the main thoroughfare for people of Kamle and Upper Subansiri districts," he said. However, the protestors have allowed students appearing for Class 5 and 8 state pre-board examinations and Class 10 pre-board examinations to write their tests, officials said.

On Tuesday, Lower Subansiri deputy commissioner-in-charge Hage Tarung issued prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 and declared the bandh illegal. (PTI)

Team Arunachal Pradesh steers global discussions on political parties at international democracy conference

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 21: The Election Commission of India in collaboration with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA) and the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIDEM), is organising the India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026 from 21 to 23 January 2026 in New Delhi. The three-day global conference has brought together nearly 100 international delegates representing election management bodies from more than 43 countries, along with representatives from international organisations, foreign missions and leading academic institutions, including IITs and IIMs.

Team Arunachal Pradesh participated prominently in IICDEM 2026 by leading the thematic session on "Political Parties and Candidates." The session was initiated by Pawan Kumar Sain, IAS, Chief Electoral Officer of Arunachal Pradesh, who set the context and outlined the key dimensions of the theme. He also moderated the ses-



sion, ensuring a structured and engaging flow of discussions among the panellists.

Anne Marel Linger, Member of the OKB, Suriname, delivered the first presentation, offering comparative perspectives on political party systems and candidate engagement in her country. She highlighted global best practices and shared lessons relevant to emerging democracies.

This was followed by a presentation by Masego Sheburi, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer of South Africa. Drawing from his professional experience, he discussed the functioning of political parties

within South Africa's electoral framework and emphasised strategies aimed at improving transparency and inclusiveness in candidate selection processes.

Professor Nani Bath, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Rajiv Gandhi University, provided a comprehensive overview of political parties in India. His presentation examined the historical evolution of political parties, their organisational structures and the contemporary challenges they face within India's multiparty democratic system.

Subsequently, Vishakha Yadav, IAS, District Election Officer from

Arunachal Pradesh, shared valuable field-level experiences. She highlighted the practical challenges encountered by political parties and candidates during elections in Arunachal Pradesh and explained how election management systems are adapted to suit diverse local contexts across India.

The final presentation was delivered by Professor Ashutosh Kumar from Punjab University, Chandigarh, who elaborated on the Model Code of Conduct. He described it as a cornerstone of electoral checks and balances, detailing its importance, enforcement mechanisms and critical role in ensuring

free and fair elections.

Following the presentations, the Chief Electoral Officer of Arunachal Pradesh invited questions from the audience. The panellists responded thoughtfully, leading to an engaging and interactive discussion. Participants noted that the session provided valuable insights through the exchange of diverse global and grassroots perspectives.

The thematic session on "Political Parties and Candidates" concluded on a highly productive note, with participants expressing that they benefited significantly from the discussions. Simultane-

ously, several other thematic sessions were conducted, moderated by Chief Electoral Officers and senior officials, covering various aspects of electoral management.

The Arunachal Pradesh delegation was led by Pawan Kumar Sain, IAS, Chief Electoral Officer, Arunachal Pradesh and included Liken Koyu, APCS, Joint Chief Electoral Officer; Shania Kayem Mize, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer; Professor Nani Bath, Dean, Rajiv Gandhi University; Advocate Nani Anju, Legal Counsel and National Level Master Trainers Rosalind Pertin, Dr Sunand Sinha and Ripi Doni.

'This discussion is particularly timely. As the global economy navigates uncertainty, fragmentation, and rapid technological change, India stands out as a market of scale, stability, and long-term opportunity'

India to keep growing 6-8 pc in real terms in next 5 years: Vaishnaw

DAVOS, Jan 21: India will keep growing by 6-8 per cent in real terms and 10-13 per cent in nominal terms over the next five years, supported by moderate inflation and strong growth, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Wednesday.

Speaking here in a session on 'Bet on India - Bank on the Future' organised by CII in association with EY on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting, Vaishnaw highlighted the importance of simplification of permissions and affirmed that the average time for installation of telecom tower has decreased from 270 days to 7 days, with 89 per cent permissions coming in zero time.

He underlined a need to bridge the gap between the intent and the functioning, and said that as political leaders, there is a need to make sure that the bureaucracy aligns with political power.

He further highlighted the im-



portance of communicating challenges amongst the industry members, mentioning the standardisation of data localisation norms across the US and Europe.

Rajiv Memani, CII President and Regional Managing Partner of EY Africa India region, Chair - EY Growth Markets Council, said India's per-capita income is

amongst the lowest, suggesting that there is a need to increase per-capita income by at least five times by 2047.

In this context, he highlighted India's strategy to diversify its trade relationships, noting that agreements with regions such as the Middle East, the Asia Pacific, and the United Kingdom are be-

coming increasingly important.

He also pointed out the significant reforms undertaken domestically, such as labour reforms and the implementation of GST, which lowered tax rates on consumer food products.

CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said, "This discussion is particularly timely. As the global economy navigates uncertainty, fragmentation, and rapid technological change, India stands out as a market of scale, stability, and long-term opportunity."

A highly diverse group representing global finance and banking, insurance and reinsurance, technology and digital platforms, industrial automation, mobility and transportation, telecommunications, cybersecurity, medical technology, life sciences, food and beverages, chemicals and consumer goods, smart infrastructure, clean energy solutions, and cross-border payments, among others were present at the roundtable. (PTI)

Pixxel-led group inks pact with IN-SPACe for commercial satellite constellation, first launches next year

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: The first set of satellites of India's privately-built national earth observation constellation is expected to be launched next year by a consortium of start-ups led by Bengaluru-based Pixxel Space.

The Pixxel-led consortium, Allied Orbits, signed an agreement with the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) in Bengaluru on Tuesday to build India's first indigenous commercial earth observation satellite constellation.

The other partners in Allied Orbits that will build and deploy the 12-satellite consortium are Pier-Sight, SatSure Analytics India and Dhruva Space.

"By entrusting this over ₹ 1,200 crore national project to a consortium of Indian start-ups, the government validates the country's private space ecosystem and its ability to deliver infrastructure at a global scale," Pixxel Space co-

founder and CEO Awais Ahmed said. Pixxel said by the first quarter of 2027, the consortium plans to have the first four satellites in orbit, with the rest of the constellation rolling out in phases over the following years.

The 12 satellites will deliver very high-resolution optical, multispectral, SAR (synthetic aperture radar), and hyperspectral imaging and provide reliable access to EO (earth observation) data for Indian government users, coordinated through IN-SPACe.

"The Indian government's requirements will always take priority. At the same time, the consortium will also serve commercial customers globally," Ahmed said.

The mission will also allow the consortium to enable global commercialisation of the earth observation data across sectors such as agriculture, environment, infrastructure, energy, and maritime.

Ahmed said the project will be funded by the consortium members using their own capital, with Pixxel contributing more than half of the total investment.

This mission also advances Pixxel's goal of building a full-stack intelligence and infrastructure layer to serve as a health monitor for the planet, the Bengaluru-based start-up said.

Moving beyond occasional observation to continuous understanding, Pixxel's planetary intelligence data will reveal patterns, risks, and opportunities before they become crises, it said.

In August last year, the Pixxel-led consortium won the government contract to build India's first commercial earth observation satellite constellation.

The consortium had placed a zero bid to bag the contract forgoing ₹ 350 crore of government support to design, build and operate the constellation of satellites. (PTI)

ASHA workers' protest throws traffic out of gear in Kolkata, police stop march to health HQ

KOLKATA, Jan 21: Thousands of ASHA workers blocked key thoroughfares in Kolkata's Esplanade and Salt Lake on Wednesday, after police stopped their march to the West Bengal health department headquarters to press for various demands, including a hike in minimum monthly honorarium.

The protesters, who arrived from different districts, were initially stopped in the morning as they emerged from Sealdah and Howrah railway stations, police said.

However, around 1,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) later regrouped at Esplanade and Karunamoyee in Salt Lake and attempted to resume the march, only to be halted again by the police, they said. Police stopped the protesters at several places, including Moulali, Sealdah's Prachi Cinema and Bowbazar, leading to heated arguments.

In Salt Lake, where 'Swasthya Bhawan', the health department headquarters is located, some protesters attempted to scale barricades and

enter the premises, leading to scuffle with police personnel, an officer said.

Similar scenes were witnessed at Dorina Crossing in Esplanade, where the agitators tried to break barricades and march forward, he said.

The health workers claimed they had not been paid for months, and were receiving meagre amounts despite being deployed for a range of medical emergencies and welfare programmes. Vehicular traffic in parts of Kolkata and the northeastern satellite township of Salt Lake remained disrupted for over two hours, as the protesters sat on the roads, the officer said.

Several ASHA workers were detained from Esplanade and Salt Lake after they refused to disperse, with police terming the gathering illegal due to lack of prior permission.

DC (Central) Indira Mukherjee said the protesters were obstructing traffic on S N Banerjee Road in Esplanade. "Commuters are inconvenienced. We have to keep one flank of the road open," she said.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in West Bengal assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, described the police action as "barbaric", and claimed that it was being carried out under the directive of the "inhuman Mamata Banerjee regime".

"They have unleashed a reign of terror and brutality against women all over the state," the senior BJP leader told reporters.

The ASHA workers, who have been on a 'cease-work' since December 23, came to Kolkata from different districts, claiming that Health Secretary N S Nigam had on January 21 assured them of hearing out their grievances.

State government officials, however, said no such assurance was given and no prior intimation about the protest was received.

The health workers had earlier staged protests at 'Swasthya Bhawan' on January 8 and January 12, seeking a meeting with senior health officials over their long-pending demand for a fixed monthly salary instead of performance-linked allowances. (PTI)

Congress to hold dialogue on MGNREGA issue

Workers from across country to participate

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: The Congress on Wednesday claimed that people's rights are being snatched away by replacing MGNREGA and said it is organising a dialogue on the issue in which workers from across the country would participate, bringing a fistful of soil from their work sites.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said a national conference organised by the 'MGNREGA Bachao Morcha' will be held on Thursday and it will be addressed by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi.

"Today, ahead of this conference, workers from across the country are arriving with soil from their respective workplaces," Ramesh said on X and shared video clips of workers collecting soil from their work sites.

Chairperson of Rachnatmak Congress Sandeep Dikshit said the BJP has replaced MGNREGA with a new Act -- VB-G RAM G -- with the Congress continuously opposing it.

In many states and districts, the 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram' is underway, he said. "During the Covid period, the MGNREGA scheme became a lifeline for crores of people. MGNREGA had truly earned a place in people's hearts. In this context, we held discussions with various organisations that have long been working for the rights of farmers



and labourers," Dikshit said at a press conference.

"One single point emerged consistently from all these conversations and discussions: people's rights are being snatched away," the Congress leader said.

He said workers from across the country are arriving on Thursday for a dialogue on MGNREGA.

"These are the people who have used the MGNREGA scheme in their villages to build roads, schools, panchayat buildings, ponds, and water harvesting plants. All these people have played an important role in nation-building through their hard work and with the support of MGNREGA," Dikshit said.

Panchayats themselves decided

and worked for their prosperity and development, and the government stood with them, he said, alleging the Modi government is "destroying" this entire process.

A programme has been organised at Jawahar Bhawan in Delhi on Thursday morning, in which people associated with MGNREGA are coming from every corner of the country, Dikshit said.

"They will interact with us, share the story of their struggle and the strategy ahead," he said.

"The people coming to this programme will bring one fistful of soil each from their MGNREGA work site. After that, all these soils will be collected together and a collective message of struggle will be given," Dikshit said. (PTI)

SC bats for expert committee on Aravallis

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: Observing that illegal mining can lead to irreversible damage, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said it will constitute an expert committee comprising domain experts to undertake an exhaustive and holistic examination of mining and related issues in the Aravallis.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi directed Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, amicus curiae K Parameshwar, to suggest in four weeks the names of environmentalists and scientists who have expertise in mining so that an expert body can be constituted to look into the aspects.

The committee will work under the direction and supervision of this court, the bench said. The apex court also extended its order, which kept in abeyance its November 20 directions that accepted a uniform definition of Aravallis hills and ranges.

During the hearing, the apex court was informed that illegal mining is taking place in scattered places, and the bench took on record assurance of Additional Solicitor General K M Nataraj, appearing for the Rajasthan government, that no such unauthorised mining shall take place. (PTI)

Left parties urge govt not to join Trump's 'Board of Peace' for Gaza

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: The Left parties on Wednesday urged the government not to accept the US invitation to join the 'Board of Peace', which is intended to implement the 'Gaza Peace Plan', saying it will be a "grave betrayal" of the Palestinian cause.

In a joint statement issued here, five Left parties -- Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (ML) Liberation, All India Forward Bloc and Revolutionary Socialist Party, alleged that the Board deliberately circumvents the United Nations and seeks to create a new international structure controlled by the US.

"We, the Left Parties, strongly urge the Indian government not to accept the US-offered position on the so-called 'Board of Peace', which is intended to implement the 'Gaza Peace Plan'," the statement said. The parties said India's participation in such a Board, which "does not respect Palestinian rights, would constitute a grave betrayal of the Palestinian cause". "This Board proposed by US President Donald Trump, deliberately circumvents the United Nations and seeks to create a new international structure controlled by the US," they said.

"The US attempt to override existing international institutions must be firmly opposed. The Indian government should stay away from such proposals and stand resolutely in defence of Palestine and other countries of the Global South that are threatened by US imperial ambitions," the Left parties added. (PTI)

Mozambican rights activist Graca Machel to be conferred with Indira Gandhi Peace Prize



NEW DELHI, Jan 21: The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace Disarmament and Development for 2025 is awarded to Mozambican rights activist Graca Machel, the international jury for the award announced on Wednesday.

She has been chosen by the international jury of the prize, chaired by former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, for her path-breaking work in the field of education, health and nutrition, economic empowerment and humanitarian work under difficult circumstances, the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust said in a statement.

Machel is a distinguished African stateswoman, politician and humanitarian whose life's work is rooted in the struggle for self-rule and protection of human rights, the statement said. "She has dedicated her life to improving the lives of vulnerable communities by creating a more just and equitable society for all," it said.

Born Graca Simbine on October 17, 1945, in rural Mozambique, she attended Methodist mission schools before receiving a scholarship to study German at the University of Lisbon, where her political consciousness regarding independence was first ignited, it said.

Upon returning to Mozambique in 1973, she joined the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) as a freedom fighter and teacher. Following independence in 1975, she became Mozambique's first Minister of Education and Culture.

"Under her tenure, there was a massive increase in school enrolment, with primary and secondary student participation rising from 40% to over 90% for males and 75% for females," the statement.

In the 1990s, Machel transi-

tioned to the global stage and was appointed by the United Nations to lead a seminal study on the impact of armed conflict on children.

"Her 1996 report, The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, fundamentally impacted how the UN and its members operate in war zones. For her tireless work, she was awarded the UN's Nansen Refugee Award and made an honorary Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1997," it said. Her leadership and efforts extending to several high-level international bodies, has brought about transformational socio-economic development, the Trust said.

She is a founding member of The Elders and played a key role in establishing Girls Not Brides. She also serves as a member of the UN Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Goals Advocacy Group.

In recent years, Machel has focused on social transformation through her own organisations and academic leadership. In 2010, she founded the Graca Machel Trust, which promotes women's economic empowerment, food security and good governance. She also founded the Zizile Institute for Child Development. In 2018, she was awarded the World Health Organisation's highest honour, the WHO Gold Medal, for her commendable contributions to the well-being of women and adolescents.

"The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2025 is awarded to Madam Graca Machel, for her path-breaking work in the field of education, health and nutrition, economic empowerment and humanitarian work under difficult circumstances. (PTI)

Humans arguing seems 'silly' when you look at Earth from space: Sunita Williams

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: Astronaut Sunita Williams said space travel has changed her perspective towards life in general, and the idea of humans arguing or having differences over issues seems so "silly" when you look at Earth as "one planet" from outer space.

Williams, 60, who recently retired from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), is currently visiting India. She was speaking at an interactive session titled "Eyes on the Stars, Feet on the Ground," hosted at the American Center here.

During the conversation, she spoke about her most recent mission -- which saw an intended eight-day test flight to the International Space Station (ISS) extend to over nine months due to technical issues with the Boeing Starliner spacecraft -- Williams described space travel as the ultimate "team sport", adding that countries need to work together as "this is our one planet, we are here together".

"When you get to space, I think everybody does this... we all want to look for our home. My father is from India and my mother is from Slovenia. So I'm obviously looking for these places to call home. And that's your first objective," she said.

However, she noted that this initial search for a specific home eventually evolves into a broader realisation of the Earth's unity. "Our planet is alive. Some people think there are just rocks out there, but it is moving. I could see seasons, changes in oceans' colours with algae blooms, for example, or seeing ice formations in the north, you know, in the high northern hemisphere or down near Antarctica," she said.

She said looking at this beautiful, living planet from up there changes one's perspectives towards life. "It changes one's perception about people having any differences. It makes you feel like we are just one, and we all should work closer and easier together," the astronaut said.

"And it actually sort of made me feel like, why would anybody argue about anything. I know, I'm married. I have a husband. We argue. So I understand arguments, but like the reality of it is, like why? You know, it seems so silly when you look at Earth from that perspective," Williams added.

When asked about if she is afraid of anything, Williams responded in a lighter vein, saying, "I'm still afraid of a lot of things. Where I live, there are some bears.



I'm a little bit afraid of waking one of them up. They're sleeping right now. That's good." "So, you have to know your place in the universe and then on Earth and be careful and respectful of the animals that are around you," she added.

The astronaut, who retired on December 27, 2025, capping a stellar 27-year career, during which she completed three missions aboard the ISS and set various human spaceflight records.

Williams logged 608 days in space -- second on the list of cumulative time in space by a NASA astronaut. She ranks sixth on the

list of longest single spaceflight by an American, tied with NASA astronaut Butch Wilmore, both logging 286 days during NASA's Boeing Starliner and SpaceX Crew-9 missions, NASA said in a statement on January 20.

She also completed nine spacewalks, totaling 62 hours and 6 minutes, ranking as the most spacewalk time by a woman and fourth-most on the all-time cumulative spacewalk duration list. She also was the first person to run a marathon in space, it said.

At the American Center event -- "Eyes on the Stars, Feet on the

Ground", she was asked a plethora of questions, ranging from ways to maintain mental health to managing space debris and from commercialisation of the space sector to collaboration of the public and private sectors in space missions.

Born in Ohio to Deepak Pandya and Ursuline Bonnie Pandya on September 19, 1965, the former US Navy captain remains a figure of immense a figure of immense inspiration in India.

Students attending the event noted her ability to make complex professional challenges relatable.

Aashi Baisoya, 21, pursuing a B.Tech degree from a Delhi-based university, who attended the event along with her three other classmates, said, she walked out of the hall "feeling great". "The way astronaut Williams engaged with this audience, showed not only her immense calibre and knowledge of the profession, but how she made it very relatable to the youths, sharing her own story," she told PTI.

Kritagya Arora, 21, her classmate, echoed her views and added that the adaptability that Williams demonstrated at the beginning of the session, as also wonderful sense of humour during the course of the interaction, was something noteworthy. (PTI)

ZPM government influencing the SEC to find an opportunity in its favour, alleges Congress

Congress accuses Mizoram govt of influencing state poll panel over civic polls

AIZAWL, Jan 21: Mizoram's opposition Congress on Wednesday accused the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government headed by Chief Minister Lalduhoma of influencing the State Election Commission (SEC) for the delay in the conduct of municipal polls.

The allegation came days after the SEC announced that it may conduct elections to the 19-member Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) in April or May even as the current term of the civic body expires on March 1.

State Election Commissioner H Lalthlangliana had recently said that the elections have to be delayed due to time constraint and the upcoming budget session, school board exams and closure of the current financial year.

He had also said that the deferment decision was taken independently and the state government was not involved in it.

Speaking to reporters, Congress spokesperson Lallianchunga said that the claim that the government was not involved in delaying the AMC polls could not be accepted as no elections are conducted without consulting the government.

The Election Commission is required to consult or seek the opinion of the government in election-related matters for law and order, election expenses, election duty and appointment of polling officials, among others, he



said. "The ZPM government is influencing the SEC to find an opportunity in its favour as the ruling party does not have the courage to face elections at this moment after it suffered humiliating defeats in recent polls," Lallianchunga told reporters here.

He alleged that the ZPM government forced the SEC to delay the AMC polls citing "lame excuses" due to fear of another defeat after it lost the Dampa assembly seat by-election and Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) polls recently.

Lallianchunga claimed that the SEC has fully completed poll preparedness to conduct the AMC

elections before the end of the current term.

The poll panel had also finalised certain wards/seats reserved for women in May last year and also published the final voter list on January 7, he said.

Lalthlangliana had earlier said that there will be a shortage of manpower to conduct the elections as all officials or teachers, needed for conducting the elections, will be engaged in their office works due to the upcoming budget session, board exams and closure of the financial year.

The budget session of the present state assembly will commence on February 7 and board examinations for classes 10 and 12 will be

held from February to March.

Lallianchunga, however, ruled out the budget session and financial year factors, stating that all officials are never involved in budget preparation or financial matters.

Normally, budget proposals are already submitted by all departments to the state finance department by this time, he said.

Moreover, only cashiers and staffers in the billing sections are involved in financial matters at the close of a financial year, he said.

He further said that there are enough teachers who could be assigned for electoral duty.

"If the government is so concerned about the students or board exams, why does it try to celebrate Chapchar Kut festival at a time when board examinations are going on," he questioned.

If the government is willing, an arrangement can be made to ensure that the elections do not coincide or clash with the budget session, Lallianchunga said.

Former Congress legislator T T Zothansanga, who accompanied Lallianchunga at the press conference, alleged that the ZPM government delayed the elections as it was looking for an opportunity to woo voters by repairing internal roads within the state capital, which is scheduled to be completed by April 15, and procuring ginger and other crops from February. (PTI)

Tripura has to play important role in achieving Modi's 'Viksit Bharat' dream: CM

AGARTALA, Jan 21: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday said that the northeastern state has to play an important role in achieving Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India) by 2047.

Speaking at a programme celebrating Tripura's statehood day, the chief minister said that Modi has set a goal of making India a developed nation by the time the country completes its 100 years of Independence.

"Tripura, one of the 'Ashtalakshmi' (term used for the eight states of Northeast), has to play an important role in achieving the PM's dream of 'Viksit Bharat'. If the states do not perform, the goal will not be achieved," he said.

Saha highlighted the achievement of Tripura becoming the third fully-literate state, after Mizoram and Goa, and said that the small state is also the second in terms of GSDP and per capita income in the Northeast.

"Tripura has drawn ₹ 15,800 crore of the total investment promises of ₹30,000 made during the Rising Northeast summit held in New Delhi last year. The investors chose the state considering its true potential and good law and order," he said.

Saha said the length of the national highways in the state has increased substantially from 198 km in 2018 to 923 km at present.

"Before 2018, the state had only one national highway with a length of 198 km but now it has six national highways with a total length



of 923 km. The 198-km Assam-Agartala national highway will be a four-lane road for seamless flow of traffic along the state's lifeline," he said.

Saha said the growth of self-help groups (SHGs) in the state in the last eight years has been changing rural livelihood opportunities.

"The number of SHGs has increased from 6,000 in 2018 to 54,363 in 2025. We have arranged a revolving fund of ₹ 700 crore. Also, 1.08 lakh women have been made 'Lakshmi Didi' out of the total target of 1.18 lakh. The SHGs are transforming the rural economy," he said.

The SHGs are working under the Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission (TRLM).

Saha said the northeastern state also witnessed massive development in the healthcare sector, with new medical institutions coming up. "A Manipur-based healthcare organisation is set to invest ₹ 900 crore in the state by setting up a super-specialty hospital and medical college. The number of MBBS seats in the state has also increased to 450, and it will further go up," he said. (PTI)

Rio highlights Nagaland's history to Gujarat media team

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 21: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio highlighted various aspects of the state, ranging from history, struggles, economy, social issues and the special provisions enshrined in the Constitution, to a visiting media team from Gujarat at the chief minister's residential complex in Kohima on Wednesday.

Interacting with the media delegation, Rio elaborated about the issue of investors not coming in and the lack of factories and industries in Nagaland, as the state is safeguarded by constitutional provisions in Article 371(A) of the Constitution, which states that the state's land and its resources belong to the people.

"The outsiders are not allowed to own land in Nagaland except on a lease-out basis for a certain period of years for any investment or establishment in Nagaland," he said. "Our natural resources cannot be exploited due to the special status given in the Constitution, but our human resources can be fully utilised," he asserted. Rio pointed out that with the advent of Christianity and education, the Naga youth are talented and well educated today, working not only in India but also abroad on a large scale. He also spoke about the JICA project being sponsored by the government of Japan and the good relationship the state had with the Japanese people in recent years. The four programme is being organised by the Press Information Bureau. Altogether, 15 media persons from different media houses and two PIB officials from Gujarat are on a four-day visit to Nagaland from January 19 to know about the various development activities taking place in the state and its rich cultural heritage.

Meghalaya CM thanks Modi for steadfast support in accelerating state's growth



SHILLONG, Jan 21: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for continued support in accelerating the state's growth and development.

Replying to Modi's greetings to the people of Meghalaya on statehood day, Sangma said it is the PM's unwavering belief in the state and the entire northeast that has brought unprecedented inclusion and confidence, positioning the region as a vital driver of India's growth.

"Meghalaya is deeply grateful for your kind and encouraging words, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji. Thank you, Sir, for acknowledging our efforts and for your constant guidance as we collectively work towards the vision of a Viksit Bharat.

"Meghalaya remains ever willing and ever ready to contribute as an integral part of our nation's journey forward under your visionary leadership. Your guidance continues to inspire me and my government," Sangma said in a post on X.

In his message, Modi said Meghalaya is a land of exceptional natural beauty and a rich cultural heritage, shaped in particular by the unique traditions of the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia communities.

"I would like to convey my heartfelt greetings to you and the outstanding people of Meghalaya on their Statehood Day... Their ethos, especially the deep respect for nature, spirit of harmony and commitment to women empowerment are deeply inspiring," the PM said in a letter to Sangma.

Modi said development in the northeast had stagnated for several years, but gained momentum after 2014 when the NDA government got a historic mandate to serve the people.

"I am proud of the fact that I am the Prime Minister who has visited the Northeast the most number of times. Not only that, the number of ministerial visits by my colleagues is also higher than ever before," he said. Modi also praised Meghalaya for hosting events during India's G20 Presidency.

Noting that Meghalaya will host the National Games next year, he said the Centre will support sporting talent and help strengthen sporting infrastructure to enable the youth to showcase their talent, while also continuing support for music and arts for which the state is globally known.

The Prime Minister also recalled former Lok Sabha Speaker P A Sangma on his 10th death anniversary this year. (PTI)

Rail boost, ₹395 cr infra push and sports-led momentum

Tourism takes centre stage in Mizoram's growth story

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: Mizoram is steadily reinforcing tourism as a central pillar of its economic growth, supported by improved connectivity, sustained infrastructure investment and a strong emphasis on destination-driven events.

By leveraging its natural beauty, cultural richness and community participation, the state is shaping a resilient and high-value visitor economy.

The commissioning of the Bairabi-Sairang railway line in September 2025 has significantly improved accessibility, resulting in a sharp rise in tourist inflow.

The state recorded a 145.54 per cent increase in tourist arrivals between 2023 and 2024, indicating strong market momentum.

Officials said the current year is witnessing an even faster growth trajectory, with arrivals already trending higher even before final figures are compiled.

With rail connectivity now fully operational, this upward trend is expected to accelerate further.

Emphasising the larger economic vision, sports and tourism minister Lalnghinglova Hmar said the focus extends beyond increasing tourist numbers.

He noted that tourism is being positioned as a transformative force for Mizoram's economy, driving rural livelihoods, youth employment and global visibility.

With improved connectivity opening new opportunities, he said the state is moving ahead with a clear strategy to establish itself as a premium experiential destination where nature, culture and community converge.

To encourage longer and more immersive visits, Mizoram tourism has rolled out the Mizoram Tourism Events and Festival Calendar 2026, launched on December 15, 2025.

The calendar brings together major festivals, cultural showcases and sporting events across the year, enabling travellers to plan visits in advance and experience the state beyond brief stopovers.

Events such as Chapchar Kut, the Anthurium Festival, the Mizoram



Travel Fest and winter celebrations are expected to ensure round-the-year tourism activity while strengthening local businesses and community participation.

Tourism Director R Lalrodingi said the calendar has been designed as a market-driven tool based on travel trend analysis, with the objective of encouraging visitors to stay longer, explore deeper and spend locally.

She added that the initiative aims to shift Mizoram from seasonal tourism to a year-round tourism economy.

Backing these efforts is a major infrastructure push, with projects worth ₹395.04 crore currently under execution through central and externally aided schemes.

These include eco-resorts, ropeways, heritage centres, pilgrimage circuits, convention facilities and farm tourism roads under flagship programmes such as Swadesh Darshan 2.0, PRASHAD, NESIDS and SASCI. At the same time, the

Bana Kaih (Handholding) Scheme is supporting tourism entrepreneurs across homestays, transport services, catering, travel operations and souvenir businesses.

Under a special package, 100 rural homestays will be developed over the next two years, placing local communities at the core of tourism growth.

Highlighting the livelihood focus of these investments, the Tourism Director said infrastructure development is being aligned with employment generation to ensure tourism revenue remains within villages and benefits local households.

Sports tourism has emerged as another key component of the state's destination strategy, led by the Aizawl International Half Marathon 2026 scheduled for February 14 at the Rajiv Gandhi Stadium.

After a successful debut in 2025 with around 1,500 runners, the upcoming edition is expected to attract nearly 5,000 national and international participants, strengthening Aizawl's presence on India's

sports tourism map.

Captain Rahul Bali, Managing Director of Innovations India and Curator of the marathon, said the event has been conceptualised as a destination experience rather than just a race.

He noted that national outreach initiatives, route optimisation, athlete engagement programmes and digital campaigns are being implemented to position the marathon as a benchmark sporting event in the Northeast, with every runner acting as an ambassador for Mizoram.

With a prize pool exceeding ₹15 lakh, accreditation from the Athletics Federation of India and enhanced accessibility through rail connectivity, the event is expected to deliver significant benefits to local hotels, transport operators, eateries and artisans.

Through integrated planning that links infrastructure, entrepreneurship, events and sports, Mizoram continues to strengthen its position as a high-value tourism destination grounded in authenticity, sustainability and community ownership.

OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL OK-KERENG HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL HOWRAGHAT, KARBI ANGLONG.

ADVERTISEMENT

Dated, 21-01-2026

This is general information to all concerned that the offline application in prescribed standard forms with self attested copies of all certificates are invited for the local eligible candidates for filling up of Teaching staff posts on purely temporary basis at OK-KERENG HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL, Howraghat, Karbi Anglong, Assam.

Sl. No.	Name of Post No. of Post	Vacancy	Minimum Educational qualification.
1	Subject Teacher (English)	01 (One) Post	Post Graduate from any recognized university.
2	1 Subject Teacher (Geography)	01 (One) Post	Post Graduate from any recognized university.

Important notes:

- Candidates should not be less than 21 years of age and not more than 38 years as on 01-01-2026 for general/OBC/MOBC and upto 43 years for ST/SC.
- The ST/SC/OBC/MOBC candidates need to submit their caste certificate along with their application form
- Incomplete application shall be rejected summarily
- Application must reach to the office of the Principal, Ok-Kereng Higher Secondary School on or before 22-01-2026.
- 5 Candidates having at least 5 years of teaching experience will be given preference
- No TA/DA will be admissible for appearing in the test/interview.

Sd/-

Member Secretary
Ok-Kereng Higher Secondary School
Howraghat, Karbi Anglong.

N.B. Copy for notice board at IS office, Diphu and at school notice board.

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Auction Catalogue No. MPS-LMG-01-26		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-113-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. NHLGMPS-6 at PF-2 of New Halfong Railway station ('D' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for OBC-women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/2	MPS-LMG-HBN-MPS-121-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. HBNMPS-2 at PF-1 of Haibargaon Railway station ('B' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/3	MPS-LMG-KTX-MPS-102-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (KTXMPS-2) at Katakhal Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/4	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-112-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. NHLGMPS-5 at PF-2 of New Halfong Railway station ('D' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for ST category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/5	MPS-LMG-HBN-MPS-120-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. HBNMPS-1 at PF-1 of Haibargaon Railway station ('B' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/6	MPS-LMG-MBG-MPS-35-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (MBGMPS-1) at PF-1 of MAIBANG Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/7	MPS-LMG-JGJN-MPS-21-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (JGJNMPS-6) at PF-2 of JUGIJAN Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/8	MPS-LMG-NGAN-MPS-33-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (NGANMPS-1) at PF-1 of NAGAON Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/9	MPS-LMG-GHY-MPS-124-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. GHYMPS-14 outside the parking lot near SSE/PI/GHY office of Guwahati Railway station ('A1' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/10	MPS-LMG-MANU-MPS-40-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (MANUMPS-3) at PF-2 of MANU Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/11	MPS-LMG-KWM-MPS-11-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (KWMPS-1) at PF-1 of KAMPUR Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/12	MPS-LMG-BHRB-MPS-107-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (BHRBMP-1) at platform -1 of Bhaibari Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only (Unreserved category). (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/13	MPS-LMG-GHY-MPS-123-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. GHYMPS-11 at RMS area of Guwahati Railway station ('A1' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/14	MPS-LMG-JGJN-MPS-18-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (JGJNMPS-1) at PF-1 of JUGIJAN Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/15	MPS-LMG-ABSA-MPS-28-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (ABSAMP-1) at PF-1 of AMBASSA Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/16	MPS-LMG-BPB-MPS-26-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (BPBMP-5) at circulating cum parking area of Badarpur Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/17	MPS-LMG-JMK-MPS-15-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (JMKMPS-1) at PF-1 of JAMUNAMUKH Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)

Auction Start Date & Time: 10.30 hrs. and closing date & time at 13.40 hrs. of 30-01-2026. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Lot wise closing time can be viewed in e-Auction module of IREPS.

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



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UP Warriorz hold edge vs desperate Gujarat in race to WPL playoffs

VADODARA, Jan 21: UP Warriorz will start with a clear edge when they take on a struggling Gujarat Giants here on Thursday, as the race for the remaining two playoff spots in the Women's Premier League heats up.

Former champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru have already sealed qualification with five wins from five matches, while Delhi Capitals' seven-wicket win on Tuesday has thrown the rest of the table wide open.

Mumbai Indians, UP Warriorz, Delhi and Gujarat are all locked on four points, with the net run rate separating them.

Having secured back-to-back wins, Warriorz are ahead of Gujarat who are languishing at the bottom with three losses on the trot.

Gujarat, however, will take confidence from their victory over UP Warriorz in the first leg.

In what was their opening match of the season, Gujarat restricted the Warriorz to 197/8 and successfully defended 207 with disciplined bowling to secure their first win.

They followed it up with a four-run win over Delhi Capitals, again crossing the 200-run mark. But their campaign has since unravelled as their batting lost momentum.

Despite scoring 192/5 against Mumbai Indians, Gujarat lost, triggering a slide that has seen them bundled out for 150 chasing 183 against RCB, before managing just 117/8 while chasing 179 in their previous outing, against the same team.

Their troubles have been compounded by the poor form of their senior batters.

Australian wicketkeeper-batter Beth Mooney



has endured a lean season, scoring just 95 runs from five innings at an average of 19, with a top score of 33.

Sophie Devine's struggles have mirrored that downturn, with scores of 8, 8 and 0 in her last three matches. Anushka Sharma has returned but has not been able to fire yet, denying them the solid starts that marked their early wins.

Skipper Ashleigh Gardner has carried much of the load, leading the team's run charts with two half-centuries. Promoting herself up the order again could be a solution as Gujarat search for a revival.

UP Warriorz, on the other hand, come into the match buoyed by their bowling performances after a stuttering start to the tournament.

After opening with three losses — against Gujarat, RCB and Delhi Capitals — they stunned Mumbai Indians by defending 161/5 and then completed a double over the defending champi-

ons by restricting them to 165/6 in another disciplined display.

Their bowling attack has been as one of the strongest in the competition, with Kranti Goud, Shikha Pandey and Deandra Dottin forming a potent pace trio, well supported by a quality spin unit featuring Sophie Ecclestone, Deepti Sharma and Asha Shobana.

However, Deepti's lack of runs has been a concern, barring a 45 not out against RCB in a losing cause. She has otherwise managed scores of 1, 2 and 0, hurting the Warriorz' middle-order stability.

With Lanning and Phoebe Litchfield capable of dismantling any attack at the top, UP Warriorz will hope to make the top-three in the playoff race.

Teams:

Gujarat Giants: Ashleigh Gardner (c), Beth Mooney, Sophie Devine, Renuka Singh Thakur, Bharti Fulmali, Titas Sadhu, Kashee Gautam, Kanika Ahuja, Tanuja Kanwer, Georgia Wareham, Anushka Sharma, Happy Kumari, Kim Garth, Yastika Bhatia, Shivani Singh, Danni Wyatt-Hodge, Rajeshwari Gayakwad and Ayushi Soni.

UP Warriorz: Meg Lanning (c), Shweta Sehrawat, Deepti Sharma, Sophie Ecclestone, Phoebe Litchfield, Kiran Navgire, Harleen Deol, Kranti Goud, Asha Sobhana, Deandra Dottin, Shikha Pandey, Shipra Giri, Simran Shaikh, Chloe Tryon, Suman Meena, G. Trisha, Pratika Rawal and Charli Knott.

Match starts: 7.30pm. (PTI)

Vinicius wins over fans with 3 assists and a goal in Real Madrid's 6-1 rout of Monaco

MADRID, Jan 21: With three assists and a goal, Vinicius Junior quieted the fans who had booed him again at the start of Real Madrid's 6-1 rout over Monaco in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Part of Santiago Bernabeu Stadium crowd jeered the Brazil forward nearly every time he touched the ball early on in the league-phase game in Madrid, but the boos dissipated as the match went on and were virtually gone by the time Vinicius scored his first Champions League goal of the season in the 63rd minute.

The early boos were not nearly as loud as they were Saturday in Madrid's 2-0 win over Levante in the Spanish league. Both times fans jeered when Vinicius' name was announced in the starting lineup, but this time the game ended with fans on Vinicius' side as he was chosen the man of the match.

Vinicius has been having a lackluster season and some fans viewed him as one of the reasons why coach Xabi Alonso was replaced last week. Vinicius had spats with Alonso, a former Madrid and Spain great as a player who was replaced as a coach following a tumultuous eight-month stint. Vinicius was reportedly the main player not backing Alonso in the locker room.



Vinicius scored his goal on Tuesday with a well-placed strike after getting past a couple of defenders and hitting the upper corner. He did not go toward the fans to celebrate, and instead hugged his teammates near midfield and then ran toward the sideline to salute and hug new Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa.

Vinicius had assists in goals by Kylian Mbappe in the 26th and Franco Mastantuono in the 51st. The Brazilian also assisted with a cross that led to an own-goal by Monaco defender Thilo Kehrer in the 55th. "Vini, we are behind you," read a banner held by a fan at the Bernabeu.

Mbappe scored in the fifth minute to put the hosts ahead. He hugged Vinicius after his second goal later in the first half — and again following the final whistle.

There were no immediate jeers toward club president Florentino Perez like it had happened against

Levante. Mbappe appeared to apologize to Monaco fans after scoring. He was a former Monaco player. Mbappe has 18 Champions League goals for Madrid, the most by any player in the first 20 appearances with the club, ahead of the 14 of Cristiano Ronaldo.

Jude Bellingham, who was also jeered by some fans on Saturday, scored Madrid's sixth goal in the 80th. The England player celebrated by making signs with his hands as if he was drinking. Spanish media reports had said during the week that some Madrid fans complained that Bellingham was spending too much time partying amid the team's struggles.

Vinicius came close to scoring again on a breakaway in second-half stoppage time.

Madrid had entered the match against Levante coming off a two-game losing streak that included a loss to Barcelona in the final of the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia — which prompted Alonso's departure — and an embarrassing elimination against Albacete in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey.

There was a moment of silence before the match in honor of the victims of the train crash that killed 42 people in southern Spain on Sunday. (AP)

Man City stunned by tiny Bodø/Glimt

BODO (NORWAY), Jan 21: Manchester City slumped to one of the most humiliating defeats in Champions League history, losing 3-1 at tiny Norwegian club Bodø/Glimt in a stunning upset north of the Arctic Circle on Tuesday.

The second-half sending-off of Rodri completed a miserable evening for big-spending City in Bodø, a fishing town with a population of around 55,000 and located more than 1,000 km north of Oslo — further north than soccer's top club competition has ever been.

Kasper Høgh scored close-range goals in the 22nd and 24th minutes to set Bodø/Glimt — a tournament debutant this season — on its way to its first-ever win in the competition. Jens Petter Hauge sent the home fans wild inside the 8,000-capacity Aspmyra stadium by curling into the top corner in the 58th to make the score a scarcely believable 3-0.

City replied through Rayan Cherki in the 60th but hopes of a comeback were damaged by Rodri — the Ballon d'Or winner in 2024 — getting sent off in the 62nd minute for collecting a second yellow card in quick succession.

The win was no fluke for Bodø, which constantly pierced City's flimsy, injury-hit defense on the counterattack and had two goals disallowed for narrow offside decisions, while also hitting the crossbar and forcing some great saves out of Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Pep Guardiola's City has spent more than USD 500 million on new signings over the last 12 months but is going through a rough patch, having also lost 2-0 at fierce rival Manchester United in the Premier League on Saturday.

This upset was up there with the most unlikely results down the years in the Champions League, including Moldovan club Sheriff beating Real Madrid 2-1 in 2021, Rubin Kazan winning 2-1 at Guardiola's Barcelona in 2009, and Swiss underdog Basel beating Alex Ferguson's Manchester United by the same score in 2011.

City started the seventh round of matches in fourth place, but could be about to drop out of the eight automatic qualification positions. Teams who finish in positions 9-24 after next week's final round have to go through the playoffs. (AP)

Talatal Cup National Volleyball C'ship begins

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 21: The second edition of the Talatal Cup National Volleyball Championship commenced on a high note on Tuesday evening at the historic Talatalghar premises.

The tournament is being organised by the Akon Baruah Memorial Trust in association with the Sivasagar Sports Association.

The championship was inaugurated by 'Arjun' Bhogswar Baruah in the presence of District Sports Officer Sanjay Upadhyay, senior journalist Manoj Kumar Borthakur, noted sportsperson Haren Duwora, sports organiser Debajit Mahanta, senior citizen Rajani Changkakoti, former education officer Abdul Zail, Dr Upal Dutta, Akhil Ahom, Jitujyoti Gayan and members of the family of late Professor Akon Baruah.

The opening league match saw Tinsukia Railway take on hosts Sivasagar, with the former registering a straight-set victory by 25-16 and 25-17.

Gabriel Jesus helps Arsenal make history in 3-1 win at Inter Milan

MILAN, Jan 21: Gabriel Jesus is already hitting top form just a month after returning from a lengthy injury layoff.

The Arsenal forward was given only his third start this season and he scored twice in a dynamic first half to set his side on the way to a 3-1 victory at Inter Milan in the Champions League on Tuesday.

The victory assured table-topping Arsenal of a spot in the knockout stage of the Champions League and also saw it win seven European games in a row for the first time in its history.

Jesus, who was named player of the match at San Siro, was out for almost a year after tearing his ACL



last January.

Jesus returned in December but has made mainly substitute appearances since then, with his only starts prior to Tuesday coming in domestic cup competitions.

However, Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta named the

Brazilian in the starting lineup at San Siro in place of Viktor Gyokeres, who has struggled to adapt since his big-money move from Sporting Lisbon in the summer.

Jesus fired Arsenal in front in the 10th minute with

an instinctive finish to stretch out his leg and get on the end of a scuffed Jurrien Timber shot.

It was his first Champions League goal in more than two years, since netting in a group match against Lens in November 2023.

Inter leveled eight minutes later through Petar Susic, but Jesus was again in the right place at the right time to again put Arsenal in front in the 31st minute.

Bukayo Saka swung in a corner from the right to the far post, where Leandro Trossard nodded it back across for Jesus to head home.

Gyokeres came on for Jesus in the 75th and scored Arsenal's third, nine minutes

later. "This is great, we've been missing Gabby a lot," Arteta said. "It's going to raise his confidence level, and that of the team's because we now have different profiles in that position."

"And the fact that those players are playing at that level — Victor comes in, he had a great impact as well in the game — it only makes us better and that's what we're seeking."

Arsenal has never won the Champions League, although it reached the final in 2006 — losing to Barcelona.

Arteta's side also tops the Premier League, with a seven-point advantage, and hosts Manchester United on Sunday. (AP)

Tilottama sweeps women's 3P trials; Manu, Aishwary also post wins

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: Tilottama Sen continued her excellent form, winning back-to-back 50m Rifle 3 Positions top spots while double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker notched a commanding victory in T1 finals of the 25m Pistol event in the National Selection Trials, here Wednesday.

Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar, who finished third in T1 on Tuesday, secured top spot in T2 of the men's 50m Rifle 3P at the Karni Singh Shooting Range.

Tilottama made it two in a row in 50m Rifle 3P event with another composed performance in the finals on Wednesday. She shot 361.5 after 35 shots, 3.1 points more than Ayushi Podder of Railways who finished second with a final score of 358.4.

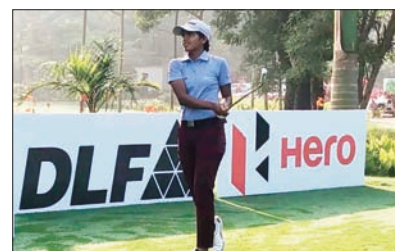
Surabhi Bharadwaj Rapole was third with a score of 348.3. Manini Kaushik, who finished third in T1, took the fourth spot with a score of 336.3, while Ashi Chouksey (326.4), Nupur Kumawat (315.6), Anjum Moudgil (305.0) and Vidarsa K. Vinod (302.8) completed the final lineup.

Bhaker produced a consistent performance in the T1 finals for Group A shooters to secure the top spot with a score of 37, six more than Vibhuti Bhatia of Haryana who finished second with a score of 31. Divya T.S of Karnataka was third with a score of 28.

Tejaswani Singh finished fourth place with a score of 26, after being eliminated in the shootout with Vibhuti. Rabi Samrat (22), Chinki Yadav (17), Rhythm Sangwan (12) were the other finalists. Esha Singh did not start the final after qualifying in the top eight.

In the men's T2, Aishwary posted a comfortable win, shooting 359.7 in the finals. Paris Olympics bronze medallist Swapnil Kusale finished in second place with a final score of 357.7 while former 10m world champion Rudraanksh Patil took the third place with a final score of 347.5. (PTI)

Ridhima grabs lead over Sneha after first day at second leg of Hero WPGT



AHMEDABAD, Jan 21: In-form golfer Ridhima Dilawari was steady over the final eight holes to take a one-shot lead after the first round of the second leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Wednesday. Ridhima, who finished second a week ago in the opening leg, had two pairs of back-to-back birdies — first on the seventh and the eighth and again on the 14th and the 15th. However, she also dropped shots on the 5th and 10th to finish at 2 under 70 at the Kalhaar Blues & Greens.

Sneha Singh, keen to make amends for a not-too-good first leg, had a bogey free round but with only one birdie, she finished at 1-under 71 and was second behind Ridhima. Six players, led by the 2025 Hero Order of Merit winner Vani Kapoor, Jahanvi Bakshi, Nayanka Sanga, amateur Mahreen Bhatia, Karishma Govind and rookie pro Saanvi Somu were tied fifth at one-over 73 each.

Ridhima, who plans to focus on the domestic events on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour and the IGPL this year, opened with four pars before dropping a shot on the Par-5 fifth. She recovered from that with birdies on the seventh and the eighth. Another dropped shot on the 10th meant she was even par yet again.

Back-to-back gains on the 14th and the 15th ensured an under-par round and the lead. Sneha, who won twice in 2025, parred 15 holes in a row before finding a birdie on the Par-3 16th for her sole birdie of the round. She ended with two more pars for a 71. Amandeep had two birdies against a double bogey, while amateur Zara had a bogey start and another one late in the round on the 17th but also had two birdies on the ninth and the 12th.

Nayanika, one of the six players at Tied-fifth, had the most birdies with five, but she also had four bogeys, three of which came in the first four holes, besides a triple bogey on the Par-3 seventh.

Vani Kapoor had a rough bogey-bogey start but birdies on the ninth and the 11th repaired that damage before she dropped another shot on the Par-5 14th.

Last week's winner Jasmine Shekar had a disappointing start with a 7-over 79 that included four bogeys, two doubles and just one birdie on the closing hole. (PTI)

Connecting India through sport: Aizawl Int'l Half Marathon 2026 unveiled

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 21: The Aizawl International Half Marathon (AIHM), the largest international sporting event ever hosted by Mizoram, was formally unveiled on Wednesday at a press conference at Mizoram House in Guwahati.

Now in its second edition, the marathon is set to be held on 14 February 2026 at the Rajiv Gandhi Stadium in Aizawl, marking another significant step in the state's journey towards sporting and tourism prominence.

The launch was attended by key dignitaries and stakeholders, including Mizoram's Minister for Sports, Tourism and Youth Services Pu Lalnghinglova Hmar, Bollywood filmmaker and AIHM curator Captain Rahul Bali, Director of the Tourism Department R Lalrodingi, and Brigadier G S Arora, Group Commander of NCC Mizoram, along with representatives of various supporting institutions.

Addressing the media, Pu Lalnghinglova Hmar underlined the broader significance of the event for the state, noting that the marathon has rapidly emerged as a flagship international sporting platform for Mizoram.

He said the initiative reflects the government's commitment to promoting



sports excellence, empowering youth and leveraging tourism, while projecting Mizoram's capabilities on a global stage.

The stature of the marathon is further reflected in its distinguished patrons, which include Governor of Mizoram Gen-

eral V K Singh, chief minister Pu Lalduhoma, Director General of NCC Lieutenant General Varinder Vats, former Northeast Frontier Railway general manager Anshul Gupta, and RDSO Executive Director Anil Verma.

The 2026 edition is expected to see a substantial increase in participation, with over 5,000 runners from across India and several other countries likely to take part, a sharp rise from the inaugural event.

The marathon is accredited by the Athletics Federation of India and is supported by the National Cadet Corps, Sports Authority of India, Northeast Frontier Railway and other leading national institutions.

Highlighting the evolving vision of the event, Captain Rahul Bali said the Aizawl International Half Marathon has grown beyond a single-day race into a larger movement that promotes fitness, unity and national integration.

With increasing international participation and strong institutional backing, he said, the marathon is helping place Mizoram firmly on the global marathon circuit.

Held under the theme "Connecting India, Developing Mizoram, Empowering Sports", the event aims to strengthen sports culture, encourage national cohesion and act as a catalyst for tourism-driven growth in the region.

The decision to hold the marathon on Valentine's Day adds a symbolic touch, with Captain Bali noting that Mizoram seeks to convey a message of celebrating

love through collective running for health, harmony and happiness.

Tourism director R Lalrodingi emphasised the marathon's role in positioning Mizoram as an emerging sports tourism destination, particularly in light of improved accessibility following the state's new rail connectivity with the rest of the country, which is expected to boost visitor numbers.

Reaffirming NCC's support, Brigadier G S Arora stressed the importance of youth participation, discipline and community involvement in ensuring the success of the event.

Organisers also announced that the total prize money for the 2026 edition has been increased to ₹20 lakh, double the amount offered in 2025, enhancing the marathon's appeal for both elite athletes and amateur runners.

Registrations for the Aizawl International Half Marathon 2026 are now open, with participants able to apply online at www.aihm2026.com. With its growing scale, international reach and clear vision, the upcoming edition is poised to become a landmark event for Mizoram, blending competitive sport, tourism promotion and a unifying national message.

Shubman Gill leads star cast as Ranji Trophy resumes after break

RAJKOT, Jan 21: All eyes will be on Shubman Gill when Ranji Trophy resumes on Thursday after India's Test and ODI captain decided against taking a break and opting to turn up for Punjab against Saurashtra in a key Group B clash here.

After India's unlikely 1-2 ODI series loss to New Zealand, Gill headed straight to this city, setting up a marquee duel against Saurashtra all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja.

The fixture carries weight for both teams, with Saurashtra placed fourth on 13 points. Punjab sit sixth and face an uphill task in a group led by Karnataka on 21 points, three ahead of Maharashtra.

Another India regular in focus will be Mohammed Siraj, who is set for his first outing as Hyderabad captain at his home ground.

Siraj, returning from international duty, replaces G Rahul Singh in the role and will lead Hyderabad against 42-time champions Mumbai in Group D, also marking his first Ranji appearance



of the season.

Mumbai, unbeaten at the top of the group with three wins from five matches, will be without Ajinkya Rahane, who has made himself unavailable. Earlier this season, he also stepped down from captaincy.

The side will continue under Shardul Thakur, with Jammu and Kashmir the only other team still in contention from the group.

KL Rahul is also set to bolster Karnataka when they face Madhya Pradesh in Alur, strengthening the

Group B leaders' push for a quarter-final berth, while Nitish Kumar Reddy will turn out for Andhra Pradesh against Vijay Hazare Trophy champions Vidarbha in Anantapur. India wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant, however, will miss out as he continues his rehabilitation from an injury sustained ahead of the New Zealand ODIs.

In Group C, Bengal, leading the standings with 23 points, will host second-placed Services at the Kalyani Stadium on the outskirts of Kolkata, holding a four-point cushion going into the clash.

The red-ball action in domestic cricket returns after a two-month pause for white-ball competitions, with two league rounds remaining before the quarter-finals begin on February 6.

The knockout leg will be held simultaneously with the T20 World Cup with the summit clash scheduled from February 24-28.

The top two teams from each of the four Elite groups will qualify for the quarter-finals. (PTI)

Tata Steel Masters: Gukesh holds Praggnanandhaa

WIJK AAN ZEE (THE NETHERLANDS) Jan 21: World Champion D Gukesh drew his fourth game on the trot, signing peace with compatriot and defending champion R Praggnanandhaa while Arjun Erigaisi could not break the defence of Anish Giri and drew for the third day running in the Tata Steel Masters, here.

Praggnanandhaa was denied a victory for the fourth day running by Gukesh who played an unusual variation to counter the French defense.

Praggnanandhaa was able to dent white's pawn structure on the queen side but that did not prove to be enough in the end as the players reached a drawn queen and pawns endgame.

With just two draws and two significant losses in the first couple of rounds, Praggnanandhaa is still the bottom of the tables with Giri.

On a day when Aravindh Chithambaram suffered his first defeat at the hands of American Hans Moke Niemann, Nodirbek Abdusattorov staked his claims to beat Thai Dai Van Nguyen of Czech Republic.

Abdusattorov and Niemann emerged as joint leaders on three points out of a possible four while Arjun Erigaisi is right behind them with Uzbek Javokhir Sindarov and Dutchman Jorden van Foreest.

Sindarov was the other winner of the day defeating Matthias Bluebaum of Germany who will be part of the Candidates' tournament later this year. Aravindh Chithambaram apparently ran in to a hurricane called Niemann. The two had played just once more in the Classical format in 2022 and then also Niemann had won. The middle game was intense as Aravindh faced



a dangerous queen sacrifice and it was a very skillful display by the American from this moment.

The momentum never arrived in the clash between Giri and Arjun. While the former is known for his solid-play Arjun's contrasting style did not really make any great difference in the fourth round as the players ended in a rook and pawns endgame where white did not have much to look forward to.

Results round 4 (Indians unless specified): Anish Giri (Ned, 1) drew with Arjun Erigaisi (2.5) D Gukesh (2) drew with R Praggnanandhaa (1); Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 2) drew with Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 2.5); Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 3) beat Thai Dai Van Nguyen (Cze 1.5); Aravindh Chithambaram (1.5) lost to Hans Moke Niemann (Uza, 3); Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus (Tur, 2) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 1.5); Matthias Bluebaum (Ger, 2) lost to Javokhir Sindarov (Uzb, 2.5). (PTI)

Rohit reflects on missing T20 World Cup and tough selection calls



NEW DELHI, Jan 21: Former India skipper Rohit Sharma on Wednesday said watching T20 World Cup from the sidelines for the first time in his career will be a "strange" experience as he reflected on the difficult selection calls and leadership decisions that defined his captaincy tenure.

Rohit and Virat Kohli, the two stalwarts of Indian cricket, now compete only in the 50-over format, having retired from Tests and T20 format.

India will begin the defence of their T20 World Cup title with a match against USA on February 7 in Mumbai. The 38-year-old said the reality of stepping away from a global event hits harder than missing bilateral matches.

"We were talking about this at home, that it will be strange watching it from home, especially the T20 World Cup. From the time it started until now, I have been part of every World Cup, so it will feel different," Rohit said on a JioHotstar show.

"When you miss a World Cup, the reality really sinks in. That's when you realise you're not going to be part of it. However, I will be somewhere in the stadium. It won't be the same, but it will be a different experience," he added.

Reflecting on his captaincy journey, Rohit said one of the most challenging aspects of leadership at the highest level was taking tough selection calls while maintaining trust and respect within the dressing room.

"There have been many such instances of taking hard calls before World Cups. You will not be able to please everyone, but it is important for the individual to know why a decision is taken," Rohit said.

Citing the example of Shreyas Iyer being left out of the Asia Cup and the T20 World Cup in Australia in 2022, Rohit said team balance and multi-skill requirements often

dictated selections.

"We felt we needed someone who could give us a little more with the ball. That's why we went with Deepak Hooda, who was in good form at the time. Shreyas would have felt bad, Deepak would have been happy — that's how it works," he said, adding that he and then head coach Rahul Dravid personally explained the decision to Iyer.

Rohit said such conversations were also held with players like Mohammed Siraj, who missed out on the 2025 Champions Trophy, and Yuzvendra Chahal, who was not selected for the 2023 ODI World Cup.

"For us, it is important to understand how we can make the best use of the 15 players in the squad. As long as you have a valid reason and you explain it properly, that is fine," he said. On building bonds with his teammates during his tenure, Rohit said creating an open and approachable environment was central to his leadership philosophy.

"I always wanted an openness to discuss anything, not just cricket but life as well. There are no boundaries; there is always an open door," he said, adding that humour and mutual respect helped create a relaxed dressing-room atmosphere.

Talking about the upcoming edition of the T20 World Cup, Rohit expressed confidence in the current Indian squad, pointing to continuity, togetherness and a young core as positives.

"About 80 to 90 per cent of the squad has remained the same since the last T20 World Cup. They have been playing together for almost two years now, which creates strong understanding," he said, noting that the average age of the group is close to 25.

"When you are heading into a World Cup, the only aim is to win it. For that, you need open conversations and sometimes hard conversations as well," Rohit added. (PTI)

Harry Brook feels lucky to still be England cricket captain after nightclub incident

COLOMBO, Jan 21: Harry Brook counts himself lucky to still be England's white-ball cricket captain after making the "terrible mistake" of clashing with a nightclub bouncer during the tour of New Zealand that preceded his team's thrashing in the Ashes series.

Brook was reportedly hit by a bouncer after being denied entry to a club in Wellington on Oct. 31, the day before the third and last one-day international against New Zealand.

He was fined about 30,000 pounds (\$40,300) at the time by the England and Wales Cricket Board and given a final warning for his future conduct. He was not stripped of the white-ball captaincy, though, and was retained as test vice-captain for the Ashes won by Australia 4-1.

"I made a terrible mistake, not only as a player, but as a captain," Brook said Wednesday on the eve of the first match in England's six-game white-ball tour of Sri Lanka. "It's very unprofessional and I should be leading from the front and showing the players how it should be as a professional cricketer and a captain and I put myself in a bad situation."

"I want to say sorry to my teammates, to all the fans that travel far



and wide and spend a lot of money to watch us play cricket. We went out for a couple of drinks beforehand and then I took it upon myself to go out for a few more and I was on my own there."

Brook said he would have understood if he'd lost the captaincy after informing the ECB about what had happened on the night out.

"(Resigning) never came into my mind," he said. "I left that decision to the hierarchy and look, if they'd have sacked me from being captain, then I'd have been perfectly fine with it as long as I was still playing

cricket for England.

On being lucky to still have the captaincy, Brook added: "Probably slightly. Even if I had been sacked, I'd have held my hands up and said, Look, I've made the mistake."

England is in Sri Lanka to play three ODIs — starting Thursday — and three T20s in preparation for the T20 World Cup that begins on Feb. 7. The tournament takes place in India and Sri Lanka.

"I think I've got a little bit of work to do to try and regain the trust of the players. I said sorry to them yesterday," Brook said. (AP)

Shoaib Malik looks for coaching or administrative role in PSL

KARACHI, Jan 21: Former Pakistan captain Shoaib Malik is expected to take up a coaching assignment or an administrative role with the Sialkot franchise in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) after announcing his retirement from the T20 tournament as a player.

The 43-year-old Malik on Tuesday announced his retirement as a player from the PSL after appearing in the league for 10-years.

He has already announced his retirement from international cricket.

"Shoaib is expected to be part of the PSL 11 in a management or coaching role with the new franchise, Sialkot," a source close to

the player said.

Malik who hails from Sialkot, has led them in domestic cricket and in the Champions League and captained them to several national T20 titles before the launch of the PSL in 2016.

"The owners of the Sialkot franchise are keen to have his expertise to build their side for the PSL," the source said.

He said that Malik himself is interested in working with the Sialkot franchise and could officially join them in a key post soon.

Malik earned a name for himself as a specialist white-ball format player, scoring close to 10,000 runs in ODIs and T20Is in his career. (PTI)

KKR appoints Dishant Yagnik as fielding coach ahead of IPL 2026

KOLKATA, Jan 21: Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) on Wednesday appointed former wicketkeeper-batter Dishant Yagnik as the fielding coach of the team ahead of IPL 2026.

KKR said Yagnik would bring a wealth of experience and a sharp eye for fielding excellence to the team.

"Yagnik is set to bring a wealth of experience and a sharp eye for fielding excellence to KKR, with the franchise set to enter the IPL with a fresh, new-look support staff unit led by Abhishek Nayar (head coach), DJ Bravo (mentor) Shane Watson (assistant coach), Tim Southee (bowling coach) and Andre Russell (power coach)," KKR said in a statement.

"Yagnik's transition to KKR ahead of the upcoming IPL marks an exciting new chapter in the former cricketer's coaching journey."

A wicketkeeper-batter in his playing days,



Yagnik enjoyed a solid domestic career representing Rajasthan and also made 25 IPL appearances between 2011 and 2014. Since his retirement, he has continued to be a part of the IPL ecosystem as fielding coach across several seasons.

The IPL 2026 is set to be held in the March 26 to May 31 window. (PTI)

ETPL to open new frontiers for cricket in Europe: Steve Waugh

NAGPUR, Jan 21: Steve Waugh has dabbled in business ventures in the two decades since calling time on his international career, but owning a franchise in the European T20 Premier League is a "challenge" the former Australia captain has embraced, with a larger mission of expanding cricket's footprint across the continent.

The inaugural ETPL marks a significant step for the game in a region long considered underdeveloped in cricketing terms.

The league will have active involvement from the cricket boards of Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands, while its ownership group features a mix of global sporting names, including legendary Australian hockey Olympian Jamie Dwyer, former New Zealand seamer Kyle Mills and flamboyant Australian batter Glenn Maxwell.

For Waugh, who owns the Amsterdam Flames franchise, the decision to get involved was both strategic and deeply personal.

"To me, Europe is the last frontier of cricket, and that's why I'm involved," Waugh told PTI in an exclusive interaction.

"Yes, it was a fairly straightforward decision to get involved in the European T20."

"From a business perspective, I've actually been involved in business for the last 25 years since I



retired. "I didn't really go down the traditional cricket pathway

The former skipper explained that his post-retirement journey has revolved around independent ventures rather than formal roles within cricket administration.

"I've been focused on my own ventures, including selling and writing books. This is a great challenge for me. It's a bit of a change from what I've

been doing, but I've been looking for a reason to get back into cricket," he added.

While Waugh has undertaken mentoring roles in the past, he believes the ETPL offers something fundamentally different with a chance to break new ground for the sport.

"I've done some mentoring in the past, but this really excites me. It's a new frontier for cricket in Europe -- taking the global game there to expand

it and find new cricketers. For me, being part of a franchise like the Amsterdam Flames is really exciting," he added.

Waugh underlined that his enduring passion for the game extends beyond nostalgia, focusing instead on building sustainable systems and talent pipelines. "It's a great challenge. I'm still very passionate about creating a winning culture, developing players and identifying talent."

The threat of franchise based T20 leagues in every nook and corner of cricketing world is creating a space for freelancers who excel in just one format. But when Waugh was asked if cricket will go the football way with players choosing clubs over country, he didn't entirely seem convinced even though he has become a T20 investor.

"I'm not entirely sure I can answer that fully, but first and foremost, I want to say that I still love Test match cricket. We want to see Test cricket survive because, to me, it's still the ultimate form of the game," he said.

What sets the ETPL apart, Waugh believes, is its geographic and developmental context.

"I see this as a great opportunity for cricket in Europe, and that's what differentiates it from other leagues. This is the first time such a league is being played in Europe."

There are more than 30 countries in Europe playing cricket, and three or four are already participating in the T20 World Cup," he said.

According to Waugh, the backing of multiple boards and the ICC gives the league both credibility and purpose.

"The region has been underdeveloped and underutilised in the past, so this presents a real opportunity to grow the game. This is new, it's exciting, and it has the backing of the cricket boards of Ireland, the Netherlands and Scotland, along with the ICC," he said.

"It's sanctioned by four boards, and there are some very influential people involved. These are people with strong values and good morals. We want to make this something special."

For Mills, ETPL will provide an opportunity to players from Scotland, Ireland and the Netherlands a chance to showcase their skills in a quality T20 event. "Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands already have strong domestic competitions, but this league provides something extra," Mills said.

"Their players are desperate to be involved in competitions around the world, but they often lack the platform to gain exposure. The European T20 Premier League will give them that opportunity," Mills added. (PTI)