

6 WORLD
8 NATION

- Death toll in Spanish train collision rises to 39
- B'desh says most incidents involving minorities in 2025 were non-communal
- Jaishankar's blunt message to Poland: Don't help fuel terror infrastructure in our neighbourhood
- Work will be 'revdi' handed over by Modi govt, no longer a right: Oppn on law replacing MGNREGA

125 DAYS
Guaranteed Wage Employment
CBC 35101/13/0066/2526

Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) : VB - G RAM G
(विकसित भारत - जी राम जी) Act, 2025

Villagers will themselves make the Viksit Gram Panchayat Plan

Viksit Gram Panchayats paving the way for Viksit Bharat

Demand grows for Amrit Bharat Express stoppage at Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 19: The demand for stoppage of the newly introduced Amrit Bharat Express trains at Kokrajhar railway station has gained momentum, with citizens and public representatives stressing the need to improve rail connectivity in the region.

The Railway Department recently introduced two Amrit Bharat Express trains to enhance passenger convenience across Assam, the Northeast and other parts of the country.

The initiative has been welcomed by people from various sections in Kokrajhar town, the headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

On Monday, the Kamakhya-Rohak Amrit Bharat Express, inaugurated between Kamakhya Junction and Rohak in Haryana, along with the Dibrugarh-Gomti Nagar service, was welcomed at Kokrajhar railway station.

The programme was attended by Kokrajhar Lok Sabha MP Jayanta Basumatary, Rajya Sabha MP Rungwra Narzary, Kokrajhar MLA Lawrence Islay, members of the Kokrajhar Railway Station Stop Demand Committee and district administration officials.

Addressing the gathering, the MPs and MLA Lawrence Islay said that people of Kokrajhar have faced long-standing problems related to railway connectivity, mainly due to the lack of stoppages of several important trains at the station. They informed (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Objectionable posts against Zubeen Garg

Garima lodges FIR: Sikha Sarma picked up

GUWAHATI, Jan 19: A woman was detained on Monday for allegedly making objectionable and derogatory remarks against Assam's cultural icon Zubeen Garg, police said.

Garima Saikia Garg, the singer's wife, lodged a complaint with the Crime Branch of Guwahati Police against Sikha Sarma, a social media commentator, and urged the law enforcers to take action against her.

"We received a complaint and immediately sent a team and picked up the accused for questioning," Guwahati Police DCP (Crime) Debajit Nath told PTI.

An FIR has been registered and a probe launched, he added.



According to sources, Garima's complaint referred to a series of objectionable posts allegedly written by Sarma on Facebook over a

period of time.

She is accused of making demeaning and personal comments against the character and legacy of the late singer. The remarks triggered widespread outrage among fans and sections of the public, prompting calls for legal action.

Speaking to reporters after filing the police complaint, Garima said, "I cannot believe someone can write such things about Zubeen. Initially, we chose to ignore her, assuming she was mentally unstable, as we wanted to focus on the main case concerning Zubeen's death. However, there is a limit to our patience." She further alleged that the social media posts amounted to (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Commercial ops of Vande Bharat sleeper train from Jan 22

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: The first Vande Bharat sleeper train flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been scheduled to begin commercial operations for general passengers from January 22 from Kamakhya to Howrah, according to an order issued by the Railways.

"Prospective passengers can book berths through IRCTC or other online platforms, as well as from physical counters, as the train's name and number have been added to the software system," a senior railway official said on Monday.

The fare, inclusive of GST, be-

tween the two stations is ₹ 2,435 for AC 3, ₹ 3,145 for AC 2, and ₹ 3,855 for AC 1.

The train will cover the entire distance in 14 hours, making it the fastest service on this route. The existing fastest train, the Saraighat Express, completes the journey in 16 hours and 23 minutes.

However, the Vande Bharat Sleeper's fare is significantly higher, especially for AC 2 and AC 3 classes, compared to the Saraighat Express.

The fare of the Saraighat Express, including GST and superfast charges, is ₹ 3,320 for AC 1, ₹ 1,985

Tiger carcass found in Kaziranga

GUWAHATI, Jan 19: The carcass of an adult female tiger has been found in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) in Assam, an official said on Monday.

The carcass was found in Kathapora area in the western range of Bagori on Sunday evening by the patrolling guards.

KNPTR authorities have constituted a committee to conduct a post-mortem examination of the animal and its disposal according to the guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the park (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Students must strive for continuous learning, upgradation of skills: Guv



GUWAHATI, Jan 19: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Monday exhorted students to strive for continuous learning and constant upgradation of skills to transform emerging challenges of the changing times into opportunities.

Addressing the fifth convocation of the Assam Science and Technology University, he said this marks the beginning of a new journey in the lives of the students, one that would bring both challenges and opportunities.

Highlighting the rapidly changing global environment, Acharya stressed the need to remain connected with emerging technologies, innovations and global trends.

At the same time, he underlined the importance of ethics, integrity and cultural values, which provide strength, patience and self-confidence to students in difficult circumstances.

Congratulating the students receiving degrees and medals, he said their success was not merely a personal achievement, but also a matter of pride for the families, teachers and the university.

The governor underscored the crucial role of higher educational institutions in establishing India as a 'Global Knowledge Superpower'.

He said these institutions should advocate quality teaching, world-class research and also give equal priority to innovation.

Acharya said that for a balanced and sustainable national development, it was essential the benefits of education and new technologies reach every village, and emphasised the role of universities in this regard. Noting the importance of entrepreneurship in the present era, he encouraged students to move (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

FIR over 'forged letter' in Sonowal's name calling for course correction before Assam polls

GUWAHATI, Jan 19: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday said that an FIR has been lodged over a "forged letter" which called for "course correction" ahead of this year's Assam assembly elections.

The letter, which is being widely circulated on social media, is purportedly on Sonowal's official letterhead and contains his signature, which the former Assam CM said was fake.

The document, marked to the BJP's national president, spoke about the "ground situation" in Assam with an appeal for "course correction" before assembly polls, which is likely in March-April.

In an X post, Sonowal said, "It has come to my notice that a forged letter bearing the official letterhead and fake signature of Union minister

Sarbananda Sonowal is being circulated by miscreants with malafide intent."

He said this constitutes a "serious criminal offence" involving forgery, impersonation and misuse of official government identity, aimed at spreading misinformation and discrediting a constitutional authority.

"An FIR has been lodged in this matter, and law enforcement agencies have been requested to investigate the case on priority and take strict legal action against those responsible," the Union minister said.

He said the letter and its contents are "completely fake and fabricated".

"The public and media are advised not to rely on or circulate such fraudulent material and to verify information only through official sources," Sonowal (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Andhra CM congratulates Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma on historic WEF debut



AMARAVATI, Jan 19: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday congratulated Himanta Biswa Sarma on becoming the first-ever CM from Assam to attend the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Switzerland.

Naidu praised Sarma, saying he has scripted history by representing Assam on the global stage.

"Met the Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, in Zurich. He has made history by becoming the first Chief Minister from Assam to participate in the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Switzerland. I congratulate him and wish him success," Naidu said in a post on X.Naidu arrived in Zurich today as part of his four-day visit to Switzerland to participate in the 2026 edition of WEF from January 19 to 22.

"Landed in Zurich for the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum at Davos-Klosters. Held under the theme 'A Spirit of Dialogue,' the meeting is another proud opportunity to represent my state," he said in the post.

Naidu emphasised his commitment to showcasing Andhra Pradesh's potential to global leaders across business, government, international organisations, civil society, and academia to shape the future.

Shortly after landing, the CM met with the President of Singapore, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, and World Bank President Ajay Banga. Following his official meetings, Naidu is scheduled to address the Telugu diaspora. (PTI)

Nitin Nabin elected BJP chief unopposed

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: Forty-five-year-old Nitin Nabin was on Monday elected unopposed as the BJP national president, the youngest ever to occupy the post as it seeks to further expand its influence in uncharted territories.

Nabin, a five-term Bihar MLA, emerged as the sole candidate for the top party post with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior BJP leaders filing nomination papers in his support.

Nabin will be formally declared as BJP president on Tuesday. He will succeed J P Nadda, who has been at the helm for an extended period since 2020.

"I hereby announce that only one name, that of Shri Nitin Nabin, has been proposed for the post of national president of Bharatiya Janata Party," K Laxman, the returning officer for the presidential election, said in a statement. (PTI)

IndiaSkills Regional Competition 2025-26 for North East inaugurated

Development of NE priority of Centre, says Union Minister

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 19: Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Minister of State for Education, Jayant Chaudhary, on Monday underscored the Central government's priority for the development of the North East, with a strong focus on integrating skilling with formal education to create wider employment opportunities for youth.

Chaudhary was speaking after inaugurating the IndiaSkills Regional Competition 2025-26 for the North East in Guwahati, where young participants from all eight northeastern states are competing across 26 skill categories.

Highlighting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's sustained emphasis on the region, the minister said



this focus has generated renewed confidence and opportunities for the youth of the North East.

"IndiaSkills is not merely a competition; it is a celebration of excellence, discipline and the dignity of work. The North East has immense

talent and aspiration, and this platform reflects our confidence that youth from this region are ready to lead India's skilled workforce and contribute meaningfully to the nation's growth," he said.

The minister emphasised the importance of aligning skilling with formal education in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, noting that closer integration would expand pathways for employability, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning, while preparing young people for a rapidly evolving economy.

The North East Regional Competition would include advanced manufacturing, green fuels, and renewable energy generation.

Students from Directorate General of Training (DGT) institutions including Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs), are participating. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

LNK Energy launched as next-gen integrated clean energy platform with ₹ 10k cr initial investment

DAVOS, Jan 19: Three Indian entrepreneurs on Monday came together here to launch a next-generation integrated clean energy platform, LNK Energy, with an initial investment of ₹ 10,000 crore over the next five years.

It will begin operations with a 6 GW solar cell and module with an integrated ingot and wafer plant in Maharashtra, the organisers said during the launch on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026.

LNK Energy's areas of operation would include advanced manufacturing, green fuels, and renewable energy generation.

The company said its first project will be spread over 60 acres at Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, Maharashtra, and will manufacture high-efficiency solar cells and modules

using advanced technologies and global best practices.

It has signed an agreement with the Maharashtra government for setting up the project.

Its co-founders are Paritosh Ladhani, Joint Managing Director of SLMG Beverages, the largest bottler of Coca-Cola in India; Kushagra Nandan, Co-Founder, Chairman and MD, REnergy Dynamics (RED), and Co-Founder & former MD of SunSource Energy; and Varun Karad, BioEnergy Entrepreneur and Co-Founder and CEO, RED, LNK Energy.

They said the company will focus on supporting sustainable growth, responsible industrial development, and long-term energy security for India.

Over time, LNK Energy will also manufacture key adjacencies such

as junction boxes, battery platforms and related energy storage components, supporting the development of a robust domestic clean-energy ecosystem.

Following the establishment of its manufacturing base, LNK Energy will expand into green fuels, with a strong focus on green hydrogen, aimed at enabling decarbonisation of hard-to-abate sectors through scalable, technology-led solutions.

In parallel, the company will build a renewable energy generation portfolio as an Independent Power Producer (IPP) and through hybrid open access solutions, integrating storage, solar and other forms of renewable energy, creating a fully integrated platform spanning manufacturing, fuels and operating assets. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Sensex, Nifty succumb to selling pressure in blue-chips RIL, ICICI Bank amid weak global cues

MUMBAI, Jan 19: Stock market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Monday, tracking deep losses in heavyweights Reliance Industries, Eternal, and ICICI Bank amid rising geopolitical tensions and renewed global tariff concerns.

Besides, subdued quarterly results, ongoing weakness in the rupee and unabated flight of foreign capital from Indian equities also made investors jittery, traders said.

Amid cautious investor sentiment, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 324.17 points, or 0.39 per cent, to settle at 83,246.18. During the day, it tumbled 672.04 points, or 0.80 per cent, to 82,898.31.

A total of 3,074 stocks declined, while 1,227 advanced and 182 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 108.85 points, or 0.42 per cent, to 25,585.50.

Despite a weak start, buying interest emerged at lower levels, helping the indices to stage a modest recovery.

"Indian equity markets traded in a narrow range with a cautious undertone, as tariff-related concerns and geopolitical uncertainties kept global investors on edge. Fresh threats from US President Donald Trump over additional tariffs on select European countries triggered a global risk-off mood, which weighed on domestic sentiment. "Persistent selling by foreign investors, along with continued weakness in the rupee against the dollar, added to the pressure on Indian equities, keeping participants defensive through the session," Ponnudi R, CEO of



Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Reliance Industries dropped 3.04 per cent after the company reported a flat net profit of ₹ 18,645 crore for the third quarter, as a decline in gas production and weakness in its retail business offset gains in other segments.

ICICI Bank, Eternal, Titan, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services and UltraTech Cement were also among the laggards.

ICICI Bank dipped 2.26 per cent after its consolidated profit for the December quarter declined 2.68 per cent to ₹ 12,537.98 crore, hit by an RBI-mandated Rs 1,283-crore provision for agricultural loans wrongly classified as priority sector advances.

On a standalone basis, the country's second-largest lender reported an over 4 per cent decline in the October-December profit at Rs 12,883 crore.

However, InterGlobe Aviation, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever and Bajaj Finance were among the gainers.

"Global risk appetite weakened after US President Donald Trump announced new tariff threats against eight European nations, reigniting concerns of a potential US-EU trade dispute. This development triggered a broad risk-off mood across global equity markets, prompting investors to rotate toward safe-haven assets like gold," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Domestically, sentiment remains cautious amid ongoing FII outflows. With the Q3 earnings season progressing, stock-specific volatility is likely, particularly where performance has been mixed, Nair added.

The BSE smallcap gauge dropped 1.28 per cent, and the midcap index dipped 0.43 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, realty tanked 1.94 per cent, energy lost 1.50 per cent, oil & gas (1.32 per cent), telecommunication (1.08 per cent), utilities (0.94 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.71 per cent) and consumer durables (0.57 per cent).

BSE FMCG, auto, capital goods and services were the gainers.

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

European markets were trading significantly lower.

US markets ended marginally lower on Friday.

The rupee breached the 91-dollar mark for the second time in a month before ending 14 paise down at 90.92 (provisional) against the greenback.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dropped 1.22 per cent to USD 63.35 per barrel.

Meanwhile, the IMF on Monday raised India's growth projection to 7.3 per cent for fiscal 2025-26, up 0.7 percentage point from its October forecast, on the back of better-than-expected performance of the economy.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth ₹ 4,346.13 crore on Friday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 3,935.31 crore, according to exchange data.

On Friday, the Sensex climbed 187.64 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 83,570.35. The Nifty rose 28.75 points or 0.11 per cent to 25,694.35. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Garima lodges FIR

defamation, criminal intimidation, hate speech and communal provocation with the potential to disturb law and order in the state. Garima further said, "She (Sarma) made objectionable comments about my sister-in-law and father-in-law as well. This woman neither respects Assam nor the sentiments of the Assamese people. The derogatory remarks made against me and my family were completely unacceptable."

Meanwhile, members of the All Assam Zubeen Garg Fan Club reached Dispur police station to lodge a separate complaint against Sarma over the same issue.

"When the public is united in seeking justice for Zubeen Garg, Sikha Sarma has been attempting to divert the issue in a completely different direction," the fan club's president Piku Borgohain told reporters here.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 last year while swimming in the sea. He had gone to Singapore to attend the 4th edition of the North East India Festival (NEIF). (PTI)

Students must strive

forward not only with the aim of seeking employment, but also with the mindset of creating employment. A total of 5,829 degrees from the 2024 and 2025 batches were awarded on the occasion. (PTI)

Demand grows for

that steps have been initiated for reconstruction, expansion and development of necessary infrastructure at Kokrajhar railway station. It was also stated that a crucial meeting of the Railways is scheduled to be held on January 29 at the divisional office in Alipurduar, West Bengal.

MLA Islary said he would personally attend the meeting and strongly raise the issues concerning Kokrajhar railway station, including the long-pending demand for stoppage of major trains.

Meanwhile, MPs Jayanta Basumatary and Rungwra Narzary expressed their gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for introducing the Amrit Bharat Express trains in the Northeast.

They highlighted that Kokrajhar is not only the administrative headquarters of BTC but also an important educational and healthcare hub, housing three universities, a medical college, RNB Civil Hospital, an engineering college, CIT and several reputed colleges and schools.

They pointed out that Kokrajhar railway station is being developed as an international-standard station under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, with future plans to connect neighbouring Bhutan by rail.

In view of this, they urged that all trains passing through Kokrajhar should be given stoppages.

The MPs added that discussions have already been held with the Railway Minister on these demands and further follow-ups will continue.

They also demanded the extension of the Rangia Railway Division from Dangtal in Chirang district up to Sriampur, the last railway station on the Assam-West Bengal border in Kokrajhar district.

At the same time, Divisional Railway Users' Consultative Committee member Arunabh Dev Sharma and social worker Chinmoi Dey welcomed the introduction of the Amrit Bharat Express trains but expressed dissatisfaction over the absence of a stoppage for the Vande Bharat Sleeper Express at Kokrajhar.

They termed it unfortunate that despite repeated representations to the Railway Ministry, residents of Kokrajhar continue to be deprived of stoppages for as many as sixteen important trains, including the Vande Bharat Sleeper Express inaugurated on January 17, Sarighat Express, Secunderabad Express, Capital Express, Puri Express, Rajya Rani Express, Poorvottar Sampark Kranti Express, Jammu-Amarnath Express, Amritsar Express, Karmabhooni Express, Dwarka-Usha Express, Kaziranga Express, SMVT Bengaluru Superfast Express and Deoghara Express.

The long-pending demand for stoppages of these trains at Kokrajhar remains unresolved, and residents are now keenly watching how the Central Government and the Railway Ministry respond in the coming days.

Tiger carcass found

official said. According to the preliminary findings of the autopsy, the death of the tiger was caused by infighting among the animals, he added. (PTI)

India-EU Summit

which have impacted both India and the 27-nation EU. India and the EU are also expected to unveil a joint comprehensive strategic vision that will govern their relationship for the period 2026-2030.

The sources said both sides are still holding negotiations to find common ground on contentious issues like CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism), which is a framework for tariffs on carbon-intensive products such as steel and cement. The EU has a principled position on CBAM and has not changed the provisions for the US and other partners, the sources said, adding both sides are working on a "compromise solution" on this sensitive issue.

Work is in progress to find a way out on the inclusion of climate-related standards under the Paris Agreement, they said. There has been progress on issues relating to the agriculture sector as both sides have "marked and mapped each other's red lines" over it. India has been taking a tough approach on dairy and farm products, the sources said. An agreement has already been reached on wines and spirits and there could be tariff-rate quotas for the automobile sector, they added.

It is learnt that both sides are looking at narrowing differences on steel.

The EU and India had first launched negotiations for the free trade agreement in 2007, before the talks were suspended in 2013 due to a gap in ambition. The negotiations were relaunched in June 2022.

The proposed Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) will facilitate deeper defence and security cooperation between the two sides.

The SDP will bring interoperability in the defence domain and it will open up avenues for Indian firms to participate in the EU's SAFE (Security Action for Europe) programme.

SAFE is the EU's Euro 150 billion financial instrument designed to provide financial support to member states to speed up defence readiness. At the summit, India and the EU are also set to launch the negotiations for a Security of Information Agreement (SOIA).

The SOIA is expected to boost industrial defence cooperation between the two sides.

The memorandum of understanding on facilitating the mobility of Indian workers to Europe is expected to be another key outcome of the summit.

It will provide a framework for advancing mobility initiatives by EU member states with India, the sources said.

France, Germany and Italy are among European nations that have migration and mobility partnerships with India. The two sides are also expected to ink a number of other agreements to provide for deeper cooperation in several other sectors. (PTI)

FIR over 'forged'

said. The office of the Union minister earlier in the day lodged a complaint at Parliament Street police station in New Delhi over the matter. (PTI)

LNK Energy launched

Co-Founder Ladhani said, "Having built large, complex manufacturing and supply-chain businesses over decades, we strongly believe that scale, quality and execution discipline are non-negotiable."

"LNK Energy brings that same institutional mindset to clean energy manufacturing, with a commitment to global standards," he said. Co-founder Nandan said, "At a time when energy security, industrial self-reliance and decarbonisation are becoming national priorities, LNK Energy has been conceived as a long-term institution rather than a short-cycle opportunity. "We plan to combine scale, technology depth and capital discipline to build long-term value creation." Karad, another Co-Founder, said the future of energy lies in integration — where manufacturing, green fuels and renewable power work together.

"LNK Energy has been structured to address exactly this convergence, using advanced technologies to deliver reliable, scalable and sustainable energy solutions for industry and the economy," he added. (PTI)

Development of NE

showcasing the growing convergence of vocational education with national-level competitive platforms.

The competition covers a wide spectrum of skills, ranging from Automobile Technology, Cloud Computing, Mobile Applications Development and Software and Web Technologies to Fashion Technology, Bakery and Patisserie, and Visual Merchandising.

Following a multi-tier evaluation process, top regional performers will qualify for the IndiaSkills National Competition, with select winners earning the chance to represent India at the WorldSkills Competition in Shanghai in September. The inauguration ceremony was attended by Nani Gopal Mahanta, Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University; Gyanendra Dev Tripathi, Principal Secretary to the Government of Assam, Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Department; and Hena Usman, Joint Secretary, MSDE, among others.

Earlier in the day, the Union Minister undertook a day-long visit to Goalpara district in West Assam.

He inspected a composite farm at the District Industries and Commerce Centre, where ornamental fish, various bird species for commercial purposes, and modern poultry units for ducks and hens are being reared.

Expressing satisfaction with the project's management, Chaudhary emphasised the need to expand it on a larger scale to benefit more people. He also interacted with teachers and students at the Industrial Training Institute (ITI) in Goalpara, with particular focus on the Tata Technologies component and the ultra-modern training being imparted in vehicle technology.

The minister later chaired a review meeting on the progress of Aspirational District programmes at the Deputy Commissioner's conference hall and suggested expediting their implementation.

Goalpara Deputy Commissioner Prodip Timung and other senior officials accompanied the minister during his visit. (With inputs from PTI)

Commercial ops of Vande

Ministry released a circular notifying the train's timetable and stoppages. According to the circular, one train set (Train No 27576) will depart from Kamakhya station at 6.15 pm and, with stoppages at 13 stations, will arrive at Howrah at 8.15 am the next morning, covering 972 kilometres in 14 hours.

The other train set (Train No 27575) will depart from Howrah at 6.20 pm and arrive at Kamakhya at 8.20 am the next morning. The 13 stoppages between Kamakhya and Howrah are Rangiya, New Bongaigaon, New Alipurduar, New Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri Road, New Jalpaiguri, Aluabari Road, Malda Town, New Farakka, Azimganj, Katwa, Nabadwip Dham, and Bandel. A press release from the Railway Ministry stated that the sleeper train set consists of 16 air-conditioned coaches, including one AC First Class coach, four AC Two-Tier coaches, and eleven AC Three-Tier coaches. "It is designed to provide safe and comfortable overnight travel, with a total capacity of around 823 passengers," the statement added. Officials maintained that Vande Bharat is envisioned as a key pillar of India's passenger rail modernisation in the coming decades. "By 2047, the Vande Bharat fleet is envisioned to scale up to around 4,500 train sets, aligned with India's long-term development goals," they added. Outlining future plans, the ministry stated that in the medium term, the focus is on scaling up services by operating about 800 Vande Bharat train sets by 2030, subject to infrastructure readiness and manufacturing capacity. (PTI)

MakeMyTrip introduces women-centric safety and assurance signals in stay and bus bookings

AFFIDAVIT

I, Mirza Sahadat Siddique Alam (Old Name) S/O- Mahamad Ali (Old Name) Spouse Name- Name-Sultana Rezia Residing at Daipam, PO- Daipam, Dist- Darrang (Assam) shall henceforth be known as Mirza Shahadat Siddiqui Alam (New Name) Father's Name - Mahammad Ali (New Name) as declared before the Notary Public, Public Darrang, Mangaldai on 19th January, 2026. Mirza Sahadat Siddique Alam (Old Name) and Mirza Shahadat Siddiqui Alam (New Name) both are same identical person.

Sd/-
Mirza Sahadat Siddiqui Alam

LOST

I, Santosh Chauhan son of Lakshman Chauhan would like to mention that, I have lost my original Documents -
(i) HSLC Registration Card (SEBA Board) Registration No-30/RV/0239/652373/20
(ii) HSLC Admit Card, bearing Registration Roll: B22-0849 No.0107.
(iii) Mark-sheet (SEBA Board) SL.NO MH384277 and
(iv) HSLC certificate (SEBA Board), SL.NO-CH 381753.
ADDRESS : SANTOSH CHAUHAN
S/O- LAKSHMAN CHAUHAN
Vill-- 3 No. HATIKHALI
P/s-- Lumding
P/o-- Lumding Dist-- Hojai
State- Assam, Pin Code - 782447
Phone no 8822537894

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 19: MakeMyTrip, India's leading online travel company, has introduced a set of women-centric safety and assurance signals across accommodation and intercity bus bookings, using artificial intelligence, user feedback and partner data to help women travellers plan journeys with greater confidence.

The initiative is based on behavioural patterns observed on the platform, which show that women travellers tend to follow a more deliberate review process before booking. Data indicates higher click-through rates on reviews, longer time spent on maps and street view, and deeper engagement with guest-uploaded photos prior to confirming stays.

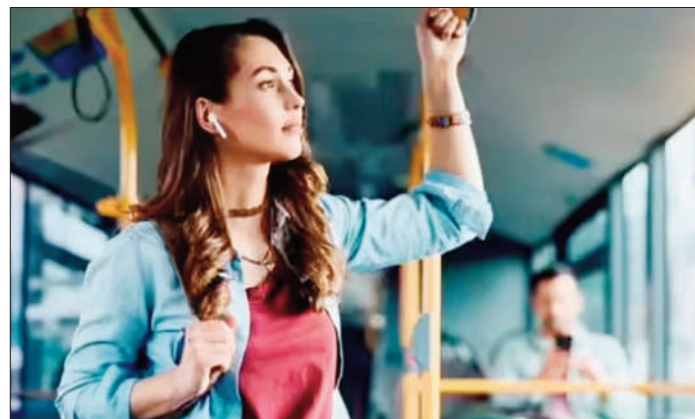
These planning habits are reflected in booking trends as well.

Women book 50 per cent more stays at least 15 days in advance and show a 16 per cent higher preference for premium and branded properties compared to men.

This preference becomes stronger in Tier II and Tier III cities, where branded accommodations are often viewed as a signal of reliability and assurance.

On intercity bus routes, solo women travellers also display a clear preference for seating arrangements that place them next to other women rather than in mixed proximity.

When the platform detects that a woman may be planning a stay, specific safety-related cues are surfaced more prominently.



Ratings submitted by women travellers are highlighted, while AI-led summaries draw attention to aspects such as staff behaviour and location safety during the search process.

Indicators for women-specific amenities, including CCTV coverage, door viewers, door chains and full-length mirrors, are displayed more clearly.

Travellers can also use the Street View feature to visually assess access roads and the surroundings of a property before booking.

A similar approach has been extended to intercity bus bookings.

AI systems identify reviews from women-only journeys and filter feedback based on concerns such as punctuality, safety and cleanliness.

Each parameter is tagged with sentiment indicators to allow quicker evaluation.

In addition, when a woman books one side of a double berth, the adjacent berth is automatically restricted


to women passengers to avoid mixed proximity, offering an added layer of reassurance during overnight or long-distance travel.

Rajesh Magow, Co-Founder and Group CEO of MakeMyTrip, said women travellers already plan their journeys carefully and evaluate stays and travel routes thoughtfully. He added that the company is using its data and


AI capabilities to simplify this planning process and help women make more informed decisions.

The system draws on two key sources: insights derived from millions of user reviews and behaviour signals analysed through AI, and structured data from nearly 97,000 accommodation properties and over 3,500 intercity bus operators covering amenities, safeguards and operational practices.

Together, these inputs are aimed at making safety and assurance more visible and accessible for women travellers across the platform.



GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT A. H. & VETERINARY OFFICER
KARBI ANGLONG, DIPHU.



No.KDVD/Ad & Interview Etc. /2/2023/540 /Dated Diphu the 19/01/2025.

NOTICE

Applicants who have applied for the vacant sanctioned posts under A.H. & Veterinary Department, Karbi Anglong, Diphu vide Advertisement Letter No No.KDVD/Ad & Interview Etc./511 Dated Diphu the 30 /12/2025 are hereby requested to collect their Admit/ Calling letter from the office of the undersigned w.e.f. 20/01/2026 to 28/01/2026 and appear in the Viva-Voce examination scheduled on 29/01/2026 from 10.00 A.M positively. The applicants list can be seen in the Office notice Board of District A. H. & Vety. Officer, Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

N. B. Next working day will be count for interview if some unavoidable holiday/Bandh Call arise.

Sd/-
District A. H. & Vety. Officer,
Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

AASU holds 12-hour hunger strike over erosion issue in Dibrugarh



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Jan 19: The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Monday launched a 12-hour hunger strike at Poolbagan in Dibrugarh, protesting the alleged lackadaisical attitude of the Water Resources Department in carrying out anti-erosion measures.

The hunger strike began at 6 AM and is scheduled to conclude at 6 PM. Several members of the Dibrugarh district unit of AASU participated in the protest, demanding the immediate resumption and acceleration of anti-erosion work in the area.

AASU members alleged that anti-erosion work along the Majan-Bogibee stretch has remained stalled for the past week without any clear reason. They said that every year people lose valuable land due to erosion and claimed that the ongoing works were progressing at a sluggish pace.

"Erosion is a serious threat for the people of Dibrugarh as the river Brahmaputra has been advancing

every year. This has been a long-pending demand of our organisation and we have been raising this burning issue on every platform," an AASU member said.

The protesters also criticised the local MLA, alleging that no concrete steps have been taken to address the erosion problem. "The MLA visits the area during the rainy season and claims that Dibrugarh is safe from erosion, but the ground reality is different. Every year, erosion continues to take away land," another member alleged.

Dibrugarh continues to face severe threats from erosion, especially during the monsoon with floods and riverbank erosion remaining major concerns for residents.

AASU leader Tanuj Haloi said that the Dibrugarh Town Protection (DTP) dyke needs urgent strengthening to safeguard people from floods. "Geo-bags alone cannot control erosion caused by the Brahmaputra. Scientific and long-term measures are required to stop erosion in Dibrugarh," he said.

Congress workers to lay siege to Arunachal Assembly in February APCC to intensify stir against renaming of MGNREGA

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Jan 19: The Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) has decided to intensify its agitation against the Centre's decision to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025.

Addressing reporters at the Namsai district Congress office on Monday, APCC president Bosiram Siram said that Congress workers would lay siege to the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly between February 7 and 15, following a directive issued by the All India Congress Committee (AICC). Siram said that the APCC has been protesting the move since the new Act came into force, organising strikes and dharnas in the state capital Itanagar. To reach grassroots-level Congress workers



across the state, the party has also launched a massive "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram" under his leadership.

"The outreach programme is aimed at creating awareness among Congress workers and the people of the state about the lacu-

nae and adverse effects of the newly crafted VB-G RAM G Act," Siram said.

Recalling the history of the scheme, Siram said that twenty years ago, the government led by Dr Manmohan Singh gave life to the constitutional Right to Work by

enacting the MGNREGA. Since then, the scheme has generated more than 180 crore days of employment, created nearly 10 crore assets such as village tanks and roads and strengthened the Panchayati Raj system by empowering Gram Panchayats to decide village-level projects.

He added that during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, MGNREGA served as a lifeline for the rural Indian economy. Siram alleged that instead of strengthening the existing scheme, the Centre weakened several of its provisions, which would severely affect rural populations dependent on it. He claimed that the move was carried out intentionally and on purely political grounds.

Advocate A K Techi, vice president of the APCC, Chua Teye, general secretary, Gollo Nipo, secretary, APCC and Minj Jerimoi Kring, APCC East Siang in-charge were also present at the meeting.

Free health camp held at Barpeta district jail

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Jan 19: A free medical and health check-up camp was successfully conducted at Barpeta district jail under the National AYUSH Mission, Assam, by the Arogya Care Foundation, Nagaon on Sunday. During the camp, comprehensive medical check-ups of the inmates were carried out. Free medicines were distributed and medical counselling was provided to the prisoners to address their health-related concerns.

The camp was conducted under the professional guidance of Dr Ainul Haque of Mondia Model Hospital and Dr Ashadul Ali, Medical and Health Officer of the Jail Hospital. A dedicated team of paramedical staff from the Joint Director of Health Services extended active cooperation and assistance throughout the programme. The initiative significantly contributed to the assessment of inmates' health status, early detection of ailments and the promotion of overall physical and mental well-being among the prisoners.

Major fire engulfs fourlane project office in Bokajan

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, Jan 19: A major fire broke out on Monday at the temporary operational office of the Fourlane project in Gautam Basti, Khatkhati, causing significant property damage and prompting a large-scale emergency response.

The blaze erupted around 9:45 AM inside the office premises. Police reports stated that a trailer (registration NL-01-AD-5733) recently arrived from Meghalaya was undergoing routine maintenance when the incident occurred.

Witnesses said the fire was sparked during pipe welding work and flames spread rapidly, fuelled by the trailer's cargo of highly flammable plastic nets.

The intensity of the fire required a cross-border response, with three fire tenders dispatched from Dimapur, one fire engine from Assam and Khatkhati Police personnel assisting in crowd control and fire-fighting operations.

45th Garo Catholic Sabha concludes at Jalpara

HT Correspondent
DONGKAMUKAM, Jan 19: The 45th edition of the annual Garo Catholic Sabha, hosted under the Satgaon Parish, concluded successfully on Sunday at Jalpara (B) village, marking the end of a four-day spiritual programme attended by over five thousand faithful.

The concluding day was highlighted by the Holy Mass celebrated by the Bishop of Diphu, Most Rev. Paul Mattek, who attended the event as the chief guest. Addressing the large congregation, Bishop Mattek delivered a sermon focusing on navigating the challenges of modern life through faith and spiritual commitment.

The Bishop urged the faithful to become "beacons of Christ's light" by adhering to key principles, including finding inner stability amid global challenges, showing love and compassion towards the marginalised, praying with sincerity of heart, listening daily to God's guidance and fostering unity and dialogue within communities.

In a poignant conclusion to his homily, Bishop Mattek called upon the congregation to overcome indifference to suffering and to remain steadfast in resisting evil through their daily actions and conduct.

The concluding Mass witnessed the participation of several clergy members and religious sisters. Among those present were Fr Albert Thyriani, parish priest of Satgaon; Fr Abraham Kanattu, parish priest of Sojong; assistant parish priests Fr Charles Sangma and Fr Daniel Sangma and sisters Mary Hasda, Silsila Marak, Sonia Sangma and Christina Sangma, among others.

The Sabha began on Friday, January 16, with an inaugural ceremony led by Fr Abraham Kanattu. The initial days of the programme were marked by prayer, reflection and spiritual discourses, including a sermon delivered by Fr Chishti, parish priest of Silchang Parish.

Located about four kilometres from Dongkamukam, Jalpara (B) village provided a serene setting for the event, which is considered one of the most significant annual religious gatherings of the Garo Catholic community in West Karbi Anglong.

KAAC CEM Dr Tuliram Ronghang distributes 3,633 free land pattas

HT Correspondent
HOWRAGHAT, Jan 19: In a major initiative to enhance land security for local residents, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Dr Tuliram Ronghang, distributed free land settlement certificates (pattas) to 3,633 beneficiaries recently.

The distribution ceremony was held at the Dengaon Sports Association playground, covering the Na-mati and Mahamaya Council constituencies in the Dengaon area of Karbi Anglong.

Dr Ronghang stated that the KAAC has already issued one lakh free land pattas across the district to date and assured those yet to receive their documents that the process is ongoing, with no eligible person being left out.

Addressing public grievances, the CEM announced that formal tenders for developmental works based on constituency applications will be issued in February. He also reassured residents



regarding the Orunodoi scheme, confirming that benefits will reach all eligible citizens.

During the event, Dr Ronghang engaged with the public on the upcoming political landscape, seeking continued support for Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's leadership to maintain the region's development momentum.

The ceremony saw participation from prominent local leaders, including Darsing Ronghang, MLA; Executive Members Ritesh Engh, Lunsing Teron, Madhurjya Dhekiyal Phukan and Richard Tokbi; KAAC Chairman Raju Tisso and former EM Ratan Teron.

Ledo Rashtriya Sahitya Sanmilian national meet concludes

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Jan 19: The two-day extensive programme of the Ledo Rashtriya Sahitya Sanmilian National, held on January 17 and 18 at the Ledo College auditorium under the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency in Tinsukia district, concluded successfully.

The inaugural day began with a tribute ceremony in memory of Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Sudhakantha Dr Bhupen Hazarika, along with a homage to Zubeen Garg. The programme was formally inaugurated by lighting the ceremonial lamp by Dr Pronoy Phukan. This was followed by a chorus performance of "Ledo Ekhoi Dhuniya Thai" by Babita Das Choudhury and her group.

Dr Ranjit Dutta, president of the Ledo Rashtriya Sahitya Sanmilian, delivered the welcome address, while the conference was formally inaugurated by noted litterateur from Jharkhand, A N Pathak (Abhayananda Pathak). The chief guest, Sahitya Akademi Award winner Basudev Das from Kolkata, delivered the keynote address.

Speeches were later delivered by poet and professor Ritu Sen Choudhury from Kolkata, litterateur Mukut Sharma from Guwahati and poet-critic Uday Kumar Sharma. Poetry recitations by Rijumoni Saikia Tamuly, Geetanjali Borkotoky Bhagwati, Afruja Akhtar, Kaniska Bhattacharya, Purushottam Upadhyay from Kolkata and others added vibrancy to the event.

Dr Chitrajit Saikia presented a lecture on "Assamese Novel: A Brief Overview". Under the moderation of Dr Pronoy Phukan, a poets' gathering (Kabi Samaroh) was organised, where poets from across the country, including Rajarshi Patranabish, Sarbajit Sarkar,

Sanket Mhatre, Rituparna Khan, Biman Saha, Bikash Gan Choudhury, Purushottam Upadhyay, Bobby Pawar, Diganta Bhajani, Ritu Sen Choudhury, Sarthak Roy Choudhury, Shashikant Singh, Kaniska Bhattacharya, Tapan Baruah, Rudra Gogoi, Pranabjyoti Dutta and others, recited their poems.

On the second day, January 18, the national literary programme was moderated by chief secretary Ranajyoti Neog and editor Arunajyoti Nibonua, with senior journalist Jagat Changmai present. The session, presided over by Dr Ranjit Dutta, was held in the presence of Ledo College principal Dr Kripaprasad Upadhyay. Poets Sukumar Chetia (Dibrugarh), Geeta Devi Neog (Ledo), Nilu Das (Margherita) and Sanket Mhatre (Mumbai) recited their works.

The national award presentation ceremony followed, during which the Dr Birendra Nath Baruah National Award was conferred on Abhayananda Pathak of Dhanbad, Jharkhand.

The Bhupen Chandra Neog Folk Culture Award was presented to Dr Anil Saikia of Moran, while the Suren Phukan Social Benefactor National Award was conferred on Dr Pushpa Gogoi of Dhemaji.

The second-day session was inaugurated by noted thinker Dr Mayur Bora. Under the moderation of Tapan Baruah and Dr Bikash Baruah, the first, second and third sessions of the poets' conference were held, during which more than 150 poets from different parts of the country recited poems.

Several books were also released on the occasion, including Dr Ranjit Dutta's poetry collection "Adhalikha Kobitar Dare", Pranabjyoti Dutta's "Chintar Shilalipi", along with three other books titled "Jeevanar Rong".

Srimanta Sankardev Sangha 73rd district conference concludes

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, Jan 19: The 73rd annual conference of the Srimanta Sankardev Sangha, Sivasagar District Branch, concluded on Sunday at Demow after a three-day programme organised under the hospitality of the Demow Regional Branch in collaboration with the local public and various organisations. The conference was held from January 16 at the Jyoti Bishnu Cultural Building and the Demow Public Playground. On the concluding day, the Sangha flag was hoisted in the morning by Rajen Barua, president of the Sivasagar District Branch of the Srimanta Sankardev Sangha. This was followed by a colourful procession carrying the Bhagawat through the streets of Demow.

A felicitation programme was organised during which octogenarians were honoured for their con-

tributions. An intimate interaction session was also arranged by the District Service Force. Later, an open session was held with Rajen Barua presiding, while Jugal Prasad Gogoi formally inaugurated the programme.

Bhabendra Nath Deka, padadhikar of the Srimanta Sankardev Sangha, attended the session as chief guest, while Rajani Kanta Dutta, chief adviser of the Sangha, was present as the guest of honour. Among the distinguished guests were Ghana Kanta Gogoi, retired principal of Demow Higher Secondary School, Bokul Dutta, principal of Demow Higher Secondary School, Basanta Gogoi, president of ATASU central committee, Jadab Gogoi, president of AYM, Diganta Sahu, central member of ATTSA, leaders of ATTSA Demow Branch and other dignitaries.

Hatighuli ME School marks platinum jubilee

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Jan 19: The two-day Platinum Jubilee celebrations of Hatighuli ME School near Gaurisagar concluded on Sunday with an open session addressed by eminent speakers from different walks of life.

Addressing the gathering, noted public speaker and secretary of the Children's Book Trust, Hrishikesh Goswami, said that Gandhari of the Mahabharata, in her journey of life, chose to go from light to darkness and in the process lost a hundred sons. He cited the example to underline the importance of pursuing truth in life instead of darkness. Goswami urged everyone to imbibe the spirit that Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Bishnu Rabha, Bhupen Hazarika and Zubeen Garg of the present generation tried to instill into Assamese social life. He also remarked that many illiterate women have given birth to some of the finest human beings.

Pranay Phukan, eminent gynaecologist of AMC Dibrugarh and a poet, said that society cannot survive on heritage alone and must struggle hard to take the younger generation forward. He recited his self-composed poems and urged parents to buy books for their children so that they can touch, read and connect with them.

Dr Archana Devi, Associate Professor of Sibsagar University, released the souvenir published on the occasion and edited by Rajib Dutta. She said that the founders of many rural and semi-urban schools were often illiterate but wise individuals who, despite not having the opportunity to attend school themselves, paved the way for others to learn and lead enlightened lives.

Mukut Gogoi, president of the All Assam ME School Association, underlined the importance of preserving the tradition of Assamese education in the light of the National Education Policy. He criticised the practice of issuing sudden mobile instructions to school principals by educational administrators.

Parasar Saikia, BEO, Amguri, stated that the word "late" would never be used before the name of singing icon Zubeen Garg while paying tribute to the cultural figure who passed away nearly four months ago in Singapore.

Tarulata Baruah, headmistress of Hatighuli ME School, offered the vote of thanks to all distinguished guests and participants. The session was also addressed by Manoj Kumar Borthakur, executive president of the Assam State Journalists Union and Dr Ranjit Baruah, principal of Dikhowmukh College. Earlier, Dr Jyoti Prasad Saikia, Vice Chancellor of JB University, Jorhat, delivered the inaugural address.

Rajib Dutta anchored the programme, while Muhikanta Nath, president of the reception committee, presided over the session.

As part of the celebrations, the Platinum Jubilee arches were inaugurated on Saturday by Dhrubweswar Nath, former principal of Gaurisagar Industrial Institute, Anandaram Bora, retired headmaster of Silpikhuri ME School and Dr Prafulla Kalita, registrar of Sibsagar University. The Puniram Nath Memorial Kshetra was inaugurated by Moniram Nath, former headmaster of Radhanath Phukan High School. The memorial pillar was inaugurated by Dimbeswar Bora, while smriti tarpan was performed by Hemanta Nath, executive president of the committee.

Dr Arun Changkakoty inaugurated the stage and the cultural procession was flagged off by Dr Jyoti Prasad Gogoi, former professor of Janjhi HNS College.

44th session of Sonitpur Natun Sahitya Parishad scheduled on Jan 25

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 19: The 44th session of the undivided Sonitpur district committee of Natun Sahitya Parishad is set to be held on January 25 at the Government Boys' Higher Secondary School, according to a press release from Mrinal Goswami, secretary of the district committee.

The day-long programme will begin with the hoisting of the institutional flag by Gynendra Sarkar, president of the district committee, followed by smriti tarpan offered by Jayanta Sarma, president of the reception committee. Dr Bhakta Prasad Goutam will deliver the welcome address during the open session.

During the event, the prestigious Sonitpur Gaurav and Rupantor Senani titles will be conferred on eminent dramatist, director and cine artiste Aisharya Kakoty and distinguished folk artist Ratneshwar Rabha, respectively.

Event aims to boost agri-export linkages and global competitiveness of Assam's agricultural produce APEDA organise North East Organic Conclave cum Buyer-Seller Meet

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 19: The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), in collaboration with the Government of Assam, organised a North East Organic Conclave-cum-Buyer Seller Meet at Guwahati on Monday to strengthen agri-export linkages and market access for Assam's agricultural and processed food products.

The inaugural session was graced by the Minister of Agriculture, Horticulture and Excise, Atul Bora and attended by senior officials including Aruna Rajoria, IAS, Commissioner & Secretary-cum-Agriculture Production Commissioner, Abhishek Dev, Chairman, APEDA and Uday Praveen, IAS, Director of Agriculture, Government of Assam.

The conclave brought together over 30 exporters, 9 importers and around 50 Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) from the state. The Buyer Seller Meet provided a structured platform

for B2B interactions, exploring trade opportunities and establishing long-term partnerships with domestic and international buyers.

Assam, endowed with rich agro-climatic diversity, produces a range of export-potential commodities including Assam Joha Rice, non-basmati specialty rice varieties, fruits and vegetables such as banana, pineapple, mandarin orange, Assam lemon, organic ginger, turmeric, black pepper and other horticultural and organic produce, offering strong prospects for global markets.

The conclave also featured a sensitisation session on the NPOP 8th Edition, regulatory framework and labelling requirements, enhancing awareness among exporters, FPOs, FPCs and entrepreneurs to ensure compliance with international quality and certification standards.

Addressing the gathering, Atul Bora said, "Assam and the Northeast possess a rich basket of high-quality, organically grown agricultural and horticultural products with strong global de-



mand. With focused support in aggregation, certification, infrastructure and market access and

APEDA's continued partnership, we are committed to transforming the region's farm produce into

globally competitive exports while ensuring sustainable livelihoods for our farmers."

Aruna Rajoria added that by strengthening aggregation, certification and market linkages through close collaboration with APEDA, farmers and entrepreneurs can access international markets in a sustainable and commercially viable manner.

Abhishek Dev, Chairman APEDA, highlighted the immense potential for agricultural, horticultural and organic exports from Assam, supported by farmer-friendly provisions in the revised NPOP and expanded market access through Organic MRAs with Australia and New Zealand, as well as FTAs with the UK, Oman and EFTA countries. The Assam Organic Conclave-cum-Buyer Seller Meet reflects APEDA's ongoing efforts to integrate regional strengths into India's agri-export growth story while positioning Assam as a key contributor to high-value, sustainable agricultural exports.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery while on a detour. - Anonymous

Ajit Doval's plea to youth

In a speech riddled with contradictions, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval has, in a subtle yet unmistakable manner, called upon the youth to embrace the idea of revenge. Addressing a gathering of nearly 3,000 young people at the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue on 10 January 2026, he stated that although revenge is "not a good word," it can nevertheless be "a huge force." He urged the audience to avenge history and take the country to greatness once again—not only in terms of border security, but also in the economy, social development, and every other sphere. Making a tacit reference to the Somnath Temple, he went on to say that India has suffered greatly in the past and must "avenge" a painful history of attacks and subjugation. He also emphasized the need for strong leadership, particularly highlighting Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His repeated emphasis on avenging wrongs committed a thousand years ago implicitly points toward Muslim invaders of medieval India. It is hardly coincidental that the very next day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a similar speech at the Somnath Temple, claiming that the glory of the temple has now been restored—despite the historical fact that it was fully rebuilt in 1951.

It appears that while the Prime Minister chose the symbolic setting of the temple, the task of directly addressing the youth and planting the idea of revenge was deftly assigned to Doval. However, Doval failed to explain how revenge is to be taken, or against whom, given that Mahmud of Ghazni is long dead. With a dangerous agenda unfolding, the RSS has now announced plans to hold Hindu Sammelans across the country. The RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat does not mince words when talking of Hindu Rashtra. Ajit Doval's speech has been well approved by the think tank among the RSS and the BJP government. The strategy is evident: seek revenge from generations born a thousand years after the events associated with the Somnath Temple, engineer communal riots, and push the nation toward chaos.

By now, we know all too well that violence has multifaceted consequences. Its effects begin even before physical incidents occur, manifesting as mental health crises. Physical impact on human health can soon be seen in the form of injury, disability and death. Economic activity and education programmes all too suffer badly. This, in turn, leads to crisis of nutrition and a rise in disease. Mistrust within society, further aggravates the crisis. Internal conflicts weaken nations and can spill over into external tensions and even wars. War remains the gravest threat to public health. It has catastrophic effects on infrastructure and the environment and causes more deaths and disabilities than many major diseases combined. War destroys families, communities, and sometimes entire cultures, while diverting scarce resources away from healthcare and essential social needs.

India amid a ring of uncertainty

By: Dipak Kurmi

India enters 2026 confronting a neighbourhood marked by turbulence, fragility, and unresolved conflict, a reality that has steadily reshaped its strategic environment since independence. Surrounded by states facing internal instability or governed by unelected and contested regimes, India's external periphery remains one of the most complex in the world. Persistent cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan, the systematic marginalisation of minorities, particularly Hindus, in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and renewed unrest along the Indo-Myanmar frontier together underscore a hard truth: India's security challenges are deeply embedded in the political and social dynamics of its neighbourhood. These pressures are not episodic disruptions but enduring features of a volatile regional landscape that demands constant vigilance, adaptive strategy, and institutional resilience.

Along the Line of Control, the rhythms of daily life have once again adjusted to uncertainty. Villages near the frontier have learned to live with heightened alertness, where evening movements are cautious, unfamiliar sounds invite suspicion, and drone sightings are discussed with weary familiarity. These are not abstract security concerns but lived realities that shape social behaviour and economic activity. On India's eastern flank, exporters in West Bengal describe growing unpredictability in cross-border trade with Bangladesh, as political unrest and administrative disruptions across the border quickly translate into delayed shipments and cancelled orders. In the Northeast, districts bordering Myanmar remain tense, with instability spilling over from that country's internal conflict and complicating security management. These local experiences reflect a wider regional pattern in which political instability, economic stress, and armed conflict are intensifying simultaneously across South Asia and India's eastern periphery.

Pakistan's internal trajectory remains a central concern for India's security calculus. The country has witnessed a sharp deterioration in internal security, with militant attacks rising and extremist violence resurging, particularly from western regions. Groups linked to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and transnational extremist networks have intensified operations, while Balochistan continues to simmer with separatist violence. Attacks on security forces and infrastructure projects, including those associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, highlight the depth of internal fragmentation. For New Delhi, these developments reinforce longstanding concerns that Pakistan's domestic instability does not remain contained within its borders but generates indirect pressure along India's western frontier through proxy threats

and cross-border militancy.

Bangladesh, long viewed as one of India's more stable neighbours, is undergoing a period of political flux following leadership changes and sustained public mobilisation. While state institutions continue to function, the transition has been accompanied by episodes of unrest and a more visible role for Islamist political actors. These developments carry tangible implications for India, particularly given the depth of economic interdependence between the two countries. Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia, with annual trade exceeding eleven billion dollars and land routes playing a critical role. Disruptions at land ports, transport corridors, or administrative systems have immediate consequences for exporters and logistics networks in West Bengal and the Northeast, underscoring how political uncertainty across the border can rapidly translate into economic stress within India.

To the east, Myanmar remains locked in a protracted civil war that shows little sign of resolution. The military junta continues to face resistance from multiple armed groups, leaving large areas of the country contested and governance fragmented. For India, the implications are direct and persistent. Cross-border security challenges along the northeastern frontier have intensified, raising concerns over arms trafficking, organised crime, and the movement of insurgent elements through poorly governed spaces. The conflict has also complicated humanitarian considerations, as displacement and instability affect border communities on both sides. Unlike short-lived crises, Myanmar's civil war represents a structural security challenge that demands sustained attention rather than episodic responses.

Sri Lanka presents a different but equally instructive case of neighbourhood fragility. Although the country has stabilised from the depths of its 2022 economic crisis, vulnerabilities remain pronounced. Debt restructuring agreements and multilateral support have improved liquidity conditions, yet economic growth remains modest and public finances constrained. Climate-related shocks, including cyclones and flooding, continue to impose repeated fiscal and infrastructure costs, testing the resilience of an already strained economy. Sri Lanka's dependence on external assistance has sharpened strategic competition among its partners, as economic vulnerability increasingly translates into diplomatic leverage. For India, this underscores how economic distress in neighbouring states can quickly assume strategic significance.

The risks emanating from India's neighbourhood are cumulative rather than compartmentalised, converging across security, economic, and strategic domains. On the western front, Pakistan's internal turmoil has coincided with increased militant activity, rein-

forcing the persistence of proxy threats despite periodic ceasefire arrangements. In the east, Myanmar's conflict complicates border control and internal security in sensitive northeastern states. The strategic importance of the Siliguri Corridor, India's narrow land link to the Northeast, has grown as instability simultaneously affects both Bangladesh and Myanmar. This convergence reduces India's ability to sequence challenges or focus on a single front, instead demanding a multidirectional security posture.

Economic exposure has emerged as a frontline concern alongside traditional security risks. India's trade with Bangladesh, heavily dependent on land routes, illustrates how political unrest or administrative disruption across borders can have immediate and disproportionate effects on regional supply chains. Sectors such as textiles, agriculture, and small-scale manufacturing, often dominated by smaller firms, are particularly vulnerable to land-border interruptions. Unlike maritime disruptions, which can sometimes be rerouted or absorbed, land-border volatility directly affects livelihoods and regional economies, linking neighbourhood stability to domestic economic resilience.

Overlaying these challenges is an intensifying layer of strategic competition. Economic stress in neighbouring states often increases reliance on external financing, infrastructure development, and emergency assistance, drawing in global and regional powers with competing interests. In the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, ports, logistics hubs, and connectivity projects now carry strategic weight alongside their commercial value. As a result, neighbourhood instability rarely remains a purely local issue, instead intersecting with broader geopolitical rivalries that shape India's strategic environment whether New Delhi actively intervenes or not.

India's response to this complex landscape has been shaped by differentiation rather than uniformity, reflecting the varied conditions across its neighbourhood. In Sri Lanka, India has played a visible role in crisis response and recovery, extending emergency assistance after climate disasters and participating in stabilisation efforts during the debt crisis. These measures have not only supported economic recovery but also reinforced India's position as a reliable regional partner during periods of acute vulnerability. With Bangladesh, India has maintained diplomatic engagement and trade continuity despite political uncertainty, sustaining security cooperation and institutional dialogue even as businesses report heightened volatility linked to domestic developments across the border.

Along the Myanmar frontier, India has prioritised border security coordination and humanitarian support in cooperation with state governments. These

Digital media and the decline of public discourse

Public discourse is the lifeblood of any democratic society. It is through sustained discussion, disagreement and debate that societies refine ideas, resolve conflicts and arrive at collective decisions. Historically, this discourse evolved through physical spaces like town halls and intellectual salons, and later through newspapers, journals, radio and television. Each medium reshaped how people spoke to one another, but certain core principles remained intact: the value of reasoned argument, respect for opposing views and a shared commitment to facts. In the contemporary era, digital media has dramatically altered this landscape. While it has expanded access to expression and broken monopolies over information, it has also coincided with a visible decline in the quality, seriousness and civility of public discourse, raising urgent concerns for democracy and social cohesion.

The defining feature of digital media is speed. Information now travels instantly, crossing continents in seconds. This velocity has fundamentally changed how opinions are formed and expressed. Reflection, once central to meaningful discourse, has been replaced by immediacy. Reactions are expected instantly, often before facts are verified or contexts understood. In such an environment, outrage becomes more valuable than insight, and emotional responses overshadow reasoned analysis. The digital public sphere thus begins to resemble a continuous emotional reaction rather than a thoughtful exchange of ideas.

This transformation is not accidental but structural. Digital platforms are governed by algorithms designed to maximise user engagement. Engagement, in turn, is driven most effectively by content that provokes strong emotional responses such as anger, fear or moral indignation. Calm, nuanced or complex arguments rarely generate the same levels of interaction

as sensational claims or provocative rhetoric. Over time, this algorithmic preference reshapes public discourse itself. Users learn, consciously or unconsciously, that extreme positions receive attention while balanced views are ignored. The result is a gradual radicalisation of tone and content across the digital public sphere.

Another critical factor contributing to the decline of public discourse is fragmentation. In earlier eras, societies shared a relatively common information environment. Even when citizens disagreed, they often disagreed over the same set of facts. Digital media has dismantled this shared space. Personalised feeds and recommendation systems create isolated information bubbles, where users are repeatedly exposed to views that confirm their existing beliefs. This selective exposure hardens opinions and deepens ideological divides. When individuals inhabit separate realities shaped by different facts, narratives and interpretations, meaningful dialogue becomes increasingly difficult. Public discourse loses its collective character and splinters into parallel monologues.

Misinformation thrives in such fragmented ecosystems. False or misleading information spreads rapidly because it is often crafted to appeal to emotion rather than

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

reason. Digital platforms enable rumours, half-truths and outright fabrications to circulate widely without verification. Corrections, when they appear, struggle to achieve comparable reach or impact. More damaging than individual falsehoods is the broader erosion of trust this process creates. As citizens encounter conflicting claims and manipulated narratives, many begin to distrust all sources of information, including credible journalism. This collapse of trust undermines the very



foundation of informed public discourse.

The economic transformation of media has further weakened public conversation. Digital advertising models reward clicks, views and shares rather than depth or accuracy. Traditional news organisations, facing declining revenues, often adapt by prioritising sensational headlines, simplified narratives and constant updates. Investigative journalism, which requires time and resources, becomes harder to sustain. When journalism itself is pulled into the logic of virality, the line between serious reporting and attention-driven content blurs. Public discourse, instead of being guided by informed analysis, becomes increasingly shaped by what is most clickable.

Digital media has also altered the nature of participation. On the surface, the expansion of voices appears democratic. Anyone with an internet connection can express opinions, challenge authority or mobilise support. Yet this openness comes with diminished accountability. Anonymity and physical distance reduce social restraint, enabling harassment, abuse and deliberate provocation. Civil disagreement often gives way to personal attacks and performative hostility. Such an environment discourages thoughtful engagement and drives many

away from public discussion altogether, particularly those who are unwilling or unable to endure sustained online abuse. What remains is a louder but narrower discourse dominated by the most aggressive voices.

The performative culture of digital platforms further distorts public debate. Expression increasingly becomes a form of self-branding rather than genuine engagement. Opinions are crafted for visibility, approval and social validation rather than persuasion or understanding. Moral certainty is rewarded, while doubt and nuance are penalised. Changing one's mind, a sign of intellectual growth, is often portrayed as weakness or hypocrisy. As a result, public discourse becomes rigid and polarised, leaving little room for learning or compromise.

Politics, perhaps more than any other sphere, has been reshaped by digital media. Leaders and parties now communicate directly with citizens, bypassing traditional mediators. While this can enhance accessibility, it also allows misinformation, populist rhetoric and personalised attacks to spread unchecked. Political debate is increasingly reduced to slogans, viral videos and emotional appeals. Complex policy discussions struggle to survive in an environment designed for brevity and immediacy. Democracy, which depends on deliberation, risks

being replaced by constant mobilisation driven by outrage and identity rather than reason.

Despite these challenges, it would be simplistic to portray digital media solely as a destructive force. The same platforms have empowered marginalised voices, exposed injustice and enabled civic mobilisation on an unprecedented scale. The problem lies not in digital technology itself, but in the values and incentives that govern its use. Public discourse deteriorates when engagement is prioritised over enlightenment, and when economic gain outweighs social responsibility.

Reversing the decline of public discourse requires a collective response. Digital platforms must accept greater responsibility for the social consequences of their designs, including algorithmic transparency and stronger action against misinformation and abuse. Journalism requires renewed public and institutional support to restore depth, verification and context. Media literacy must become a core civic skill, enabling citizens to critically assess information rather than passively consume it. Most importantly, societies must consciously reclaim norms of respectful disagreement and reasoned debate, recognising that democracy depends not merely on freedom of speech but on the quality of speech.

Public discourse has always reflected the moral and intellectual health of society. Digital media has expanded the reach of voices while narrowing the space for understanding. If this trajectory continues unchecked, democratic conversation risks being reduced to noise, outrage and mistrust. The challenge of the digital age is not to silence voices, but to elevate discourse, to rebuild a public sphere where disagreement informs rather than inflames, and where dialogue once again becomes a tool for collective progress rather than division. (The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

Davos 2026 delegates are panicky as Trump is set to explode his policy bomb on January 21

By Nitva Chakraborty

The annual summit of World Economic Forum began in the Alpine hills of Davos in Switzerland on January 19 with the European leaders and the businessmen rattled over the confrontationalist approach taken by the U.S. President Donald Trump on Greenland annexation. After imposing 10 per cent tariff on the EU countries taking position against Trump, the President now has threatened to hike this to 25 per cent.

Trump will be addressing the Davos meet on January 21 on the third day of the five day summit. He is attending the meet heading the U.S. delegation which is so far the largest consisting of all the key secretaries including Marco Rubio, Howard Lutnick and Scott Bessent. The WEF is generally dominated by the European CEOs. They are apprehensive that the U.S. President will use the Davos meet to take forward the confrontation with Europe further adding to disruption in global business and collaboration. The U.S. delegation consists of all big American CEOs including some of the CEO's of Indian origin like Satya Nadella.

The theme of the Davos meet is "A spirit of Dialogue" but the main speaker on whom everyone at the summit is looking at - Donald Trump is the very enemy of this spirit which he has shown in his actions in the last one year of his second term. In 2025, Trump addressed the Davos meet virtually three days after his inauguration by declaring war against Europe by asking the NATO member countries to hike their defence spending by minimum 2 per cent of their budgets and warning that the US will not subsidise the expenditure on security for Europe any more.

It was the beginning and in the last one year, the Greenland issue has emerged as the one in which Trump has challenged the honour and sovereignty of a NATO member nation. The EU members have to take a position at the Davos meet after Trump comes up with something more damaging to the honour of the EU nations. Ukrainian President Zelensky is attending the Davos meet. On the Ukraine peace formula, Zelensky has just been blamed by Trump for slow progress and his lack of intention in stopping the war while the EU members have been supporting Zelensky extending assistance to his war efforts. The dividing line between the U.S. and the Europe has widened too far and it may widen further after Trump's Davos address on Wednesday.

The WEF has chosen the theme Spirit of Dialogue but the business

leaders on their own have little confidence in this Spirit. A large number of business leaders who were asked about their preferred theme for the future opted for geo economic confrontation not the Dialogue which is the official theme. This means that the real issues belong to this domain as to how to wriggle out from this geo political hostile environment and adopt policy measures for global economic stability.

The confrontation is not just economic and political which takes place a number of times. But in 2026, there are apprehensions of a military confrontation between USA and Europe over Greenland. EU nations have asked for mobilization of their troops along the Denmark border. This is just a warning. But Trump has gone berserk. Though the EU nations are trying their best to avoid any military confrontation with the U.S., it all depends on Trump. Trump has said that he will only decide whether the option is war or not.

NATO chief Mark Rutte and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will be attending. Much depends on their expertise in negotiating with Trump and the U.S. delegates at the session. At the NATO leaders meeting last year, Rutte tried his best to appease Trump, but it seems that NATO has not got the results the leaders wanted. French President Macron and the German Chancellor Frederic Merz will be the main European leaders to talk to Trump if the U.S. President gives them time. It is a pathetic situation for the European nations. Their status lies in tatters at the hands of Trump.

Another toothless international figure who will be attending is the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres. The UN has been converted into a talking shop. Nobody cares for it, not even the developing countries of Global South. Trump has just marginalized the 80 year old UN and floated his own world charter challenging the UN. His composition of Gaza Peace Board and the accompanying directions are nothing but the beginning of Trump's own United Nations.

In such a global turmoil what is India's position regarding the Davos summit? Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not attending but his ministers are the part of the big Indian delegation. Chief ministers like Devendra Fadnis, C Chandrababu Naidu and Revanah Reddy are attending. Many state governments are showcasing their investment potential. Most of the big industry people are attending. CII is the partner of this WEF Davos meet since its inception. (IPA NEWS)

Can AI empower the underprivileged?

By: S.N. Sahu

A panel discussion on the topic 'Artificial Intelligence and Empowerment of Underprivileged Communities for Pursuing Learning and Education,' organised at the World Book Fair in Pragati Maidan, Delhi, on January 16 enlisted the participation of journalist Insiyah Vahanvaty, author Come Carpentier de Gourdon and me. Moderated by Abbas Panakkal, the discussion threw light on applicability of AI for underprivileged communities and why adequate caution should be exercised in doing so.

While participating in the discussion I was reminded of the thought that slavery could be abolished because of electricity. By linking abolition of slavery with electricity, this idea underlines the point that some of the great ideals proclaiming equality of human beings are often materialised by scientific discoveries and not by mere formal declarations by great leaders and movements. The first line of the American Declaration of Independence, "All men are created equal," was drafted, among others, by leaders like George Washington and John Adams who were slave owners. That ideal became a reality, according to Einstein, with the advent of electricity.

AI for work
Will AI result in empowering underprivileged communities like electricity which had the power to liberate slaves? As is well known, electricity and machinery reduced the drudgery of work and enabled humans to work faster and most effectively. In the same pattern, AI has a huge potential of reducing the drudgery of work which is consigned to underprivileged communities.

BAI cannot be employed to do creative work or any work concerning literature, art and culture. Such tasks can



only be justly done with the application of human faculty and intelligence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that when teenage school students seek solutions of mathematical problems by applying AI, they often get wrong answers and end up spending more time and energy to rectify those errors.

Those asking AI platforms to write articles on desired subjects get disappointed when the texts contain haphazard information which are unsubstantiated. Therefore, AI would never help if it is employed for creative and research work. Articles written by employing the Google search function are often of higher quality, compared to

articles generated by AI. Therefore application of AI must be informed by a nuanced approach.

AI endangers diversity
AI endangers diversity of language and cultures. If AI is employed to get a text in Odia it is sure to miss the dialects of Odia language and will always give a standardised format of Odia. So linguistic diversity marked among underprivileged communities would be in peril if reliance on AI is excessive.

Yuval Harari's dystopia
Historian Yuval Noah Harari has repeatedly warned that AI could give rise to what he calls "a useless class". In earlier eras, thinkers and political lead-

ers imagined a very different future: the creation of a classless society. Today, however, the prospect of AI replacing doctors, technocrats and trained professionals has revived fears of a new dystopia — one in which large sections of society are rendered economically and socially redundant.

The utopian ideal of a classless society has faded, replaced by Harari's warning of a technologically driven underclass. This will hasten existing inequalities and the marginalisation of already underprivileged communities.

Gandhi's vision
Mahatma Gandhi had sharply interrogated modern civilisation's proclivity

to replace human labour with machine power, causing massive unemployment and propelling, in his words, "incessant multiplication of wants and desires". These are now accepted as the factors behind global warming and climate change.

Therefore, he emphasised on manual labour and labour-intensive methods such as the spinning wheel to enable underprivileged sections to earn their livelihood from jobs beyond agriculture which only kept them engaged for six months a year. He argued that machinery must reduce drudgery of all and not just of the well off.

Gandhi's logic is eminently applicable in the context of the application of AI to reduce the drudgery of the underprivileged communities. That was why he famously stated during freedom struggle that while a great science could be used to build a bridge over Ganga, a greater science will be required to manufacture equipment for village people that will save them from the grind of work and allow them their humanity. AI might be cautiously seen as a manifestation of that "greater science" but its impact in shaping human civilisation needs careful scrutiny and examination.

Nehru's vision
India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote in his monumental book *Discovery of India*, that mankind passed through steam age, was passing through the age of electricity and was bound to pass through the age of electronics. AI is a product of the age of electronics. Nehru also talked about the future alliance of science and philosophy out of which, he said, would emerge scientific humanism.

It is feared that AI has robbed the human element by employing algorithms which are owned by people in the US or China. Such algorithms have

their bias, limitations and even prejudices. People from underprivileged communities may be badly or even adversely impacted by such biases embedded in those algorithms. Human contacts and human touches afforded by face-to-face interaction in schools with students and others in underprivileged communities can never be replaced by AI. So, Nehru's scientific humanism assumes seminal significance to give primacy to human contact. AI, therefore, must be understood in a nuanced manner and used by exercising discretion.

AI and inequality
AI's application in this age of inequality has the potential of exacerbating existing inequalities and plaguing underprivileged communities.

Swami Vivekananda famously stated that India declined in its history because of the monopolisation of education and intelligence by a few. So if monopoly of human intelligence in India by a few led to its decline then what dreadful prospects would India confront in the 21st century in the context of the monopolisation of AI by a few in the US and China? The democratisation of AI is a categorical imperative to make it more creatively employable for underprivileged communities. The government at the Union should focus its attention on such pressing issues in the manner in which Nehru did at the formative stage of nation-building after India attained Independence.

B.R. Ambedkar in the context of the sub-human treatment of Dalit people in caste-ridden Hindu society radically called for the "reclamation of human personality". AI has to be employed for the reclamation of human personality and intelligence so that the dystopia of creating a useless class can be averted. (Courtesy: *The Wire*)

Weaponised trolls What is 'oatzeptic'? Does it actually work for weight loss?



By: Nargis Natarajan

The nature of the abuse is also different, focusing on their bodies, appearances and character, thus reflecting a societal tendency to reduce women to mere sexual objects or even question their fundamental human worth.

It also stems from a power to control by manipulating a woman's emotions, to disrupt her 'online' presence, to silence and limit her participation in public life. What is worse is the anonymity, which enables the anonymous perpetrators to reveal their underlying prejudices.

It's easier to express aggressive and hostile sentiments behind a mask, which they might otherwise suppress in face to face interactions. Some psychopaths actually derive enjoyment by causing women distress.

Many Indian women celebrities have been trolled for various reasons, some of which are ridiculous. Deepika Padukone was trolled for expressing solidarity with JNU students and more recently for wearing a Hijab; Sonakshi Sinha for her weight, her marriage and her on-screen 'no-kissing policy'; Janhvi Kapoor for nepotism; Priyanka Chopra Jonas for her young boyfriend and unrealistic beauty standards; Alia Bhatt for her general knowledge and IQ; Rakhi Sawant for wearing a swimsuit while doing Yoga; and Neetu Kapoor for not appearing as a 'crying widow' after her husband Rishi Kapoor's death.

But nothing compares to the kind of online harassment that Rhea Chakraborty was subjected to. Who can forget the intense social media trials and the crazy circus by the Media Clowns in the aftermath of Sushant Singh Rajput's death?

Even if it was ruled a suicide, Rhea, along with her brother Shovik, was arrested in connection with a narcotics case. Not only was she vilified and labeled a 'Black Magic Woman', a 'Nagin', a 'Gold Digger' and a 'Murderer', she was also jailed and sidelined from Bollywood. She was even

investigated by various central agencies, from the Enforcement Directorate to the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Memes flooded the internet and there were death threats. In fact Rhea was given more airtime than the battle against Covid that our nation was fighting. Just because she came from Bengal, the trolls soon started targeting all the Bengalis too. And the result was that our hyperbolic news channels had indicted her much before the courts did. After almost 5 years of ordeal, the Supreme Court has finally granted her relief and cleared her from all the charges. But will these spineless, faceless trolls have the guts to ask her forgiveness?

Fast forward to the present, to a girl called Jemimah Rodrigues. Not many know that Jemimah played hockey at the state level for Maharashtra. She also played basketball and football displaying her strength and discipline. She was incredibly versatile because apart from balancing every demanding game as a teenager, she was also a guitarist and singer. If sports shaped her coordination, reflexes and competitive nature, music helped her stay grounded and joyful.

She is not just talented. She is unstoppable. When most children were learning basics, Jemimah was already breaking into elite junior cricket. She became the first woman cricketer to get the Khar Gymkhana membership. And then the ordeal began.

In 2024 allegations were leveled against her dad Ivan, of allegedly conducting conversion religious activities at the Club. There was no proof, no evidence. The entire family was subjected to backlash on the basis of religious bias. Jemimah went into depression and her membership with the Gymkhana was lost. She was heartbroken but her mother and friends supported her. And then suddenly, with one of the most memorable chases in the history of the World Cup of Cricket, Jemimah Rodrigues became a national hero.

From Bandra's resilient prodigy to an emotional 127*

semifinal century, her faith-fueled comeback, multi-sport roots, and viral music talent should have been an inspiration. From being dropped and doubted to leading India into a World Cup final, Jemimah's story is all about belief and resilience because it just did not win a match it moved a nation.

But unfortunately, the trolling didn't stop. When Jemimah, during her post-match presentation, thanked Jesus Christ and quoted a Bible verse, it did not go well with netizens, whose rabid 'feelings' were hurt. Her beliefs were mocked and her dad's old controversy of religious conversion again surfaced. When she credited the Almighty for overcoming her self-doubt and mental struggles, a section of the audience questioned her strike rate. She was accused of being slow, and her remark on, 'But I wasn't playing for a century' was mocked for 'wasted balls'.

And guess what, even after the miraculous World Cup Victory the trolling continued:

'What happened to your Jesus?'

'Why didn't he help you today?'

'Was he taking a Sabbath on Sunday?'

'You will never find a better dramatist than these Jesusists'.

So Yes!

The web definitely isn't a friendly field for girls and women, even if you play your part in making your country proud. But here's the kicker and I speak with experience. Sometimes women are not only the victims but also the perpetrators of online trolling.

It's a sad fact that most online trolls are actually women. This may come as a surprise since our culture isn't used to thinking about females as aggressors, but believe me the females can be even more vicious and deadly than male trolls. One of the reasons being, that they see them as competition and might be jealous of them or their achievements. But all in all trolling anyone, (whether men or women) is only a reflection of a deeply entrenched psychopathic mindset of the individuals who perpetrate it. And the trolls (whether men or women) also tend to get a sense of power and control over others. Perhaps that's why they attack only those they perceive as weak. But this psychopathic behaviour isn't merely about online conflict because offline too it perpetuates a hostile environment.

But when trolling is normalized it indicates a broader societal issue. And the most disturbing and worrying factor is when the institutions designed to protect us, often fail to take online abuse seriously, thus further emboldening the trolls.

What kind of society are we creating? Is it okay to have such online public executions, where the victims are hung from the tallest tree by the thinnest thread by some and the rest of us lap it up? Is this the kind of trolling triumph we really need? Think about it. (Courtesy: *The Citizen*)

Weaponised trolls What is 'oatzeptic'? Does it actually work for weight loss?

By: Lauren Ball, Emily Burch

If you've spent any time on TikTok or Instagram lately, you may have seen people blending oats with water or juice and calling it "oatzeptic."

The name is a nod to Ozempic, a prescription medication used primarily for type 2 diabetes that also suppresses appetite. Videos of the oatzeptic drink usually promise easy weight loss, effortless fullness and a "natural alternative" to medication.

But is oatzeptic supported by science? The short answer is no. Let's unpack why.

What exactly is oatzeptic?

There is no standard recipe for oatzeptic, but most videos show people blending one to two tablespoons of rolled oats with a glass of water. Others add lemon or lime juice, cinnamon or soak the oats first.

The suggested benefit is that drinking the mixture will create a sense of fullness and reduce appetite.

Some TikTok videos recommend to have oatzeptic instead of breakfast. Others say to drink it as a mid-afternoon snack to prevent overeating later in the day.

What happens when you eat oatzeptic?

Many users on social media report feeling fuller after drinking oatzeptic which is not surprising.

Oats are rich in beta-glucan, a type of soluble fibre that forms a gel-like substance when mixed with water. This slows down digestion which helps you to feel full.

There is good evidence that diets rich in viscous soluble fibre (like that from oats) modestly improve appetite control, reduce post-meal blood glucose (blood sugar) spikes and help regulate cholesterol.

Oats aren't the only source of viscous soluble fibre though. Foods such as apples, citrus fruits, flaxseeds, barley, psyllium husk and legumes (beans, lentils) also provide soluble fibres that form gels in the gut and have similar effects of making us feel full, as well as improving overall health.

So, the claim that oats can help people feel

full is well-founded. But feeling full is not the same as achieving meaningful or sustainable weight loss.

Long-term weight management requires balanced nutrition and physical activity — rather than relying solely on feeling full.

Has oatzeptic been tested for weight loss?

No. There are no scientific studies that look at the "oatzeptic drink" for weight loss, appetite control or other health outcomes. There is no official recipe, no recommended amount, and no long-term research.

So, if someone loses weight while drinking it, it's hard to know if that's because of the oatzeptic drink, eating fewer calories overall, or other changes in their lifestyle.

What we do know is that oats and other high-fibre foods (for example, brown rice, nuts and seeds, berries, broccoli and Brussel sprouts) have been studied for decades. Research shows they can help you feel a little fuller, improve your blood glucose control and support heart health. For example:

- o A randomised crossover trial showed adding oat fibre (beta-glucan) to a meal made people feel fuller and less hungry compared to a similar meal without it

- o A review of multiple studies (meta-analysis) reported that oat beta-glucan can modestly reduce LDL-cholesterol (the bad type) and help control blood glucose levels, both important for heart and metabolic health.

But, these benefits occur when oats are part of a healthy, balanced diet, not when consumed as a standalone "magic drink".

From a scientific standpoint, oatzeptic is a fibre-rich drink. It does not work like Ozempic, the prescription medication. Ozempic affects hormones that control appetite and blood glucose levels in a much more powerful way.

Could oatzeptic still be helpful for some people?

Yes. A drink that helps you feel fuller could slow down eating and better support portion control.

For those who often skip breakfast or grab

food on the run, an oats-based drink may be a more nutritious option than not eating at all. But these benefits come from fibre and hydration.

You'd get a greater nutritional benefit by making a simple smoothie with oats, a banana or berries, a spoonful of nut or seed butter and a splash of milk or yoghurt. This combination adds protein, potassium, healthy fats and a range of vitamins and minerals, offering a more balanced and nourishing option for your health.

Are there any risks?

For most people, drinking oatzeptic in small amounts is safe. But there are some important considerations:

- o It's not a complete meal. Oatzeptic is low in protein, healthy fats and several essential micronutrients. If it regularly replaces meals, it could lead to nutrient gaps or even under-eating

- o Sudden fibre increases can cause discomfort. For those not used to high-fibre diets, a rapid increase can trigger bloating or gastrointestinal symptoms — especially if fluid intake is inadequate

- o The name can be misleading. "Oatzeptic" invites comparison with a prescription medication, which may give the impression that the drink has drug-like effects

- o It could delay evidence-based care. Relying on a fad drink instead of seeking professional dietary or medical advice may prevent people from accessing the support they truly need.

What actually works for sustainable weight management?

Research supports a combination of strategies for long-term, sustainable weight management:

- o Cooking healthy meals at home that focus on adequate protein, healthy fats, unprocessed carbohydrates and fibre

- o Reducing intake of added sugar and processed foods and drinks

- o Drinking enough water

- o Consistent physical activity

- o Good sleep and stress management.

(Courtesy: Down to Earth)

Cinema taught us the names of emotions, we were never allowed to feel

By: Devendra Neeraj Shekhawat

I didn't learn what heartbreak feel like from a conversation. I learned it sitting in a dark theatre, watching someone else falls apart on screen. Growing up, we were never taught how to behave, how to succeed, how to survive but rarely how to feel. Emotions were either brushed aside, mocked or silenced. Crying was weakness. Confusion was immaturity. Somewhere between film scenes, characters, and quiet moments in cinema halls, cinema became our emotional dictionary. It gave names to feelings we experienced but never knew how to express.

Indian Cinema, in many ways, became our first emotional teacher.

One of the earliest lessons came from Taare Zameen Par. It gently showed us that not every child learns the same way, and that silence does not mean stupidity. The film gave shape to an emotion many children live with — the feeling of being unseen. It taught us empathy before society taught us expectations. It reminded us that understanding someone often matters more than correcting them.

As we grew older, cinema grew with us. Tamasha captured something many adults struggle to articulate — the suffocation of living a life chosen by someone else. Through Ved, the film showed how chasing approval at the cost of dreams slowly erodes identity. It wasn't just about ambition; it was about emotional exhaustion. The quiet frustration of existing without feeling alive. For many viewers, it gave a name to a feeling they had been carrying for years.

Even superhero films, often dismissed as fantasy, taught us deeply human emotions. Spider-Man is not just a boy with powers. He is a teenager dealing with bullying, loneliness, loss, and responsibility far beyond his age. He loses family, stands alone, and carries grief that never completely fades. Yet, despite pain and anger, he chooses kindness over cruelty. Responsibility over revenge. Through him, cinema taught us a quiet truth — that suffering does not automatically make us bitter, and that choosing to be good is sometimes the hardest emotional decision of all.

Then there are films that don't try to heal grief — they simply sit

with it. Masaan showed us how deeply one person can become attached to our life, and how their absence can quietly break us. The loss doesn't just hurt emotionally; it drains us mentally and physically. When Vicky Kaushal asks why pain doesn't seem to end, the film doesn't offer comfort — it offers honesty. Sadness doesn't completely disappear. Life only gives us a choice: to stay trapped in it, or to learn how to move forward while carrying it. Masaan taught us that surviving grief itself is a form of strength.

But cinema didn't teach us only pain.

Sometimes, it reminded us of emotions we forgot while growing up. Hera Pheri showed comedy in a unique way, by making us laugh at three people who were emotionally drained, financially broken, and almost out of hope. Behind the jokes were lives weighed down by unemployment, constant failure, and the quiet fear of not knowing what comes next.

We laughed at Raju, Shyam, and Baburao — not because their struggles were funny, but because cinema transformed their helplessness into humour. In doing so, the film taught us something deeply human: that laughter is often not the absence of pain, but a way of surviving it when nothing else seems to work. Together, these films didn't give us answers. They gave us language.

They helped us recognise feelings we didn't know how to name — grief, longing, confusion, responsibility, joy. They didn't promise happiness or solutions. They simply told us that what we feel is valid.

Of course, cinema is not perfect. Sometimes it romanticises pain. Sometimes it teaches unhealthy ideas of love and sacrifice. But at its best, cinema doesn't tell us how to live — it helps us understand what we are already feeling.

Maybe that's why films stay with us long after the credits roll. Not because of the stories, but because of the emotions they awaken. Emotions we were never taught in classrooms or living rooms, but quietly learned in dark theatres, watching someone else live them first.

Maybe cinema didn't give us answers.

It only reminded us — with great power comes great responsibility. (Courtesy: *Youth Ki Awaaz*)

B'desh says most incidents involving minorities in 2025 were non-communal



DHAKA, Jan 19: The majority of incidents involving members of minority communities in Bangladesh during 2025 were "criminal in nature" and not driven by communal motives, the interim government said on Monday.

The statement came days after India, on January 9, pressed Dhaka to "swiftly and firmly" deal with attacks on minorities in Bangladesh and described as "troubling" the attempts to attribute the incidents to extraneous reasons. New Delhi's reaction had come against the backdrop of the killing of several Hindu individuals in Bangladesh in the last few weeks.

Citing a yearlong review of official police records, the statement issued by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' office said a total of 645 incidents involving minority communities were recorded between January and December 2025 across Bangladesh.

"While every incident is a matter of concern, the data presents a clear and evidence-based picture: the overwhelming majority of cases were criminal in nature rather than communal," it said.

According to the statement, of the 645 incidents, 71 were identified as having communal elements. These included 38 cases of temple vandalism, eight of arson, one of theft, one murder and 23 other incidents such as threats to break idols, provocative social media posts and damage to worship pavilions. Police cases were filed in 50 of these incidents, and arrests were made in an equal number, while other preventive or investigative measures were taken in 21 cases, the statement said.

The remaining 574 incidents were linked to criminal or social disputes unrelated to religion, including neighbourhood disputes (51), land-related conflicts (23), theft (106), prior personal enmity (26), rape (58) and 172 cases of unnatural death.

Police registered 390 cases in this category, filed 154 unnatural death reports and made 498 arrests, with additional measures taken in 30 incidents. The interim government said the report "does not

deny challenges, nor does it claim perfection; rather, it seeks to provide a factual, evidence-based picture of crime trends affecting minority communities within the broader national context". "While all crimes are serious and demand accountability, the data demonstrates that most incidents involving minority victims were not driven by communal hostility, but by broader criminal and social factors that affect citizens across religious and ethnic lines," it said.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) leader Kajal Debnath questioned the government's classification of incidents involving minorities as "non-communal".

"If the government thinks these are not communal incidents, the question then is whether anyone can take the law into their own hands," Debnath said.

He warned that such statements could embolden criminals and give them a sense of impunity.

According to the 2022 census, the Hindu population in Bangladesh is approximately 13.13 million, which accounts for about 7.95% of the country's total population. The Buddhist population is approximately 1.01 million (0.61%), Christians number nearly 500,000, and other religions, including Sikh and Animist, comprise approximately 200,000 (0.12%).

Earlier this month, the BHBCUC, in a statement, claimed that as the date of the general elections draws nearer, communal violence is increasing at an alarming rate in the country. Parliamentary polls are scheduled on February 12. The forum alleged that the violence is aimed at preventing minority voters from casting votes for candidates of their choice.

The Council reported 51 incidents of communal violence in December 2025 alone.

The interim government in the statement reiterated that ensuring safety and justice for all citizens, including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and people of other beliefs, remains a constitutional and moral obligation. (PTI)

Death toll in Spanish train collision rises to 39, authorities say it could still rise

ADAMUZ (SPAIN), Jan 19: Spanish police said Monday that at least 39 people are confirmed dead in a high-speed train collision the previous night in the south of the country, as efforts to recover the bodies continue with authorities expecting the death toll to rise.

The crash occurred Sunday at 7:45 pm when the tail end of a train carrying some 300 passengers on the route from Malaga to the capital, Madrid, went off the rails at 7:45 pm. It slammed into an incoming train travelling from Madrid to Huelva, another southern Spanish city, according to rail operator Adif.

The head of the second train, which was carrying nearly 200 passengers, took the brunt of the impact, Spanish Transport Minister Oscar Puente said.

That collision knocked its first two carriages off the track and sent them plummeting down a 4-metre (13-foot) slope. Puente said that it appeared the largest number of the deaths occurred in those carriages.

Andalusia regional president Juanma Moreno said Monday morning that emergency services were still searching what he described as a mass of twisted metal where the smashed carriages had derailed.

"It is likely (that there will be more dead people found) when you look at the mass of metal that is there. The firefighters have done a great job, but unfortunately when they get the heavy machinery to lift the carriages it is probable we will find more victims."



"Here at ground zero, when you look at this mass of twisted iron, you see the violence of the impact."

Video and photos showed twisted train cars lying on their sides under floodlights late on Sunday. Passengers reported climbing out of smashed windows, with some using emergency hammers to break the windows, according to Salvador Jimenez, a journalist for Spanish broadcaster RTVE, who was on board one of the derailed trains.

He told the network by phone Sunday that "there was a moment when it felt like an earthquake and the train had indeed derailed".

Spanish police said 159 people were injured, of whom five were in critical condition. A further 24 were in serious condition, authorities said.

The collision took place near Adamuz, a town in the province of Cordoba, about 370 km south of Madrid.

A sports centre was turned into a makeshift hospital in Adamuz and the Spanish Red Cross set up a help centre offering assistance to emergency services and people seeking information. Members of Spain's civil guard and civil defence worked on site throughout the night.

Transport Minister Puente early Monday

said the cause of the crash was unknown. He called it "a truly strange" incident because it happened on a flat stretch of track that had been renovated in May. He also said the train that jumped the track was less than 4 years old. That train belonged to the private company Iryo, while the second train, which took the brunt of the impact, was part of Spain's public train company, Renfe.

According to Puente, the back part of the first train derailed and crashed into the head of the other train. When asked by reporters how long an inquiry into the crash's cause could take, he said it could be a month.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez expressed his condolences to the victims' families. "Tonight is a night of deep pain for our country," he wrote on X.

The prime minister will visit the accident site on Monday, according to his office.

Spain has the largest rail network in Europe for trains moving over 250 kph, with more than 3,100 km of track, according to the European Union.

The network is a popular, competitively priced and safe mode of transport. Renfe said more than 25 million passengers took one of its high-speed trains in 2024.

Train services Monday between Madrid and cities in Andalusia were cancelled.

Spain's worst train accident this century occurred in 2013, when 80 people died after a train derailed in the country's northwest. An investigation concluded the train was travelling 179 kph on a stretch with an 80 kph speed limit when it left the tracks. (AP)

Prince Harry's court battle against British tabloids reaches final chapter

LONDON, Jan 19: Prince Harry arrived in a London court Monday for the third and final chapter in his legal quest to tame the British tabloids.

Harry, also known as the Duke of Sussex, is the lead litigant in a case full of high-profile plaintiffs who accuse the publisher of the Daily Mail of invading their privacy by using unlawful information-gathering tactics to snoop on them for sensational headlines.

The seven plaintiffs, including Elton John and actors Elizabeth Hurley and Sadie Frost, allege that Associated Newspapers Ltd. hired private investigators to bug their cars, gain access to their private records and eavesdrop on phone calls.

The publisher has denied the allegations and called them preposterous.

The trial in London's High Court is expected to last nine weeks and will see the return of Harry to the witness box for the second time since he made history in 2023 by becoming the first senior member of the royal family to testify in more than a century.

The prince vs. the publishers case was one of many that has emerged from the widespread phone hacking scandal in which some journalists began intercept-



ing voicemail messages around the turn of this century and continued for more than a decade.

Harry won a court judgment in 2023 that condemned the publishers of the Daily Mirror for "widespread and habitual" phone hacking. Last year, Rupert Murdoch's flagship UK tabloid made an unprecedented apology for intruding on his life for years, and agreed to pay substantial damages to settle his privacy invasion lawsuit. Harry's self-proclaimed mission to reform the media is more personal and goes far beyond headlines that attempted to document his party boy youth and romance ups and downs.

He holds the press responsible for the death of his mother, Princess Diana, who was killed in a car crash in 1997 while being pursued by paparazzi in Paris. He also blames them for persistent attacks on his wife, Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, that led them to leave royal life and move to the United States in 2020.

Repairing rift in the royal family

The trial comes as Harry tries to repair a damaged relationship with his family since he moved to America and burned the bridge behind him by penning a scorching 2023 memoir, "Spare," and airing other family grievances in a Net-

flix series.

Frosty relations with his father, King Charles III, appear to be thawing a bit after the two met for tea last fall when Harry was last in town. But a reunion this time looks unlikely.

The start of the trial coincides with Charles' trip to Scotland and Harry's visit is expected to be limited to the opening of the trial and his early testimony.

Wins and losses before trial

The case against the Mail was filed in 2022 and has been the subject of several contentious hearings that have led to rulings that each side has claimed as victories.

Lawyers for Associated Newspapers had argued that the case should be thrown out because claims dating as far back as 1993 were brought too late. But in a ruling saying the cases have a "real prospect of succeeding," Judge Matthew Nicklin said the papers had "not been able to deliver a knockout blow" to the claims.

In the same ruling, Nicklin handed a win to the Mail in saying Harry and the others could not use records that allegedly showed payments by the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday to private investigators because they had been disclosed in confidence to a government inquiry into phone hacking. (AP)

Death toll in Karachi shopping mall fire rises to 15



KARACHI, Jan 19: The death toll from a major fire at an old shopping mall in Pakistan's Karachi has risen to 15, while around 65 people remain missing, officials said on Monday.

Authorities said the toll could increase further following the blaze, which broke out late Saturday night at Gul Plaza, a wholesale and retail market housing shops in the basement, mezzanine and three additional floors. The fire was brought under control by Sunday night.

Addressing a press conference, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said, "There has been a considerable loss of lives in this incident. I cannot give a final number as of yet. We have recovered 15 bodies... As per the latest figures as of 1 pm, around 65 people who were reported to have come to Gul Plaza are missing. So, in total, around 80 people [have died] in this."

Six bodies were found immediately after the fire broke out. They had died due to suffocation, while dozens of others were sent to hospitals. However, as the fire spread, rescue teams were unable to go in.

"Once the fire was doused, we didn't wait for the cooling period and forcibly went in to rescue trapped people, and we found eight more bodies, some badly charred," Rescue 1122 Chief Operating Officer (COO) Abid Jalal said.

He told PTI on Monday morning that the fire had almost completely damaged the building, with one back and one front portion collapsing because of weak pillars.

"The building structure has been weakened by the fire, and we are still continuing to search for any remaining people because we could see more structural collapses," Jalal said. The market, which had around 1,200 shops on all floors, has been one of Karachi's landmarks since the early 1980s on the main M A Jinnah Road in the Saddar commercial area. Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori, who came to the site this morning, said, "We are extremely concerned and alarmed. Efforts are going on to find them, but this is a national tragedy."

South DIG Syed Asad Raza told the media that the casualties could increase because there was still a lot more space to be covered to find survivors. He said an electrical short circuit might have caused the fire, but the cause is yet to be confirmed. Gul Plaza is not the first shopping mall to catch fire in Karachi, as in recent years there have been several incidents due to a lack of safety, inadequate fire-fighting systems, overloaded electrical systems and illegal constructions in Pakistan's biggest city.

In 2024, a government audit found that in 266 shopping malls and commercial buildings located on major roads, only six had proper fire safety measures, with 62 per cent lacking emergency exits and 70 per cent having substandard electrical systems. (PTI)

Pakistan Air Force contingent arrives in Saudi to participate in multi-national exercise

ISLAMABAD, Jan 19: A Pakistan Air Force (PAF) contingent comprising F-16 Block-52 fighter aircraft, alongside dedicated air and ground crew, has arrived in Saudi Arabia to participate in a multi-national aerial combat exercise, the military said on Monday.

The PAF contingent landed at the King Abdulaziz Air Base, Saudi Arabia, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) - the media wing of the Pakistan military - said in a statement. Fighter jets and combat support elements from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, France, Italy, Greece, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, the UK and the US would participate in the exercise called 'Spears of Victory-2026', the ISPR said.

"It offers a robust platform to enhance interoperability, operational synergy, mutual understanding and capacity building among participating Air Forces, particularly in large force employment, night composite air operations, integrated ISR, and operations in advanced electronic warfare environments," it said.

Through participation in this multinational forum, Pakistan Air Force seeks to enhance interoperability

with partner air forces and validate its operational preparedness in a contested, technology-driven battlespace, it said.

The ISPR said that for this international deployment, PAF fighter aircraft undertook a non-stop flight from their home base in Pakistan to Saudi Arabia, demonstrating the long-range operational reach and expeditionary capabilities of the PAF.

During the exercise, the PAF pilots flying advanced F-16 Block-52 aircraft equipped with modern avionics and Beyond Visual Range capabilities will be pitched against aircrew of participating air forces operating a wide array of sophisticated combat aircraft.

Participation of the PAF contingent in the multi-national exercise not only reflects PAF's firm commitment to regional and international military cooperation, but also underscores its professional excellence and proven capability to operate effectively in diverse and demanding operational environments alongside leading contemporary air forces, the ISPR said. (PTI)

Imran denied access to legal counsels, his party claims

LAHORE, Jan 19: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has been denied access to his legal counsels and kept in solitary confinement for the last three months, his party PTI said on Monday.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) also said that the "prolonged solitary confinement" is viewed under international law as harmful and potentially constituting cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Khan, 73, has been incarcerated since August 2023, when he was arrested for the first time. Multiple cases have been registered against Khan after his government was toppled in April 2022.

The military backed Shehbaz Sharif government early last month had imposed a complete ban on Khan's all kinds of jail meetings following his statement against Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Field Marshal Asim Munir.

Khan, after meeting with his sister in jail on December 4, called Munir "a mentally unstable person" in a post on X.

On Monday, the PTI said that "prolonged solitary confinement is viewed under international law as harmful and potentially constituting cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, the reason why it's drawing concern among the supporters and the leadership." It said the former prime minister has been completely isolated in a cell -- placed in solitary confinement -- for more than three months. "Even the basic necessities guaranteed under the jail manual have been denied to him," the party said.

The party further said the Form-47 mandate (a reference to stolen mandate of Khan's party in 2024 polls and installing the PML-N government by the military es-

tablishment) has so far been unable to explain the reason why it's been so long since Khan last met his lawyers, which is a constitutional right of any prisoner, let alone a former prime minister.

After the February 8 general elections in 2024, Khan had called the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as "mandate thieves" alleging that they stole his party's seats by manipulating results to come to power.

The PTI has earlier launched multiple demonstrations demanding Khan's release and has now already announced a massive protest on February 8 to protest its "stolen mandate" in the general polls two years ago. The PML-N government initially cited rule violations during visits by his family and leaders, leading to "political discussions and instructions." (PTI)

China's population shrinks to historic low as demographic slide continues

BEIJING, Jan 19: China's population shrank for the fourth consecutive year as birth rates in 2025 fell by about 10 million from a decade earlier, a trend widely blamed on the long-term effects of the former one-child policy.

According to the data released by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on Monday only 7.92 million babies were born in 2025 compared to 9.54 million in 2024, a decline of 17 per cent.

This marked the lowest birth figure since records began in 1949 and broke the previous lowest record set in 2023, the year India overtook China as the most populous country, according to a United Nations report.

Based on the current fertility rates in China, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) estimated in 2024 that China's population

would decline to 633 million by 2100.

As per NBS data released on Monday, China's total population fell by 3.39 million in 2025 to 1.4049 billion from 1.4083 billion a year earlier.

Also, China is currently grappling with a rapidly ageing population. According to the official data at the end of 2024, the number of people aged 60 and above in China had hit 310 million.

By 2035, this demographic is projected to exceed 400 million.

By sheer numbers last year marked the steepest annual population decline on record, apart from during China's devastating famine from 1959 to 1961, the Hong Kong based South China Morning Post reported.

Meanwhile, about 11.31 million people died last year - one of the highest totals in five decades.



China's serious demographic crisis is blamed on the decades-old one-child policy followed by the ruling Communist Party.

Amid warnings that the demographic crisis will seriously impact the economy, China scrapped the one child policy in 2016 and per-

mitted all couples to have two children. As it failed to make an impact, China revised the population policy in 2021, allowing people to have three children in an attempt to address the reluctance of couples to have more kids due to mounting costs.

In the last few years China has implemented policies to boost the birth rates which included the national childcare subsidy scheme offering up to 10,800 RMB (USD 1,534) per year for each child.

Beijing also increased the condom tax to encourage couples to have more children.

The pace of the decline of population in China is striking, particularly in the absence of major shocks, Su Yue, principal economist for China at the Economist Intelligence Unit.

The reluctance among young people to get married, along with rising economic pressures - particularly an increase for women in the perceived cost of stepping away from employment - served as major birth deterrents, she told the Post.

"The data should serve as a strong signal for policymakers to

place greater emphasis on domestic structural reforms," she noted, calling for a more forceful policy response on fertility in the face of a shrinking population and the risk of a smaller consumer base in the future.

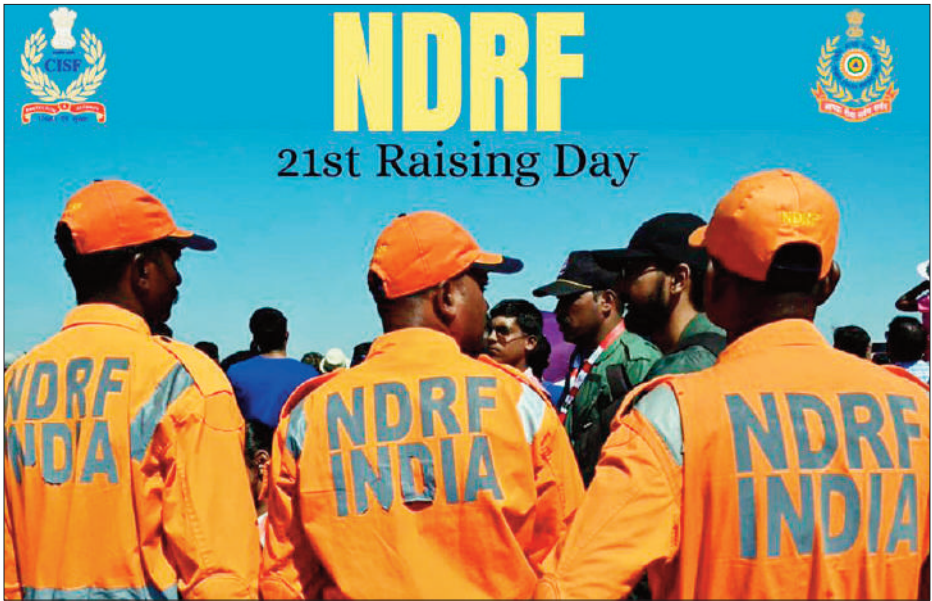
Yuan Xin, vice-president of the China Population Association, pointed to a correlation between the decline in births last year and the sharp drop in marriages in 2024.

China's mainland registered 6.106 million marriages in 2024, down more than 20 per cent year on year, marking the lowest level since 1980, Yuan said.

However, through the first three quarters of 2025, China recorded a year-on-year upstick of 8.5 per cent in marriage registrations, with analysts signalling that a host of pro-marriage policies were starting to pay off, the Post reported. (PTI)

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CM, Dy CM laud NDRF on Raising Day for lifesaving service NDRF at forefront of disaster response, saving lives, serving nation: Khandu



ITANAGAR, Jan 19: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday lauded the NDRF, saying that its personnel stand at the forefront of disaster response, saving lives and serving the nation with honour.

He paid the tributes on the occasion of the

Raising Day of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).

"We pay tributes to the unwavering dedication and bravery of NDRF personnel who stand at the forefront of disaster response, saving lives and serving the nation with honour," Khandu

Villagers lock gate to protect Itanagar water catchment areas

HT Correspondent

POMA, Jan 19: Residents of Poma village under the Sangdupota circle in Papum Pare district have expressed strong displeasure over the alleged inaction of the PHE & WS Department in safeguarding the catchment areas of Itanagar's water supply intake points. On Monday, members of the Poma Panchayat Youth Welfare Society (PPYWS), Gaon Burahs (GBs), Panchayat leaders and village elders issued a stern warning to the department to halt human settlement activities near the Meh and Mupu rivers, the primary sources of drinking water for Itanagar.

In a show of protest, villagers locked the gate on the only road leading to the intake point, blocking access. Key leaders present included GPC of Poma Panchayat Techi Punia, GBs Techi Paso, Tayum Senkam, Techi Lera, Tayum Nabro, Kino Senda, along with other PPYWS members and village elders.

"As the department has failed to take any action to safeguard the catchment areas, we are forced to take matters into our own hands. We have locked this gate and will not allow anyone, including PHE & WS workers to use this road. The gate will remain closed until a long-term solution is implemented," the villagers stated.

They alleged that unauthorised construction activities have been carried out near the catchment areas without village consent. "We have always cooperated with authorities in the best interest of everyone, but now outsiders are building near the rivers while the department remains inactive. This is hurting our sentiments," the villagers added.

The protest highlights growing concern among local communities over the protection of vital water resources amid increasing settlement pressures and lack of timely government intervention.

Painting and essay competitions held at Lok Bhavan

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 19: As part of the 77th Republic Day celebrations, the Governor's Secretariat organised painting and essay writing competitions at Lok Bhavan, Itanagar on Monday. The events saw enthusiastic participation from schoolchildren across the state, including students from Donyi Polo Mission School for the Hearing and Visually Impaired, Chimpu and Oju Mission, Naharlagun. Their spirited involvement brought colour, creativity and inclusivity to the celebrations. Winners are set to receive prizes from the Governor during the upcoming 'At Home' function.

The competitions were initiated by the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), to engage youth in meaningful participation in national celebrations. The initiative aims to nurture patriotic values, encourage creative expression and instil civic responsibility among young minds as India moves towards the vision of Viksit Bharat@2027.



The essay writing competition covered themes such as 'Unity in Diversity: Strength of India', 'Children as Responsible Citizens' and 'Our Constitution: Our Pride'. Meanwhile, the painting competition encouraged students to depict the role of youth in development and nation-building, providing an avenue for young participants to express their aspirations for the country's future through art and imagination.

CBCS chairman stresses preservation of traditional systems Ringu Gautam pledges to work for social and cultural uplift

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 19: Chairman of the Changtum Butte Charitable Society (CBCS), Ringu Gautam, has assured community, tribe and society leaders that he will lead the organisation towards social and cultural development of the community and society as a whole.

Gautam, a social worker by profession was recently appointed chairman of the Changtum Butte Charitable Society along with other executive members, including Yurum Sajam as general secretary, Chello Tate as vice president and Gangete

Tukhs as assistant general secretary. During a meeting, the executive members discussed several important issues related to the community, clan and society and deliberated on ways to address so-

cial challenges for the overall development of the community and tribe. Gautam said that the Changtum Butte Charitable Society is working with a mission to protect and preserve age-old traditions and traditional systems. He emphasised that the promotion and preservation of traditional practices can be achieved only if all stakeholders with knowledge and experience of the old systems come together and support the organisation.

Appealing for cooperation, Gautam urged like-minded people to extend support to organisations working for the protection, preservation and promotion of age-old traditions so that society remains connected with its cultural roots and traditional values.



said in an X post, underlining the critical role played by the force during natural and man-made disasters across the country. Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein also lauded the force for its selfless service and professionalism.

"On NDRF Raising Day, we honour the brave men and women who stand as the nation's first responders during disasters. Their dedication, discipline and compassion inspire confidence and hope," Mein said in a social media post.

"We express our deepest gratitude for their tireless service in protecting lives and communities," he added.

NDRF Raising Day is observed every year on January 19 to mark the establishment of the specialised disaster response force, officials said. The day recognises the courage, preparedness and swift action of NDRF personnel who are often the first to reach disaster-hit areas, operating in the most challenging conditions to save lives. The NDRF was constituted in 2006 under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, with the mandate of responding promptly and effectively to disasters and emergencies.

Since its formation, the NDRF has evolved into a highly trained, multi-disciplinary force equipped to handle floods, earthquakes, cyclones, landslides, industrial accidents and other complex emergencies. (PTI)

APEWF holds coordination meet on employees' welfare issues OPS restoration, allowances and service benefits discussed



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 19: The Arunachal Pradesh Employees Welfare Federation (APEWF) on Jan 17 held a coordination meeting with leaders of various employees' organisations, including associations, unions, federations and societies, to discuss issues related to employees' welfare.

APEWF president Pill Takur informed that the federation was formed in 2025 to represent employees of all categories, including regular, contingency, contractual staff and retired pensioners. He said the federation is affiliated with the national body, the All India National Public Sector Employees Federation (AINPSEF). Since its formation, several activities have been undertaken to create awareness among employees about welfare schemes, rights and privileges.

Takur said the main objective of the federation is to act as a bridge among different frontal organisations to collectively fight for the rights and privileges guaranteed to

employees by the government. "We are working with the motto of safeguarding the greater interest and well-being of employees," he said.

He added that due to New Year celebrations and holidays, attendance at the meeting was comparatively lower, but the programme was encouraging as presidents and general secretaries of several departments attended and shared their views, suggestions and advice to strengthen the organisation and prioritise employees' welfare issues.

During the meeting, leaders of various organisations raised several issues, including Dearness Allowance (DA), Tough Location Allowance (TLA), Travelling Allowance (TA), Leave Travel Concession (LTC), House Rent Allowance (HRA), Children Education Allowance (CEA), Transport Allowance (TrA), medical reimbursement or medical allowance, family planning allowance, maternity and child care

leave, overtime allowance, uniform and dress allowance, conveyance allowance, washing allowance, non-practicing allowance and regular conduct of Departmental Promotion Committees (DPC).

Apart from allowances and welfare schemes, Takur said the restoration of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) in place of the National Pension System (NPS) has remained a major demand of employees for some time. He said the federation has organised several programmes and submitted memoranda to the state government, besides participating in protest programmes in New Delhi and within the state.

"As part of awareness campaigns, we even released hundreds of balloons to highlight the demand for restoration of OPS, which is still in place or being implemented in several states of the country. We hope the state government will also consider our demand," Takur added.

EKSWCO raises concerns over selective re-check in Lada-Sarli compensation

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 19: The East Kameng Social Welfare and Cultural Organisation (EKSWCO) has raised objections to what it termed "arbitrary and selective" physical re-verification of land and property compensation under the Lada-Sarli Frontier Highway project in Arunachal Pradesh.

In a representation to the chief secretary, EKSWCO's Lada-Sarli Frontier Highway Scam Committee issue chairman Chopa Cheda highlighted that the ongoing re-verification exercise, which began on January 14, excluded a key stretch between chainage 0.00 km and 14.600 km (Package-I). Cheda expressed concerns that this omission raised questions about the transparency and fairness of the process.

He alleged that the excluded areas, predominantly inhabited by the Sajolang (Miji) community, while re-verification focused on Nyishi-dominated belts, amounted to discrimination and could undermine the credibility of the entire exercise. EKSWCO cited a government order dated December 23, 2025 and noted that no official justification had been provided for leaving out the stretch from scrutiny.

"This selective approach sends a disturbing message that irregularities exist only in certain communities, which is factually untenable," Cheda said, emphasising that corruption and manipulation are not confined to any single community.

EKSWCO further warned that the selective verification raised suspicions of political interference aimed at shielding alleged irregularities from public scrutiny. The organisation cautioned that such actions could deepen public distrust and fuel perceptions of bias in the compensation process.

ArSRLM, RGU sign MoU to boost rural livelihood initiatives



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 19: The Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM) and Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen academic, research and institutional collaboration aimed at enhancing sustainable rural livelihoods in the State.

The non-financial MoU outlines cooperation in areas such as research, capacity building, internships, field-based studies, documentation and knowledge management, in alignment with the objectives of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), UGC regulations and Government of Arunachal Pradesh norms.

The agreement was signed by Sangeeta Yirang, CEO-cum-State Mission Director, ArSRLM and Dr N.T. Rikam, Registrar, RGU. Addressing the gathering, Yirang emphasised the role of academic institutions in supporting NRLM implementation, including impact assessments, documentation of locally relevant livelihood models and capacity-building initiatives.

Dr Rikam highlighted the University's commitment to community-oriented research, experiential learning and extension activities. He noted that the partnership would offer students and faculty meaningful field exposure and applied research opportunities while contributing to evidence-based rural development planning.

Sonny Patey, State Mission Manager (M&E and MIS), ArSRLM, detailed the MoU's scope, including structured internships, research collaborations and systematic knowledge sharing between the Mission and the University.

The signing ceremony was attended by Dr N.T. Jose, Joint Registrar (Academic), RGU, Dr Arindam Garg, Associate Professor, Department of Management, RGU and officials from both institutions.

Both ArSRLM and RGU expressed confidence that the MoU would provide a robust platform for academic-institutional collaboration, supporting human resource development, institutional strengthening and sustainable rural livelihoods in Arunachal Pradesh.

Awareness camp on PM Vishwakarma scheme held at Pasighat

HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Jan 19: A one-day seminar-cum-awareness programme on the PM Vishwakarma Scheme was organised at the IGT Auditorium, Pasighat, by the MSME Development & Facilitation Centre, Itanagar in collaboration with the District Administration and District Industries Centre, Pasighat. Addressing participants, Anima Gammeng, ADI, DIC Pasighat, highlighted that the PM Vishwakarma Scheme is a flagship initiative by the Government of India designed to support traditional artisans and craftsmen. She urged gram panchayat leaders to actively promote the scheme at the grassroots level to ensure maximum reach and benefit for eligible beneficiaries. Vijay Sherawat, AD of the Itanagar branch of MSME-DFO, explained that the programme's primary objective was to raise awareness among gram panchayat chairpersons, artisans, craftsmen and other stakeholders.

Global conference on democracy and election management to see participation from over 70 countries

ECI to host IICDEM-2026 in New Delhi

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 19: The Election Commission of India (ECI) will host the inaugural India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026 from January 21 to 23 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. The conference is being organised by the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) and is expected to be the largest global event of its kind hosted by India in the field of democracy and election management.

Nearly 100 international delegates from over 70 countries are expected to participate, along with representatives of international organisations, foreign missions in India and experts from academic and professional backgrounds in the electoral domain. Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Dr Vivek Joshi will inaugurate the event and receive the delegates at the opening session.

The three-day program will include general and plenary sessions of Election Management Bodies (EMBs), including the inaugural session, EMB leaders' plenary and EMB working group meetings. A total of 36 thematic breakout sessions, led by CEOs of States and UTs and supported by national and international academic experts will focus on global electoral challenges, model international electoral standards, innovations and best practices in election management.

The conference will also feature over 40 bilateral meetings between the ECI and EMBs from across the world to promote dialogue and cooperation. Participation from premier academic institutions, including four IITs, six IIMs, 12 National Law Universities and the Indian Institute of Mass Communication is expected to enrich discussions.

Alongside the sessions, an exhibition will showcase the scale and complexity of conducting elections in India and highlight recent initia-



tives to strengthen electoral rolls and improve the conduct of elections. The docuseries "India Decides," which chronicles the making of India's largest election, the Lok Sabha 2024 elections will

be screened on the first day. During the conference, the ECI will also formally launch ECINET, a digital platform designed to provide comprehensive election-related information and services. The

event aims to position India as a global leader in democracy and election management while fostering international collaboration and exchange of best practices in the electoral domain.

Work will be 'revdi' handed over by Modi govt, no longer a right: Oppn on law replacing MGNREGA



NEW DELHI, Jan 19: Opposing the new VB-G RAM G Act that has replaced the MGNREGA, Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi have claimed that work for the country's rural population will now become a "revdi", to be handed over to them as the government decides, and will no longer be a right.

Writing this in a letter to the rural folk, the Congress leaders have alleged that their right to work is being "stolen" even as states are being burdened financially through the new Act.

The letter written by Kharge and Gandhi is part of the Congress's countrywide "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram" demanding the restoration of the earlier law. The campaign was launched on January 10 and will continue till February 25.

The Congress has asked all its state unit chiefs to disseminate the letter among the rural folk after getting it translated into all local languages. The letter said 20 years ago, the Congress government led by then prime minister Manmohan Singh brought life to the constitutional right to work by enacting the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Since then, the MGNREGA has generated more than 180 crore days of work, created almost 10 crore assets like village tanks and roads, and strengthened the panchayati raj system by empowering gram panchayats to decide on village-level projects, it said.

"During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the lifeline of the rural Indian economy. The Modi government is now planning to destroy the soul of the MGNREGA in four critical ways.

"Your Right to Work is being stolen. Before: Work was a legal guarantee to every rural family across India. Work had to be provided within 15 days, to any family seeking work in any Gram Panchayat. After: Work will no longer be a right but a 'revdi' to be handed out as the Modi government decides. The Modi government will pick and choose which Gram Panchayats will get work under the scheme," the letter said.

It also claimed that the right to wages is being stolen.

"Before: Work was provided at notified minimum wages which increased yearly and was available 365 days of the year. Families could seek work whenever needed, with the guarantee of a minimum wage.

"After: Wages will be set arbitrarily with no guaranteed yearly revisions. The scheme will not run during the harvest season, so workers will be forced to accept any other work they get with no minimum wage," the Congress leaders said in the letter.

Claiming that the gram panchayats' powers will be handed over to contractors, they said the gram panchayats earlier planned and undertook its own development projects according to their needs, while contractors were banned and workers were supported by local MGNREGA mates and rozgar sahayaks.

Now, they claimed, decisions regarding projects will be taken through a remote-control from Delhi.

The gram panchayat will become only an implementing agency for the Narendra Modi government's orders, contractors will be brought in and workers will become mere labourers in their hands, they said.

There will be no MGNREGA mates or rozgar sahayaks either, Kharge and Gandhi said.

Noting that the states are being burdened financially, the Congress leaders said while earlier, the Centre would pay 100 per cent of the MGNREGA wages, states were incentivised for providing work.

"The states will now pay 40 per cent of your wages. To save costs, they are incentivised to limit work-days. In all this, the worst impact will be felt by rural families, especially women and SC/ST communities, for whom guaranteed work is a lifeline against hunger, debt and distress migration," the letter read.

It said the Congress is leading the "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram", a nationwide movement to restore the previous law.

"Our goal is simple: guaranteed work, guaranteed wages, and guaranteed accountability. Our local Congress office-bearers will apprise you of the activities planned in your Gram Panchayat and Blocks. Please join us in this struggle for justice," the Congress leaders said in the letter. (PTI)

BJP president election: Senior leaders submit nomination papers of Nitin Nabin

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: Bharatiya Janata Party set the ball rolling for the election of its new president with top party leaders submitting nomination papers of Nitin Nabin, the party's 45-year-old working president, for the post on Monday.

BJP president J P Nadra and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh handed over a set of Nabin's nomination papers to K Laxman, the Returning Officer for the election, in the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah, Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari and senior leaders Dharmendra Pradhan, Bhupendra Yadav and Kiren Rijjiu.

Later, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu and other state leaders submitted another set of nomination papers in support of Nabin, who was appointed as the working president last month.

Chief Ministers Yogi Adityanath, Pushkar Singh Dhami, Nayab Singh Saini and Pramod Sawant were also present on the occasion.

Leaders from Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Assam, Jharkhand and other states also submitted nomination papers in support of Nabin.

Nabin is likely to be elected unopposed as the BJP's 12th national president, with top party leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, backing his candidature.

The BJP national president is elected by an electoral college comprising representatives from the party's national council and state councils, with the process overseen by its national returning officer. (PTI)

Karur stampede case: CBI questions TVK chief Vijay for second time

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: The CBI started the second round of questioning of TVK chief and actor Vijay at the agency headquarters here on Monday in connection with the Karur stampede case, officials said. The actor arrived at the agency headquarters on Lodhi Road in a fleet of luxury SUVs this morning, they said. He is being questioned during the day by a team of officials led by a deputy superintendent rank officer drawn from the agency's anti-corruption, they said.

Vijay was earlier questioned at the CBI headquarters here on January 12 for more than six hours. He was asked to come again on January 13 last but the actor sought another date citing Pongal, they said.

The central probe agency acceded to the actor's request and gave him a date for Monday, they said. Several questions related to decision-making about the rally, reasons for his delay, continuation of speech, his knowledge about the ongoing chaos, turnout and mismanagement of the crowd were put forth to him, they said. The call on attributing the role of individuals in the chargesheet will be taken only after a thorough analysis of the statements of the actor, senior political officials of his party, police and district administration officials involved

in the process of giving clearance and managing the rally said. The federal agency took over the case from an SIT following a Supreme Court order and has been gathering evidence related to the September 27 stampede, which claimed 41 lives and left more than 60 injured in Tamil Nadu's Karur.

In October last year, the apex court had asked the CBI director to appoint a senior officer to take over the investigation and also constituted a supervisory committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Ajay Rastogi to monitor the agency's investigation.

A bench comprising Justices J K Maheshwari and N V Anjaria had said the stampede has left an imprint in the minds of citizens throughout the country.

It has wide ramifications with respect to the life of citizens and enforcing the fundamental rights of the families who lost their kin is of utmost importance, the court had said.

"The faith and trust of the general public in the process of investigation must be restored in the criminal justice system, and one way to instil such trust is by ensuring that the investigation in the present case is completely impartial, independent and unbiased," the bench said. (PTI)

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Jaishankar's blunt message to Poland: Don't help fuel terror infrastructure in our neighbourhood

'Our bilateral relationship has also progressed steadily, but nevertheless, needs constant tending'

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: Poland should display "zero-tolerance" for terrorism and not help "fuel" the terrorist infrastructure in India's neighbourhood, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told his Polish counterpart Radoslaw Sikorski on Monday in a blunt message apparently over the mentioning of Kashmir in a Poland-Pakistan joint statement in October.

At a meeting with Sikorski, Jaishankar also expressed his anguish over the unfair and unjustified "selective targeting" of India over the Ukraine conflict, in what is seen as a reference to Western nations' criticism of New Delhi over its energy ties with Russia.

The external affairs minister made the comments in his televised opening remarks at the meeting in New Delhi. Sikorski is also Poland's deputy prime minister.

On his part, the Polish foreign minister said he completely agreed with Jaishankar on the "unfairness" and "selective targeting" in the context of tariffs over India's relations with Russia.

Sikorski is on a three-day visit to India that came less than 10 days before the top leadership of the European Union travels to the country.

"You are no stranger to our region and are certainly familiar with the longstanding challenge of cross-border terrorism," Jaishankar said.



"I hope at this meeting to discuss some of your recent travels to the region. Poland should display zero-tolerance for terrorism and not help fuel the terrorist infrastructure in our neighbourhood," he said.

In late October, Sikorski travelled to Islamabad and held wide-ranging talks with Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, following which a joint statement was issued that featured the Kashmir issue.

The external affairs minister also mentioned India's consistent position on the Ukraine conflict.

"In the recent past, both in New York last September and in Paris this January, I have candidly shared with you our views on the Ukraine conflict and its implications," Jaishankar said.

hankar said.

"While doing so, I have also repeatedly underlined that the selective targeting of India is both unfair and unjustified. I do so again today," he added.

In his remarks, Jaishankar also talked about the upswing in India-Poland ties.

"We meet at a time when the world is under considerable churn. As two nations located in different regions, each with its own challenges and opportunities, it is obviously useful to exchange views and perspectives."

"Our bilateral relationship has also progressed steadily, but nevertheless, needs constant tending," he said.

Jaishankar also recalled Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to Poland in August 2024 and said it saw the relationship elevated to a strategic partnership status.

In the talks, the two foreign ministers discussed ways to take forward ongoing cooperation in trade and investment, defence and security, clean technologies and digital innovation.

"Poland is one of India's largest trading partners in Central Europe. Our bilateral trade, I believe, stands at USD 7 billion, having registered growth of almost 200 per cent in the past decade," Jaishankar said.

"Indian investment in Poland has surpassed USD 3 billion, creating a number of job opportunities for Poles. India's strong economic growth, size of its market and pro-investment policies, provide immense opportunity for Polish businesses," he said.

The external affairs minister also mentioned about "Dobry Maharaja (The Good Maharaja)", a term used by the Polish people to remember Maharaja Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji Jajodia of Nawanganar who provided shelter, food and education to over 650 Polish children fleeing Soviet oppression during World War II.

"The 'Dobry Maharaj' remains a cherished link," he said on people-to-people ties between the two countries. (PTI)

Bengaluru civic body polls will be held after May 25 with ballot papers: State EC

BENGALURU, Jan 19: Elections to the five city corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) will be held after May 25 with ballot papers instead of EVMs, Karnataka State Election Commissioner G S Sangreshi said on Monday. He also said that zilla and taluk Panchayat polls, which are expected later this year, will also be held using ballot papers.

"Elections will be held tentatively after May 25, after SSLC (class 10) and PUC (class 11 and 12) examinations are over, and before June 30," Sangreshi added. The Supreme Court had last week asked the Karnataka government and the state election body to hold Bengaluru local body polls by June 30.

Speaking to reporters here, the Commissioner said, this time the GBA election will be held using ballot papers.

"There are two best practices to hold elections, ballot papers were being used since the beginning, but since 20-30 years ago EVMs are being used. Use of ballot papers is not barred by law or by the judgements of the Supreme Court," he said, defending the decision to use ballot papers.

The Congress government in Karnataka in September last year had decided to recommend to the State Election Commission (SEC) to hold all the future panchayat and urban local body polls in the state using ballot paper instead of Electronic Voting Machines, claiming there is erosion of confidence and credibility, among the people towards EVMs. Noting that developed countries like America too use ballot papers, the state's chief election commissioner said, most elections like Gram Panchayat, Cooperative polls are held using ballot papers, except Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. "However, last time the Bengaluru corporation polls in 2015 were held using EVMs," he noted.

Responding to a question whether the

decision to use ballot papers was under the government's pressure, he said the state election commission is an independent and constitutional body, and as law provides for elections to be held either using ballot papers or EVMs, the commission has the discretion to decide.

Sangreshi in response to a question said, Zilla and Taluk Panchayat polls will also be held using ballot papers.

"Using ballot papers is a choice. The SEC after considering what is good in the present scenario, after discussion and thinking, felt that use of ballot papers is appropriate. Most of those voting, since the last 20-30 years ago (in Bengaluru) have not seen ballot papers as EVMs are being used. Ballot paper is also a best practice, and throughout the world it is appreciated," he said.

"Using ballot papers doesn't mean going back to old age. Ballot papers are still being used in several of our elections like Gram Panchayat, cooperative and MLC polls," he also said.

Stating that according to him both ballot papers and EVMs don't have any faults, Sangreshi said, the Supreme Court which has upheld EVMs, has not said that ballot papers shouldn't be used.

He said, under the GBA Act there is a specific provision to hold the election using ballot paper. "When there is an act, why shouldn't we use it?"

The officers are well equipped to complete the process of election within the time, he further said, adding that "I think, there will be no hurdle to conduct the polls using ballot papers."

Responding to a question, the commissioner said that web cameras and CCTV cameras will be installed and adequate security will be ensured using police force to address the concerns of rigging. Also there will not be any logistical issues. "Everything will be taken care of," he said. (PTI)

J&K: Paratrooper succumbs to injuries as search ops continue in Kishtwar

JAMMU, Jan 19: A paratrooper, who was critically injured in a gunfight with terrorists, succumbed to his injuries as a massive search operation to track down terrorists believed to be hiding in the upper reaches of Kishtwar district entered its second day on Monday, officials said.

The operation was launched in Sonnar village near Mandal-Singhpora in the Chattru belt on Sunday, leading to a gunfight that left eight soldiers injured, primarily due to splinter injuries caused by a sudden grenade attack from the hiding terrorists.

The operation was suspended late Sunday night and was resumed early this morning in the challenging terrain marked

by thick vegetation and steep slopes, limiting visibility and movement, officials said. One of the injured troopers, Havildar Gajendra Singh, breathed his last during treatment at a military hospital here during the intervening night of January 18 and 19, officials said.

"The General Officer Commanding, White Knight Corps and all ranks pay solemn tribute to Havildar Gajendra Singh of the Special Forces, who made the supreme sacrifice while gallantly executing a counter terrorism operation in the Singpora area during the ongoing operation TRASHI-I.

"We honour his indomitable courage, valour and selfless devotion to duty and

stand firmly with the bereaved family in this hour of profound grief," the army said in a post on X.

Multiple teams of the army, police, and paramilitary forces, supported by drones and sniffer dogs, are combing the area while maintaining a tight security cordon to ensure that the terrorists are not able to escape, the officials said.

A group of two to three terrorists allegedly affiliated with the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) are believed to be trapped in the area, officials said, adding the operation resumed with the first light of the day and was ongoing when the last reports were received.

Named 'Operation Trashi-I', the army's

Jammu-based White Knight Corps, in a post on X on Sunday, said the security forces came in contact with the terrorists in the general area Sonnar, northeast of Chattru, during the search operation conducted as part of ongoing joint counter-terror exercises along with Jammu and Kashmir Police.

"Operations remain underway with additional forces inducted to reinforce the cordon, supported by close coordination with civil administration and security agencies," the army said, commending the troops for their exceptional professionalism and resolve while responding to hostile fire under challenging terrain and conditions. (PTI)

SC flags concern over exorbitant rise in airfares during festivals

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: The Supreme Court on Monday said it would interfere with the "unpredictable fluctuations" in airfares and flagged the exorbitant rise during festivals.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta termed the exorbitant rise of airfares by airlines as "exploitation" and asked the Centre and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to file their replies to a PIL seeking binding regulatory guidelines to control the unpredictable fluctuations in airfare and ancillary charges imposed by private airlines in India.

"We will definitely interfere. Just see the exploitation of passengers done during the 'Kumbh' and other festivals. Just look at the fares for Prayagraj and Jodhpur from Delhi," the bench told Additional Solicitor General Anil Kaushik appearing for the Centre.

Justice Mehta, in a lighter vein, told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who was in the courtroom, that maybe airfares for Ahmedabad may not have increased but they have shot up for other destinations



like Jodhpur.

The top court listed the matter for further hearing on February 23 after Kaushik sought time to file a reply on behalf of the Centre.

On November 17, last year, the top court sought responses from the Centre and others on a plea by social activist S Laxminarayana, who has sought to establish a robust and independent regulator that en-

sure transparency and passenger protection across the civil aviation sector. It has issued notices to the Centre, the DGCA and the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India seeking their responses on the plea.

The plea claimed that all private airlines have, without any credible justification, reduced the free check-in baggage allowance for

economy class passengers from 25 kg to 15 kg, "thereby converting what was earlier part of the ticketed service into a new revenue stream".

It has said the "new policy of permitting only a single piece for check-in and the absence of any rebate, compensation or benefit to passengers who do not avail themselves of check-in baggage demonstrates the arbitrary and discriminatory nature of the measure".

It claimed that currently, no authority has the power to review or cap airfares or ancillary fees, allowing airlines to exploit consumers through hidden charges and unpredictable hikes.

The plea said the "unregulated, opaque and exploitative conduct of airlines manifesting in arbitrary fare hikes, unilateral reduction of services, absence of on-ground grievance redressal and unjustified dynamic pricing algorithms directly infringes upon citizens' fundamental rights to equality, freedom of movement and life with dignity".

It said the absence of regulatory safeguards results in arbitrary fare

hikes, especially during festivals or weather disruptions, which disproportionately harm poor and last-minute travellers.

The plea said the wealthier few can plan and book in advance, while economically weaker citizens are forced to buy tickets at the peak of surge pricing.

It said inaction by the State in regulating fare algorithms, cancellation policies, service continuity and grievance mechanisms constitutes a dereliction of its constitutional duty and calls for urgent judicial intervention.

It said there is no rule to stop the airlines from increasing prices based on demand and allowing them such freedom under essential services is unjustifiable.

It also said the right to dignity includes access to essential services such as emergency transport on fair and non-exploitative terms.

"Arbitrary fare hikes during emergencies deny vulnerable citizens this right, especially when they are compelled to choose air travel out of necessity rather than luxury," the plea said. (PTI)

Rahul accuses BJP of centralising power



KOCHI, Jan 19: Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday accused the RSS and the BJP of trying to centralise power, while asserting that his party believes in decentralisation. Speaking at a Mahapanchayat of newly elected Congress local body members here, he said the Congress brought the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to strengthen the three-tier Panchayati Raj system.

Gandhi stressed that protecting the Constitution means protecting

decentralised governance at the grassroots level.

He said noted Malayalam writer M Leelavathi had warned him about a growing culture of silence spreading across the country. Accusing the BJP, he said it wants people to remain silent so that a few corporates can control the nation's assets.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha asserted with certainty that the people of Kerala cannot be silenced and will speak out through elections. (PTI)

Saha lays foundation stone for extension of Delhi's Tripura Bhavan Three new Tripura Bhavans in Dwarka, Mumbai and Telangana soon: CM

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Jan 19: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Monday said that the state would soon get three more new Tripura Bhavans, including in Dwarka, Mumbai, and Telangana. Saha said this after laying the foundation stone for the Extension Project of Tripura Bhavan at Bir Tikendrajit Marg in Delhi. Under this project, six rooms and two hall rooms will be constructed, with an estimated cost of ₹ 2.95 crore. Saha said, "We have got one space where we have laid the foundation stone. If you think about ourselves, during our school or college days we have visited Delhi several times. But there were no rooms and a lack of accommodation, and if you were not a supporter of a particular party, you would not get a room. Such things were there. So we had to hire some rooms, and those places were very insecure too," he said. Saha said that many people from Tripura come to Delhi and there is



a lack of space in the Tripura Bhavan. However, when I found the space and spoke with the officers here, we tried our best to do something for the people of Tripura. Keeping such things in mind, we have laid the foundation stone. Whatever space was available, we extended it. The estimated project

cost is around ₹ 2.95 crore. Back in 1981, the first Tripura Bhavan was established in Kautilya Market, and in 2002 the second Tripura Bhavan building at Tikendrajit Marg was extended. Now we have 24 rooms, along with a big hall which is being used as a dormitory," he said. Saha informed that in Dwarka also he visited the site and there is a space of around 3,000 square metres where 60 rooms will be constructed. "Drawing and design have been made and some clearances are pending. Modern infrastructure will be constructed. Construction of a new Tripura Bhavan in Mumbai is also underway, as many patients go there and land has already been purchased, which is very near to hospitals. In Telangana also one will be built, and land has been sanctioned to us," said Saha. He said that the North East region and Tripura are witnessing massive development in all sectors, and this has been possible due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Protest erupts at Kokborok Language Day rally in Tripura over roman script demand 40 students detained for creating trouble



HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Jan 19: The 48th Kokborok Language Day celebrations in Tripura turned tense on Monday as indigenous student organisations staged a protest demanding the adoption of the Roman script for the Kokborok language. The rally, which began in front of Rabindra Shatabarshiki Bhavan, saw participation from students, teachers, and representatives of various schools and social organisations. It was led by MLA Rampada Jamatia and former MLA Atul Debbarma, convener of the Script Selection Committee for Kokborok language development. Shortly after the event started, members of the Tripura Students Federation (TSF) and Tripura Indigenous Students Federation (TISF) arrived, raising slogans calling for the government to adopt the Roman script. The protesters alleged that their long-standing demands had been

Meghalaya signs MoU with Amazon

SHILLONG, Jan 19: The Department of Commerce and Industries, Government of Meghalaya, signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Amazon at the Directorate of Commerce and Industries in Shillong, marking the first collaboration between Amazon and any State Government department in Meghalaya recently. The MoU signing was followed by a workshop conducted by the Amazon team for over 100 MSMEs, during which participants learnt about Amazon's Karigar and Saheli initiatives. The Department encouraged MSMEs to register on the Amazon platform to enhance product visibility and expand market reach, and assured handholding support at artisans' level to facilitate their onboarding and business collaboration with Amazon. The event was attended by Sarita Tiwari from Amazon; F Sutnga, Director of C&I M L Wanshiong, Joint Director; Daphiralin Kharijana, MD of the MHHDC; members of the RAMP SPIU; and other officials. Speaking on the occasion, the Director stated that the partnership is expected to generate long-term value and significantly strengthen market access for MSMEs. The MoU has been signed under the Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) Scheme by MoMSME. As part of the agreement, the Meghalaya Handloom & Handicrafts Development Corporation (MHHDC), a Public Sector Undertaking under the Department of Commerce and Industries, will manage business operations, including product listings, cataloguing, and pricing on the Amazon platform. (NNN)

Kuki groups demand justice for woman who died 2 years after being gang-raped

CHURACHANDPUR, Jan 19: Several organisations demanded justice for a Kuki woman from Manipur, who died recently from illness allegedly linked to the trauma she suffered after being gang-raped during the early phase of the ethnic violence in the state in 2023. The Kuki organisations based in Manipur's Churachandpur and Delhi claimed that she was kidnapped in Imphal and gang-raped in May 2023. She, however, escaped from the kidnapers, but never fully recovered from the shock and injuries and died on January 10 while undergoing treatment in Guwahati. The groups also demanded a separate administration for the Kukis, claiming that it was not possible for them to live together with the Meitei community. At least 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and hills-based Kuki-Zo groups in Manipur since May 2023. The state has been under President's Rule since February last year. In a statement, the Kuki group Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) said, "Her death is yet another painful testimony to the ruthless manner in which the Kuki-Zo people have been targeted." The Kuki-Zo people "now have no other option but to demand a separate administration for our safety, dignity, and survival", said the ITLF. The Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO), Delhi & NCR, alleged that despite the seriousness of the crime and repeated appeals by civil society organisations, no meaningful action was taken against the perpetrators. "We categorically assert that her death must be officially recognised as resulting from the violence committed against her in 2023. Any attempt to treat it otherwise would amount to a denial of justice and an erasure of responsibility," the KSO Delhi & NCR said. The organisation called upon the Centre to expedite the process of creating a separate administration for the tribals, which is "both necessary and unavoidable". A woman's group of the Kuki tribe said that the victim would be remembered not only for the injustice she suffered but also for her resilience and courage in the face of unimaginable brutality. (PTI)

DoNER secy reviews central projects in Nagaland

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Jan 19: Angshuman Dey, joint secretary, ministry of development of north eastern region, reviewed the implementation of the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East (PM-DeVINE) projects and schemes of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Nagaland. An official statement on Monday said the meeting reviewed the utilisation status of released funds, submission of demands, and progress reports under PM-DeVINE and NEC schemes. All departments concerned attended and presented updated reports on the implementation of their respective projects. Dey also inspected projects constructed under the two schemes in the state. He inspected the construction works of the 220/132kV (2x100 MVA) and 132/33kV (2x50 MVA) Tsitronge-Dimapur substation being executed under the PM-DeVINE scheme. He also visited the upgrade works of the radiation oncology department at the Christian Institute of Health Sciences and Research, Dimapur, and reviewed the progress of the project. On Sunday, Dey carried out inspections of projects being implemented under PM-DeVINE and NEC schemes in Dimapur district. During the inspection, he visited Thiluxu village and reviewed an NEC-funded project on value addition in coffee, which includes procurement of coffee roasting machines and capacity-building through entrepreneurship training.



The project aims to improve market access, strengthen local enterprises, and enhance income generation for coffee growers and entrepreneurs. The central official also inspected the construction of a Common Facility Centre (CFC) Emporium for Handloom and Handicraft at Agri Expo Nagaland, implemented by the Nagaland Khadi and Village Industries Board, and visited the state-of-the-art cane and bamboo technology facility at Nagaland Bamboo Resource Centre under the Nagaland Bamboo Development Agency (NBDA). He was accompanied by SD Meena, director, MDoNER, TemsunaroAier, development commissioner, Nagaland, Hekato N, additional director, department of land resources, Kasho Chishi, chief engineer (transmission & generation, Asangla Imti, secretary, power department, Kuku Mero, state mission director, Nagaland Bamboo Development Agency, Dr Tolto Metha, team member, NBDA and other departmental officials.

Four held in Manipur for 'involvement' in extortion, recruitment in banned outfits

IMPHAL, Jan 19: Four persons, belonging to proscribed outfits, were arrested in Manipur for allegedly being involved in extortion activities and recruitment of new cadres for their organisations in valley districts, police said on Monday. Two members of the banned NFRM were apprehended from the New Checkon area in Imphal East district on Sunday, a senior officer said. They were allegedly involved in recruiting new cadres of the outfit, he said. A member of the outlawed United National Liberation Front was arrested from his residence at Yourabing in Imphal East district on Sunday, the officer said. The man was accused of being involved in extortion activities, he said. Security forces also arrested an active cadre of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Noyon faction) from the Keirao Wangkhem area in Imphal East district on Saturday. The police have been conducting search operations since the ethnic violence broke out between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and hills-based Kuki-Zo groups in Manipur in May 2023. At least 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the ethnic strife. The state has been under President's Rule since February last year. (PTI)

Mizoram CM Lalduhoma lays foundation stone of ₹ 676 crore Tuirini hydro power project

AIZAWL, Jan 19: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Monday laid the foundation stone of ₹ 676.98 crore Tuirini small hydro power project in Aizawl district. The power project will have a generating capacity of 24 Megawatt (MW), officials said. The Tuirini small hydro power project will be implemented as an externally aided project to be funded by New Development Bank through loan, they said. Eighty per cent of the project cost will be borne by the Centre, while the remaining 20 per cent will be contributed by the state government, they said. Laying the foundation stone, Lalduhoma said it is a momentous day for the state as the project is part of the people's government initiative to become self-sufficient in power. He said that a 10 MW Thenzawl solar power plant in Serchhip district was inaugurated in December last year and another 5 MW solar power plant is being constructed at Sumsuih in Aizawl district. Both the solar power plants are fully owned by the state government, he said. The chief minister said his government is making massive efforts to become a self-sufficient state in power. He said that two more electric power projects are in the pipeline.



While the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for 132 MW Tuivai hydro electric project in Saitual district near the Manipur border has been completed, the DPR for Tlawng hydro project near Aizawl is expected to be completed by September this year, he said. To enhance solar power generation, an Expression of Interest (EOI) has been issued to private developers for setting up solar plants at five locations across the state, he said. According to the chief minister, a total of 791 rooftop solar installations have been completed so far, with a combined installed capacity of about 2.62 MW. A pump storage project is also being planned at Tuichang river, close to the Vankal solar park in Khawzawl district, he said. The project aims to pump water to higher elevations during low-demand periods and generate power during peak demand, or alternatively, sell power through trading, he said. Lalduhoma said that Mizoram has long-term Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with central generating stations even though it is not yet fully self-reliant in power generation. At times when the state is unable to fully utilise its allocated quota, surplus power, especially during daytime or late-night hours, is available for trading, he said. Since the state government pays its power bills on time, it is able to sell surplus power and also receive rebates amounting to ₹ 6.57 crore, he said. He said that the state government has generated a total revenue of ₹ 172 crore from power trading with a net profit of ₹ 87.21 crore. He said that the overall financial gain due to timely payment of bills and power trading was ₹ 93.79 crore. Officials said that the Tuirini small hydro electric power project will cost ₹ 676.98 crore and it is planned to be completed within five years. (PTI)

Rajasthan's school games team 'faced extortion' by armed group in Manipur, probe ordered

IMPHAL, Jan 19: A state-level team from Rajasthan, which came to Manipur to participate in the National School Games, was allegedly extorted by an armed group, prompting the authorities to order an investigation, officials here said on Monday. Though the team management did not lodge any official complaint, the matter came to light after the father of a player made the allegation on social media during the day. The alleged incident occurred on January 13 when the 52-member team of boys and girls from Rajasthan was coming from Dimapur in Nagaland to Imphal, the capital of Manipur, in a bus. The team that participated in the Wushu event, a form of martial art, left Manipur early on Monday without lodging a formal complaint. However, in a widely circulated video clip, the father of one of the players said, "The team was kept detained for two hours at gunpoint by militants and took money from the team." Officials said that no grievance in this regard was brought to the notice of the authorities while the team was in Manipur. "The control room was a few metres away from the hostel where they were staying at the Khuman Lampak stadium (in Imphal). Had they raised the matter during their stay here, it could have been taken up immediately," an official said. Officials, however, said that despite the absence of a formal complaint, an enquiry is being conducted into the matter, and the police have been asked to verify the claims. "Without complaining about the matter, they left Imphal in the early morning of Monday. We came to know about the extortion claims through video clips being circulated on social media," an official said. In a letter to Imphal West Superintendent of Police, Youth Affairs and Sports Director M Veto Singh said, "I am to request you to take up necessary action to verify the information and take up necessary legal action on the same that is currently circulating on the social media...about some extortion activities...." The Rajasthan contingent, which came by train to Dimapur, participated in the national-level event and delivered an impressive performance, with the girls' team winning first place and the boys securing the second spot. The Manipur governor had inaugurated the 69th National School Games Championships 2025-26 at Khuman Lampak Main Stadium last week. (PTI)

'Manipur should not just consume AI but should create, adapt and lead' AI became democratic, its future to be written in big cities and small places: Nasscom director

IMPHAL, Jan 19: Nasscom director Nirupam Chaudhuri on Monday said artificial intelligence (AI) has become a democratic force, and its future will be written in both big cities, as well as small towns. Addressing a pre-summit event in the run-up to the upcoming India AI Impact Summit 2026, Chaudhuri said Manipur should be considered a "living lab" of inclusive AI where innovation serves both local development and global needs. "Today, AI is no longer a futuristic concept. It has become a democratic force. In Manipur, it is in a unique moment right now where

grassroots AI can directly translate into global employability, inclusive growth and societal impact," he said. "The future of AI in India will not only be written in big cities and metros; it will be shaped in places like Imphal, Churachandpur, Ukhrul and Thoubal. That's what I believe in," the Nasscom director said. While Imphal is the capital of Manipur, the other three places are district headquarters towns. Chaudhuri continued, "In NASSCOM, we strongly believe that AI capability building must start at the grassroots. This means enabling students, start-ups, faculties, MSMEs, and community

groups to learn AI by solving local problems." He also said that as Manipur steps into the AI era, data privacy, cybersecurity and inclusivity should be ensured and must be foundational principles. Chaudhuri said, "Manipur should not just consume AI but should create, adapt and lead with AI. We should all position Manipur as a living lab of inclusive AI where innovation serves both local development and global needs." "Grassroots AI is not about teaching technology alone but is also about unlocking confidence, capability and global relevance right here at home," he said. (PTI)



Tripura Bar Association calls indefinite boycott

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Jan 19: Following serious allegations against the President of the West District Consumer Court, the Tripura Bar Association has decided to abstain from court work for an indefinite period. At a meeting held today, the Bar Association demanded the removal of Justice Gautam Sarkar and set a three-day deadline for the government to respond. The meeting was attended by Tripura Bar Association President Mrinal Kanti Biswas, Secretary Kaushik Indu, senior advocate Pijush Kanti Biswas, Arindam Bhattacharya, and several other lawyers. According to the allegations, Justice Gautam Sarkar regularly appears in court in an intoxicated condition and has even been accused of consuming alcohol inside his chamber. Court staff have alleged that under the influence of alcohol, he frequently behaves inappropriately with office employees. These incidents, reportedly continuing for a long time, have now come to light, triggering strong resentment among court staff and members of the legal fraternity.

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Not seeking to be a big star, want to do films for the joy: Imran Khan on comeback with 'Happy Patel'



Imran Khan is back on the big screen after a decade with a cameo in "Happy Patel" and the actor says his return is driven by a desire to reconnect and make movies for the sheer joy of it. Over the past two years, Imran sifted

through numerous scripts but found none that sparked interest until he heard about "Happy Patel", which marks the directorial debut of his "Delhi Belly" co-star and friend Vir Das.

"In late 2023, when I started reemerging

from my hibernation, and connecting with the world, people said, 'Hey, this guy is alive' and started reaching out. (But) My approach at this point is very different from what it was back then," the actor, who was last seen on screen in 2015 film, "Katti

Batti", told PTI in an interview.

"Not everybody wants the same thing from their careers. Everyone's got different paths that they're seeking. I'm not seeking to build myself into a very big star, to be the biggest star or to be in the top three. Unless I love the film and really want to make it, I won't... I will only make a film if I feel FOMO (fear of missing out)," he said.

Acknowledging that he is financially secure, Imran -- best known for rom-coms like "Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Naa", "I Hate Luv Storys", and "Break Ke Baad" -- said at this point in his life, he prefers working alongside friends and like-minded individuals.

"The reason that I ever made films was to play with my friends. We get a bunch of friendly people together, we paint our faces, we put on costumes and we play (the part). That's how I see moviemaking. Not to take away from how seriously one takes the thing, but creating art must come from a place of love and joy," he said.

Imran said when he heard that Das and another friend, actor Mithila Palkar, were working together on a "zany, spoofy spy comedy", he couldn't shake off the feeling of missing out.

"I'd not heard a narration or a script, it's the buzz that I was getting from my friends. I was struck with FOMO. I was like, 'Guys, you're all doing this fun thing. Can I also come along and have fun with you guys?'"

"I texted Vir saying, 'I would love to be in your film, can you include me somewhere?'. So, he wrote me a part, which was not in the original script and said, 'Let's have some fun'."

Imran said Das is one of the best stand-up comedians in India and he loves attending his com-

edy shows across the world.

"Happy Patel", which released in theatres on Friday, is a quirky spy comedy. It is a reunion between Imran and Das after "Delhi Belly" (2011), and with Palkar after "Katti Batti" (2015).

In the film, Imran takes on the role of Milind Morea, an international supermodel. He and Das had planned to keep the news of his cameo a "secret", hoping to "surprise" audiences when they saw him in the theatre. However, the news leaked immediately.

The 43-year-old actor admitted that he was surprised to see himself in the film's trailer and never anticipated the attention and interest it would generate. He added that he has not actively tried to stay relevant during his hiatus.

"It's (attention) all a lot more than one would have imagined. When you consider all of the conventional wisdom that tells you that you must make great efforts to stay in people's consciousness and to stay relevant, you've to reach out and grab them and hold their attention," he said.

"Again, because up until this moment, it's not like I had suddenly made a great film that everyone was appreciating. 'Oh, what a wonderful film, what great acting is', it's none of that. People responded a lot more than (expected)," Imran added.

Imran said he chose to take a step back from acting after a bunch of his films including "Katti Batti" and "Gori Tere Pyaar Mein" failed at the box office.

"...At first, you've that feeling. 'Oh, no, my film has flopped'. I had made the films with love and with friends. I enjoyed the process," he recounted. (PTI)

'Dhurandhar 2' will become largest multi-starrer in the history of cinema: Ram Gopal Varma



Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma is sure Aditya Dhar's directorial "Dhurandhar 2", scheduled for release in March, would become the "largest multi-starrer in the history of cinema". Released in December 2025, "Dhu-

randhar" featured Ranveer Singh in the lead role and revolved around covert intelligence operations set against a backdrop of geopolitical and terror events like the Kandahar plane hijack, 2001 Parliament Attack and 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

It also starred Akshaye Khanna, Sanjay Dutt and Sara Arjun, R Madhavan and Arjun Rampal, among others. Varma, who has earlier praised the first part of the film, penned a lengthy note on his X handle on Sunday.

"Dhurandhar 2" will be the biggest multi-starrer ever, in the history of cinema, because each and every character in the 1st film has become enormously huge in the audiences mind, in terms of both their value and impact, which is what true stardom is really about," he wrote.

"In the 1st part the characters could have been small or big but now all of them have become giant super stars and hence #Dhurandhar2 will be the BIGGEST MULTI-STARRER ever," the director said.

The film emerged as a blockbuster, crossing over ₹1300 crore at the worldwide box office. The second instalment is set to release on March 19. (PTI)

VARUN TEJ'S INDO-KOREAN FILM TITLED KOREAN KANAKARAJU



The makers of director Merlapaka Gandhi's upcoming Indo-Korean horror comedy, tentatively being referred to as #VT15 and featuring Telugu actor Varun Tej in the lead, have now announced the title of the film as 'Korean Kanakaraju.' The production house First Frame Entertainments took to its X handle to make the announcement on the occasion of actor Varun Tej's birthday on Monday.

Sharing the link to a title glimpse video, the production house wrote, "#VT15 is #KoreanKanakaraju.#KOK-AGlimpse OUT NOW. Happy Birthday @IAMVarunTej. Get ready for a roller-coaster of fun and thrills in theatres this SUMMER 2026. #HBDVarunTej."

Varun Tej, for his part, shared the link to the title glimpse on his X timeline and wrote, "Meet Korean Kanakaraju. See you all in theatres this SUMMER 2026. #KoreanKanakaraju." The title glimpse opens with a pho-

tographer from India being tortured by policemen in Korea. The cops want the photographer to give them details of the location of a person they know as Kanakaraju. Initially, the photographer struggles to understand as he does not know the language. When an interpreter (Ritika Nayak) comes and translates what the cops seek from him, he says he does not know where Kanakaraju is. But then, on a full moon night, a possessed Kanakaraju (Varun Tej) walks into the station and hacks the Korean cops to death with a Samurai sword. He laughs in an eerie fashion and says, "I'm back" in Korean, prompting the photographer to say, "This Kanakaraju isn't our Kanakaraju..."

The film has triggered huge expectations among fans and film buffs ever since the project was announced.

The fact that an Indian actor will be working on a joint Indo-Korean film has thrilled fans, who are eager to see

how the film will turn out.

The film has one of South Indian cinema's top music directors, S Thaman, scoring music for it. It has art direction being handled by Paneer Selvam. It may be recalled that Varun Tej left for Korea in the middle of June last year for the shooting of the film. The unit had, during the third week of May, wrapped up its Ananthapur schedule.

After kicking things off with an auspicious pooja ceremony in Hyderabad, the team shot in Ananthapur, where shooting took place at a number of places, including the iconic KIA grounds and the picturesque village locales. One of the highlights of the Ananthapur schedule was a visually stunning song sequence that was shot.

The schedule in Korea was the third. While sequences shot in the first two schedules had more of the thrill element along with humour, the Korean schedule had more entertaining sequences filled with thrills. (PTI)

Junglee Pictures collaborates with writer-director Raj Kumar Gupta for his next

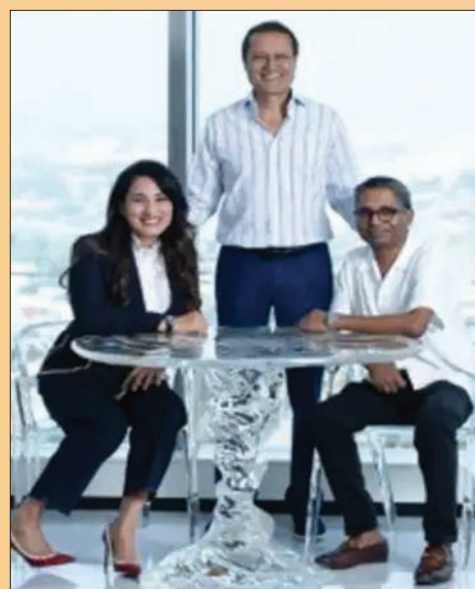
Junglee Pictures has announced its collaboration with renowned filmmaker Raj Kumar Gupta for an ambitious tentpole film, to be directed by him. This marks the coming together of two creative forces known for delivering engaging, rooted narratives that resonate powerfully with audiences at scale.

The versatile filmmaker is best known for the successful Raid franchise films - Raid and Raid 2, One Killed Jessica and Aamir, among many others. Raj Kumar Gupta has carved a distinct space in Indian cinema with stories grounded in realism, sharp observation, and mass entertainment while remaining high in emotion and drama. Raj is fresh off the success of Raid 2, one of the top 10 highest-grossing theatrical films of 2025. His films balance authenticity with strong commercial appeal, delivering hard-hitting narratives that leave a lasting impression. His storytelling sensibility and singular vision align seamlessly with Junglee Pictures' creative ethos.

Over the years, Junglee Pictures has built a formidable filmography, championing meaningful and disruptive narratives across genres. It started its journey with Dil Dhadakne Do and went on to produce blockbuster, superhit and critically acclaimed films like Badhaai Ho, Raazi, Talvar, Badhaai Do, Bareilly Ki Barfi. The studio has consistently delivered stories that not only entertain the audience but also spark conversations. Moreover, Junglee's 2025 releases - Haq and the Malayalam film Ronth - have received widespread acclaim during their theatrical and streaming runs. The yet-to-be-titled film has completed scripting, with casting set to begin shortly. It is said to promise a gripping, intense narrative reflecting the director's signature style while pushing the envelope in terms of impact.

Speaking of the collaboration, Vineet Jain, MD, The Times Group, shared, "Junglee Pictures has always focused on backing distinctive, relatable stories with lasting cultural value. This collaboration with Raj reflects the studio's intent to join forces with filmmakers who strengthen its slate through purposeful, impact-driven cinema, bringing quality storytelling with relevance, scale, and audience connection. This film will also be a true tentpole for Junglee - bold and impactful, rooted in realism." Elaborating further, Director Raj Kumar Gupta said, "I've always been drawn to narratives grounded in reality that also have the ability to connect with audiences on a larger canvas. This film is conceived as a hard-hitting, immersive, engaging and entertaining theatrical experience. Junglee Pictures has a strong legacy of backing thoughtful, content-led cinema, making this collaboration feel like a natural alignment. I'm excited to collaborate with Junglee Pictures."

Speaking about the association, producing partner Myra Kam said, "Junglee Pictures brings together heart, vision, and fearless storytelling. Junglee's bold, innovative approach meets Raj Kumar Gupta's unflinching storytelling, crafting stories that question the status quo. This collaboration is special, and I am honoured to be part of this dream team." (PTI)



ILAIYARAJA TO BE HONOURED WITH PADMAPANI AWARD AT AJANTA-ELLORA FILM FESTIVAL

Legendary music composer Ilaiyaraaja will be conferred with the Padmapani Award at the upcoming Ajanta-Ellora International Film festival (AIFF) 2026, the organisers have said. The annual film festival will be held from January 28 to February 4 in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. The maestro will be presented the award during the opening ceremony of the festival on January 28, in the presence of national and international artists, eminent personalities from vari-

ous fields and film lovers, the organisers said in a release issued on Sunday.

A committee comprising film critic Latika Padgaonkar (chairperson), filmmakers Ashutosh Gowariker, Sunil Sukthankar and Chandrakant Kulkarni selected Ilaiyaraaja for the award.

He will receive the Padmapani Memento, a letter of honour and a cash prize of Rs 2 lakh. The past recipients of the award include stalwarts such as lyricist Javed Akhtar, veteran director-

writer Sai Paranjpye, and actor Om Puri, among others.

For over five decades, Ilaiyaraaja has composed more than 7,000 songs and original scores for more than 1,500 films. His compositions in various Indian languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi, and Marathi, have earned him an enduring place in the hearts of music lovers.

Nearly 70 films will be screened at the eight-day festival, the release stated. (PTI)



We need to get better at converting starts and improve our catching: Gill

INDORE, Jan 19: India's first-ever bilateral ODI series defeat at home against New Zealand was not just a statistical jolt but a moment of uncomfortable clarity, and skipper Shubman Gill did not hide behind the margin of defeat or missing personnel.

Speaking after the loss in the series-deciding game here on Sunday, the India captain instead laid bare a pattern that, in his words, "made the difference between the two teams".

"For me, it wasn't that we didn't bat well. It was that we didn't bat long enough. When batsmen are getting starts and they're not able to convert those starts, especially in high-scoring matches, it becomes very difficult. At least two batters need to go on and play that long innings," said Gill after the 41-run defeat at Holkar Stadium. "That was the difference between them and us."

The inability to turn promising starts into match-defining scores haunted India throughout the series, including in Indore where Virat Kohli's century briefly threatened to swing the momentum back. Gill repeatedly returned to the contrast with New Zealand's approach.

"Whenever their batsmen got set, they scored long. That's the difference. Even in the first two matches, I got set, but I wasn't able to convert it into 100, 120 or 130, and that's something we need to get better at as a batting unit."



The conversation then inevitably turned to Ravindra Jadeja, whose returns with both bat and ball have dipped over the last two to three years. Gill was quick to contextualise the all-rounder's struggles rather than isolate them.

"Jaddu bhaji was looking in good touch with the bat. But it wasn't just him. I don't think any of our batsmen were able to consistently convert the starts we were getting. On pitches like these, if you don't make those starts count, you're always chasing the game." Gill also acknowledged that Jadeja's wicket-taking impact — once a cornerstone of India's ODI dominance — hasn't been the same recently.

"The way he has been bowling in the past couple of years, he has always been a strike option for us. It's unfortunate he couldn't pick as many wickets as he would have liked, but that happens in series like these. You learn from it and you grow."

India's fielding lapses emerged as another decisive factor, especially as overseas teams continue to narrow the gap in Indian conditions. Gill admitted that missed chances shifted momentum at critical moments.

"We dropped some catches at very important stages of the game. On wickets like these, bowlers are trying to force chances, and when those catches don't stick, it's not easy. No one drops a catch intentionally, but it's one area we really have to improve."

While Rohit Sharma's modest returns across the series — 61 runs — drew scrutiny, Gill backed his senior opener's intent and approach. "He has been in very good form. You won't always be able to convert the starts you get. As a batsman, you always want to make it into hundreds, but that doesn't happen every time."

That's impossible. What's important is that the intent and rhythm are there."

Harshit Rana is a great prospect for future
Amid the disappointment, Gill highlighted a positive that could shape India's future ODI balance — the rise of Harshit Rana as a lower-order batting option.

"Batting at number eight is a very important position for us. All the top teams in the world bat really deep. We want to give opportunities to players who can strengthen that depth, and Harshit is someone who is constantly improving his batting."

Gill went further, underlining why Rana excites the team management. "You don't get too many bowlers who can consistently bowl at 140-plus with the height that he has," he said.

"And the way he is batting right now, he keeps getting better. In the future, he can be a very good prospect for us."

With the World Cup still some distance away, Gill believes the defeat offers clarity rather than crisis.

"The way we want to play, we haven't been able to do it consistently in this series," he admitted.

"But we have time. As long as all the players are aware of what we need to work on, hopefully in the next one or two series we can fix those areas and perform the way we want to." (PTI)

Struggling Mumbai Indias, Delhi Capitals eye revival

VADODARA, Jan 19: Defending champions Mumbai Indians will be desperate to arrest their slide and revive their campaign when they take on an equally struggling Delhi Capitals in a Women's Premier League match here on Tuesday.

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side have managed just two wins from five outings so far and have looked off the pace for large parts of the season. They began with a loss to Royal Challengers Bengaluru, before thrashing bottom-placed Delhi Capitals by 50 runs in the reverse fixture after defeating 195.

Wins over Gujarat Giants by seven wickets offered some momentum, but back-to-back defeats against UP Warriorz — failing to defend 161/5 and then falling short while chasing 188 — forced them to play catch-up, even as they hung on to No. 2 spot in the five-team standings.

MI's biggest concern has been their powerplay returns.

Hayley Matthews' delayed comeback from injury and experimentation with Amelia Kerr and G Kamalini at the top have left them with their lowest powerplay run rate of the tournament (6.50).

The onus thus has fallen heavily on skipper Harmanpreet and Nat Sciver-Brunt and MI have struggled whenever the duo have not produced substantial scores.



Frequent chopping and changing in the XI, including Matthews moving in and out, Kamalini being shuffled down the order, and pace spearhead Shabnim Ismail sitting out, has added to the sense of instability.

Their fielding too has been below par, with 10 dropped catches in five matches hurting them at crucial stages.

On the other hand, last season's runners-up Delhi Capitals are rooted to the bottom of the table with three losses from four matches.

They opened their campaign with successive defeats, first against Mumbai Indians and then against Gujarat Giants, when they fell just short while chasing 210.

Their lone win came against UP Warriorz, but an eight-wicket loss to RCB after being bowled out for 166 in their previous match has again stalled their progress.

Skipper Jemimah Rodrigues' lack of runs in the middle order has hurt Delhi badly, while Laura Wolvaardt will be keen to return to form after a duck in the last game.

The South African skipper remains key to their batting, having looked imperious in her 38-ball 77 against Gujarat Giants in a near-successful chase of 210, which they lost by four runs.

With the league stage entering the crucial Vadodara leg and each match carrying added significance in the eight-game format, Delhi will be desperate to find their consistency and move up the table.

Teams:
Delhi Capitals: Jemimah Rodrigues (c), Shafali Verma, Marzianne Kapp, Niki Prasad, Laura Wolvaardt, Chinelle Henry, Shree Charani, Sneha Rana, Lizelle Lee, Deeya Yadav, Taniyaa Bhatia, Mamatha Madivala, Nandini Sharma, Lucy Hamilton, Minnu Mani and Alana King.

Mumbai Indians: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Nat Sciver-Brunt, Hayley Matthews, Amanjot Kaur, G. Kamalini, Amelia Kerr, Shabnim Ismail, Sanskriti Gupta, Sneha Sajeevan, Rahila Firdous, Nicola Carey, Poonam Khemnar, Triveni Vasistha, Nalla Reddy, Saika Ishaque and Milly Illingworth.

Match starts: 7.30pm. (PTI)

Coco Gauff advances to second round at Australian Open despite serving struggles

MELBOURNE (AUSTRALIA), Jan 19: Third-seeded Coco Gauff had some familiar struggles to serve but had still enough class and power to defeat Kamilla Rakhimova 6-2, 6-3 on Monday in a first-round match at the Australian Open.

Gauff has won two Grand Slam titles but has never gone past the semifinals at Melbourne Park. She was knocked out in the quarterfinals last year.

Gauff had six double faults in the first set against Rakhimova, and only one in the second set as she eventually found her range on serve. The American has struggled with double-faults and had 431 on the WTA Tour last year, by far the most of any player. No one else had more than 300.

"I mean, it was just the first set," Gauff said. "Only had one double in the second. I think both of us were struggling on the far side. The sun is right there, which I know for every time I play first on day here, that's just how it is."

"But once I got through kind of the first game, I had like three doubles in the first game, and once I got through that game, I mean, it was pretty much smooth sailing from there. Maybe I would have liked to put more first serves in the court, for sure."

The 21-year-old Gauff has been reworking her serve for the last several months and practiced some more during a comfort break in the match on Rod Laver Arena.

Gauff faces left-handed Olga Danilovic in the second round. Danilovic defeated 45-year-old Venus Williams on Sunday in a first-round match, which erased the possibility of the two Americans facing off.

"There's not many (left-handed players) on Tour, but Olga's a great player, she's beat some top players so it's going to be a tough match," Gauff said.

No. 4 Amanda Anisimova, runner-up at the last two majors, advanced 6-3, 6-2 over Simona Waltert, No. 6 Jessica Pegula beat Anastasia Zakharova 6-2, 6-1 and No. 14 Clara Tauson had a 6-3, 6-3 win over Dalma Galfi.

Kenin's exit
Sofia Kenin's poor recent run at the Australian Open continued as she lost 6-3, 6-2 to fellow-American Peyton Stearns.

Kenin won the 2020 Australian title but has since struggled at Melbourne Park since, losing in the first round for the fifth consecutive time.

No. 15 Emma Navarro lost in three sets to Magda



Linette of Poland.

Retirements
Priscilla Hon secured her first trip to the second round of her home major in six years and also helped her opponent Marina Stakusic leave the court in a wheelchair after the Canadian qualifier collapsed with severe leg cramps.

Another Canadian player ended early with cramping, with No. 7 Felix Auger-Aliassime retiring from his match with Nuno Borges of Portugal. Borges led 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 when Auger-Aliassime walked to the net to shake hands.

"I can't recall ever in my life (cramping) this early in a tournament, this early in a match," he said.

Retirement tour
Stan Wawrinka kicked off his farewell season at the Slams with a 5-7, 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (4) win over Laslo Djere. The 2014 champion announced last month that 2026 will be his last year on the elite tour.

"It is my last year. It's been too long that I'm coming back!" he said. "The passion is still intact. Today was amazing. I'm so happy that I won — I have a chance to play one more here."

Three-time Australian Open runner-up Daniil Medvedev beat Jesper de Jong 7-5, 6-2, 7-6 (2) to continue a streak Down Under that included a title run in Brisbane. No. 19 seed Tommy Paul defeated Aleksandar Kovacevic 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in an all-American match to advance along with Reilly Opelka and No. 13 Andrey Rublev.

Local hope Alex de Minaur, the No. 6 seed, beat Mackenzie McDonald — a lucky loser from qualifying who replaced the injured former Wimbledon runner-up Matteo Berrettini — 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 in an afternoon match on Rod Laver Arena. (AP)

Two-day block-level sports meet concludes successfully at Mokarambil

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Jan 19: A two-day block-level sports meet was organized successfully at Mokarambil Primary School under the Gossaigaon Education Block, bringing together youths from the area in a spirit of enthusiasm and camaraderie.

The event was organised under the initiative of Mera Yuva Bharat with active support from the NGO Step to Better Future. A range of sporting events was conducted during the meet.

Competitions for girls included badminton, rope skipping, and the 100-metre sprint, while boys competed in volleyball, high jump, and the 200-metre race.

The sports meet was inaugurated with the ceremonial hoisting of the flag by the guests.

Addressing a meeting held prior to the competitions,

CRC Coordinator Kamal Kumar Malakar called upon the youth to associate themselves with sports and cultural activities for maintaining physical fitness and for fostering unity, discipline, and a sense of brotherhood in society.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from young boys and girls across the block.

The meet concluded with a valedictory function, during which medals and certificates were distributed to the winners.

Organisers from Step to Better Future NGO stated that the initiative aimed at promoting sportsmanship, cooperation, and social harmony among the youth.

The Programme was attended by officials, teachers, social workers, and local residents, whose presence and cooperation contributed to the smooth and successful conduct of the event.

Inaugural KCL from Jan 25-Feb 7

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: The inaugural Kabaddi Champions League (KCL) will be held from January 25 to February 7 at the Sports University of Haryana, Rai, the organisers informed on Monday. The KCL has officially announced the match schedule for the inaugural season.

Over 12 days, eight franchises — Sonipat Stars, Gurugram Gurus, Hisar Heroes, Bhiwani Bulls, Rohtak Royals, Karnal Kings, Panipat Panthers, and Faridabad Fighters — will battle it out in a tightly packed league format. (PTI)

Madrid to host Laureus World Sports Awards on April 20

MADRID, Jan 19: Madrid will host the Laureus World Sports Awards for third year in a row, the organisers announced on Monday.

Like last year, the award ceremony will take place at the Cibeles Palace on April 20.

"Since Madrid first hosted the Laureus Awards in 2024, the city has benefited greatly from the work of Laureus Sport for Good," said the organisers in a statement.

"The 2026 edition will once again unite the world's sporting community, alongside some of the biggest names in entertainment, culture and fashion. The iconic Laureus statuette will be awarded to one winner in each of seven major categories," the statement added.

Isabel Diaz Ayuso, President of the Community of Madrid, said he is looking forward to a sport filled year in his city.

"In 2026, we are confident that the

Spanish Formula 1 Grand Prix will renew the global success we experienced in 2025 with the NFL spectacle held at the world's best stadium, the Santiago Bernabéu, as we look ahead to upcoming milestones such as the EuroBasket, the UEFA Champions League Final and the FIFA World Cup.

"In Madrid, sport is always welcome because, through the shared values it represents, we all win," said Ayuso.

Mayor of Madrid, José Luis Martínez-Almeida, added: "Madrid is proud that the Laureus World Sports Awards are being held here once again. We are a city that loves sport and athletes."

"The capital has proven—and will continue to prove—that it has the capacity to host the world's greatest sporting events. Madrid will rise to the occasion so that the biggest gala in global sport has the best possible setting." (PTI)

Praggnanandhaa goes down again, Gukesh held by Forest

WIJK AAN ZEE (THE NETHERLANDS), Jan 19: Defending champion R Praggnanandhaa lost his second game in as many days, going down to Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, even as D Gukesh was held to a draw by Netherlands' Jorden van Foreest in the Tata Steel Masters Chess here.

Having been at the top of his game for a major part of 2025, Praggnanandhaa seems to be running low on steam as a drawn endgame turned into a painful loss against the Uzbek on Sunday.

With no points to show after the first two games, Praggnanandhaa is at the bottom of the table and will have to make a strong comeback in the remaining 11 rounds in order to pose a challenge.

Meanwhile world champion Gukesh was held to a draw by van Foreest in another hard-fought game. Gukesh took his tally to one point following his second draw. After defeating Praggnanandhaa in the opener, Arjun Erigaisi tried to make a

foray against Thai Dai Van Nguyen of Czech Republic but eventually did not succeed in breaking the fortress. The top seeded Indian however remained in joint lead on 1.5 points in the company of Hans Moke Niemann of the United States and Abdusattorov.

The fourth Indian in the fray Aravindh Chithambaram played out a draw with Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus of Turkey to also take his tally to one point out of a possible two. With three players in front, as many as nine are in closed pursuit a half point behind with local star Anish Giri on 13th spot on a half point just ahead of Praggnanandhaa.

It was a Queen's Gambit declined by Praggnanandhaa and it did not seem he had any trouble equalising with the black

pieces. Nodirbek waited for the position to open up and went a pawn ahead in the rook and pawns endgame after the Indian erred on his 31st move.

However, there were still huge technicalities and the experts believed that the endgame should have been a draw. Praggnanandhaa could not really find the way to equalise and had to surrender on his 60th turn. Arjun also employed the Queen's gambit and suffered a little in the early stages of the middle game. The Indian even went for a repetition of moves that was rejected by Nguyen but eventually it was another rook and pawns endgame on the board leading to a draw.

Gukesh pushed hard with his white pieces against Forest who was equally



Shubhankar, Yuvraj receive invites for Hero Dubai Desert Classic 2026

Hero Dubai Desert Classic remains one of the marquee events on the DP World Tour

DUBAI, Jan 19: Indian golfers Shubhankar Sharma and Yuvraj Singh Sandhu have received official invitations to compete at the 2026 Hero Dubai Desert Classic from January 22 to 26.

The duo's presence means a strong Indian representation in the Rolex Series event at Emirates Golf Club. While Sharma is making his eighth successive start at the iconic USD 9 million dollar event, Sandhu will make his debut, though he has played the course before.

The tournament, among the most prestigious on the DP World Tour, will once again be staged at the famous Majlis Course and is expected to feature a world-class field, including several Major champions, Ryder Cup stars and emerging international talents.

Rory McIlroy, who defends his Masters' Green Jacket in April, leads the field which will also have the likes of for-



mer Masters winner Dustin Johnson, who has also received an invitation.

Patrick Reed, another former Masters champion, and Tommy Fleetwood, winner of the PGA Tour's FedEx Cup, who turned 35 during the tournament, will also take part.

Others in the star-studded field include former Open winner Shane Lowry, two-

World Tour card but regained status with a sterling effort in the Q-School.

"It was awesome to receive an invite and I love this event, having played it so many times. Hopefully I can make it count with a good showing," said the 29-year-old Sharma.

Sandhu's invitation marks another notable milestone in his professional progression. The Chandigarh-based player has earned attention for his solid results on the domestic Indian PGTI Tour with seven wins in 2025, which earned him the DP World Tour card as the PGTI Order of Merit winner.

"I am looking forward to the Hero Dubai Desert Classic, which is such an iconic event," said Sandhu.

The invitations to Sharma and Sandhu highlight the growing engagement between the tournament and India, and the strong support from Hero MotoCorp. (PTI)

New Zealand proud of historic India series win, says Daryl Mitchell



INDORE, Jan 19: Daryl Mitchell says New Zealand's historic triumph was built on calm decision-making under pressure and collective belief, as the visitors sealed their first-ever bilateral ODI series victory on Indian soil.

India threatened to nail a stiff chase of 338 with a key partnership between centurion Virat Kohli and Harshit Rana but fell short once the stand broke in the series-deciding third game here on Sunday.

Mitchell admitted the pressure was real and praised his team's composure.

"They had a really good partnership and there was a lot of pressure, especially considering the nature of this ground, the surface and the size of the dimensions," Mitchell, who scored 137, said.

"I was really proud of how calm the group stayed and how clear the plans were in terms of how we wanted to operate."

Calling the decider a contest worthy of the occasion, he added, "It was a great game of cricket to go down to where it did. I think both teams should be very proud of the way they

played." Reflecting on the magnitude of the achievement, Mitchell said the win carried special significance.

"A number of New Zealand teams have toured India in the past and every time you come here, you learn and grow. But to come here with this group and achieve what we have is something the guys in the shed are really proud of. There will be some big smiles going back home."

Asked to place the ODI series win alongside New Zealand's recent Test series success in India, Mitchell said both achievements reflected the team's growth.

"Beating India here is never easy, in any format. To do it with this group makes it very special for New Zealand cricket."

Mitchell also spoke warmly about the experience of playing in front of Indian crowds.

"We're used to pretty small crowds back in New Zealand. Then you come here and the noise people create is very special. It's amazing to be part of that," he said with a smile.

Mitchell, who has enjoyed consistent success

in Indian conditions, credited his time in the IPL for helping him adapt.

"I am very grateful for the time I spent in Chennai, and also in Rajasthan. Hopefully, I'll be back here a few more times in the future. India is a great place to tour. Playing in front of these fans is very special."

However, he stressed that New Zealand's preparation back home was equally vital.

"We spent a lot of time preparing in Lincoln and at Mount Maunganui. International cricket gives you exposure to different surfaces and different ways of scoring runs. We're very lucky to have good preparation back home and groundsmen who help us simulate conditions."

Mitchell had words of praise for Indian wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav, despite New Zealand's apparent intent to attack him.

"Kuldeep is world-class. There's a reason we try to put him under pressure — when he bowls well, he sets up their whole attack. He can spin the ball both ways and I still think he has a massive role to play for India in the future."

On India's decision to bowl first in the series decider, Mitchell said the call was understandable.

"We would have done the same. If there's any dew later on, it can become hard to control. As visiting teams, we don't always know the conditions as well as the locals, so you're guessing and trying to make the best decisions together."

On his crucial partnership with Glenn Phillips (106) after early wickets, Mitchell said they complemented each other well.

"With GP, we've got different angles, so we work well as a partnership. He's a very fast runner, so my challenge is trying to keep up with him. We lost a couple of wickets early and the focus was on extending the partnership and putting the pressure back on them."

Mitchell was particularly pleased to see Phillips return strongly after a spell out injured.

"He's been out for a long time, so it was awesome to see him come out and do what he does," he said. (PTI)

Indian shuttlers eye improvement against challenging draw at Indonesia Masters

JAKARTA, Jan 19: Indian shuttlers would eye a drastic improvement after last week's disappointing home run when they go up against a demanding draw at the USD 500,000 Indonesia Masters, which gets underway here on Tuesday.

At the India Open in New Delhi last week, Lakshya Sen bowed out in the men's singles quarterfinals, while no Indian progressed beyond the last eight in any category as Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi and world number one An Se Young of Korea clinched the men's and women's singles titles respectively.

The focus now shifts to Jakarta, where Indian shuttlers will face a challenging line-up in the opening rounds with several tough ties against higher-ranked opponents.

Seventh seed Lakshya, who won the Australia Open last year, will be hurting after his run at India Open was cut short by Lin in the last eight stage.

He will look to make a good start when he opens his campaign against Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh, while HS Prannoy faces a stern test against Malaysia's former world No. 2 and Paris Olympics bronze-medallist Lee Zii Jia.

Former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth, who reached the finals at Malaysia Masters and Syed Modi International last year, will take on Japan's Koki Watanabe, while Tharun Manneppalli is drawn against Yushi Tanaka of Japan.

US Open champion Ayush Shetty has been handed a tough draw against third seed Jonatan Christie of Indonesia, who reached



the finals at India Open.

After a disappointing first-round exit at India Open, it will yet another tough outing for the 20-year-old.

In women's singles, fifth seed PV Sindhu, who started the season after recovering from a foot injury, will begin her campaign against Japan's Manami Suizu.

World No. 12 Sindhu endured a first-round exit at India Open after going down to Vietnam's World No. 23 Nguyen Thuy Linh.

The young and promising Tanvi Sharma, a junior world Championships silver-medallist, is drawn against fourth seed Tomoka

Miyazaki of Japan.

Sharma had produced a fearless show last week, coming close to beating Tokyo Olympics champion Chen Yu Fei before falling short in a three-game thriller.

Teenager Unnati Hooda would hope to be up for the challenge when she faces top seed Chen Yufei in her opening round, while Malvika Bansod will fight it out against sixth seed Michelle Li of Canada.

India will also have representation in the men's doubles qualification, with Hariharan Amsakarunan and MR Arjun competing in the fourth qualifying round. (PTI)

We believe in each other, wanted to bring a white ball trophy home: Vidarbha coach Ghani

BENGALURU, Jan 19: Vidarbha's dominant title run in the Vijay Hazare Trophy was a result of the players' belief in each other which helped them overcome challenging situations successfully, reckoned head coach Usman Ghani.

Reigning Ranji Trophy champions Vidarbha defeated Saurashtra by 38 runs here on Sunday to add the premier domestic one-day title also to their showcase.

"We believe in each other. We have been a dominant team in the white ball formats for a while now, but that white ball trophy has eluded us. This year we didn't have a good outing in the SMAT as well, losing a couple of close matches and could not even reach the Super League," Ghani told PTI.

"But this time we were confident and backed each other to bring a white ball trophy home. The team responded well to the challenge by playing a brand of positive cricket," he added.

Support is the key word for Ghani, a trait he thinks helps the team consistently rise above situations and fancied teams.

"We have to support each player, it does not matter if it's a clutch situation or not. We have to be behind them. If one game goes wrong for us, we are always confident of coming back and that's what we are teaching everyone in the team."

"That has become a mindset of the team now, and if you look at it in the last couple of matches (VHT semifinal and final) we haven't had that kind of situation. It's all about keeping a positive mindset as a team," he noted. Unlike many teams in the domestic circuit, Vidarbha seemed to have found the right balance between red ball and white ball formats. Ghani credited it to Vidarbha's incredible bench strength and diversity of players.

"Look (Dhruv) Shorey didn't get to play in the final. We did not have the services of injured Danish Malewar also as he was in-



jured in the league phase at Rajkot. But there is a good bench strength and healthy competition in Vidarbha for spots.

"So, we have players waiting to grab the opportunities and they want to capitalise on each outing, and that makes it easy for us to take on challenges," he said.

Ghani is keen to project the team effort behind success, but could not avoid talking about a few individuals who shouldered Vidarbha's campaign admirably.

Aman Mokhadde is one of them as the 25-year-old opener bagged the player of the series award, scoring a tournament-highest 814 runs at an average of 90.44 with five hundreds. "I have seen him from a very young age and he has always been a sharp learner. Earlier in the season, he had a couple of bad matches, and runs were not coming but we still persisted with him because he is a good talent."

"He repaid our faith, scoring over 500 runs so far (in Ranji Trophy) and then over 800 runs in Hazare, which shows his skill and temperament. I know these young players' mindset, they are very confident and

that's what we need as a team," he said.

Yash Thakur underlined his domestic performer tag, taking 19 wickets to top Vidarbha's bowling charts in this Vijay Hazare Trophy, and Ghani has high expectations on his lead pacer.

"Thakur has been a complete leader of this side with the ball. He's just 26, but he's been one of the most consistent bowlers around. He's got a very good head and reads the game very well. He reads the batsmen early and that's very important for a bowler. He keeps working on the batsmen and it keeps him always ahead of them."

"He's mentally very strong too. He has a good amount of self-motivation and has worked on his pace too. Unfortunately, he's not playing for the country. He is a consistent performer and, hopefully, his chances will come soon," he said.

Ghani was also effusive in his praise for 23-year-old Harsh Dubey for leading Vidarbha in a mature way.

"He has put in a lot of work as a bowler and leader. There's a lot of competition for spots in Vidarbha but when we gave him a chance he proved worthy of it."

"He is a very patient individual and developed good relations with senior players in the side as well. He talks with everyone and encourages a lot of communication."

Vidarbha will resume their Ranji Trophy campaign against Andhra at Anantapur on January 22. They are currently leading Group A with 25 points from five matches. Ghani hoped that the team can adapt to the needs of red ball cricket after playing white ball formats for close to two months.

"Yeah, it may be a bit tough but most of the teams have to go through it and that's how the season is now. We have to adapt to the different formats quickly. It's a challenge but we know we can adapt to it, and continue the good work that we had put in the first phase," he signed off. (PTI)

Decide on participation by Jan 21 or risk removal from T20 WC: ICC to BCB

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: The ICC has asked the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to decide on its participation in the T20 World Cup in India by January 21 or "risk being replaced by another team" in the tournament beginning February 7.

Despite the back and forth between ICC and BCB, no solution has been found to the crisis that was triggered by the removal of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from the 2026 Indian Premier League on BCCI's instructions for unspecified "developments all around."

"The BCB officials have been told to decide on the participation by January 21. If they refuse to travel to India, then they should be ready to be replaced by another team as per rankings," said an ICC source. Citing security concerns and national pride, the BCB has announced that its national team won't be travelling to India for its group games in Kolkata and Mumbai.

However, with the event schedule already finalised, the ICC has shown reluctance to shift Bangladesh's games to co-host Sri Lanka, where the marquee India-Pakistan clash will be held as per the mutually agreed arrangement for ICC events till 2027.

In case Bangladesh continue to be unyielding, the replacement team would most likely be Scotland based on current rankings. Bangladesh are scheduled to play three league games in Kolkata and one in Mumbai.

The BCB has remained adamant on either a change of venue or a change of groups to facilitate its games in Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh are currently placed in Group C along with the West Indies, Italy, England and Nepal.

In their last meeting with ICC officials in Dhaka, the BCB proposed that Bangladesh be swapped with Ireland in Group B alongside Sri Lanka, Australia, Oman and Zimbabwe.

Such a move would allow the team to be based completely in Sri Lanka for all its league engagements. "...the possibility of moving Bangladesh to a different group as a means of facilitating the matter with minimum logistical adjustments was discussed," the BCB had stated after the meeting on Saturday.

While the BCB considers it unsafe for its players to travel to India, ICC's risk assessment report does not flag any specific or direct threat to the team if it participates in the tournament.

Bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh have deteriorated with the killings of Hindus in Bangladesh.

Former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal and current Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto have cautioned against a very hard-line approach on the controversial subject with the former saying that decisions taken today would have repercussions 10 years down the line. (PTI)

No rest, Gill to play Punjab's Ranji game from Thursday

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: India Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill has decided against taking a break after the recent 50-over loss to New Zealand and will play the next Ranji Trophy game for Punjab against Saurashtra at Rajkot, starting Thursday.

Gill, who featured in all three ODIs in the just-concluded series that India lost 1-2, has chosen to return to red-ball cricket immediately as he is not part of India's T20 World Cup squad.

The 26-year-old is keen to help Punjab keep their slim knockout hopes alive in the premier domestic tournament.

"Shubman decided against taking any break post ODI series and it took him eight hours to reach Rajkot from Indore as there aren't any direct flights, available," a source close to the Punjab team told PTI.

Punjab are currently placed sixth in Group B with 11 points from five matches. With three league games still to be played, the former champions would need outright victories in all their remaining fixtures to harbour any realistic chance of making it to the knockout stage.

Gill's presence at the top of the order is therefore seen as crucial to Punjab's ambitions.

The match against Saurashtra, the reigning domestic heavyweights, will also mark Gill's first red-ball appearance since he sustained a neck injury during the Test series against South Africa, which ruled him out of competitive cricket for a lengthy period.

His return is expected to significantly bolster Punjab's batting line-up, which has been inconsistent so far this season.

Despite his growing responsibilities at the international level, the Indian captain has often stressed the importance of domestic cricket in maintaining form and match fitness. (PTI)

Pramod Bhagat, Sukant Kadam win two gold each in Para Badminton International event in Egypt

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: India's Pramod Bhagat and Sukant Kadam clinched a gold medal each in the singles events of their respective categories and then combined together to stand on top of podium in doubles at the SPIRO SPATHIS Egypt Para Badminton International 2026 in Cairo.

Bhagat showcased grit and experience in the SL3 men's singles final, defeating compatriot Umesh Vikram Kumar in a thrilling three-set contest.

After conceding a closely-fought opening game 19-21, Bhagat raised his intensity and tactical sharpness to take the next two sets 21-15 and 21-13, sealing victory in a match lasting over an hour.

In the SL4 men's singles category, Sukant Kadam underlined his consistency and mental toughness, overcoming India's Surya Kant Yadav in straight sets. Both games went down to the wire, with Kadam prevailing 27-25, 21-18 in a high-quality final. In SL3 class, a player must play standing and can have an impairment in one or both lower limbs, and poor movement balance.

SL4 class players have a lesser impairment than those in SL3. SL4 players can have impairment in one or both lower limbs and minimal impairment in walking/running balance. The Indian duo then combined forces in the SL3-SL4 men's doubles event, where Bhagat and Kadam were awarded the gold medal following a walkover in the final against fellow Indians Umesh Vikram Kumar and Surya Kant Yadav, completing a memorable double-gold outing for both.

India enjoyed a highly successful campaign in the tournament, with gold medals also coming from Nitesh Kumar, Thulasimathi Murugesan, Alpha James, and the women's doubles pair of Manasi Joshi and Thulasimathi Murugesan.

An elated Bhagat said, "This tournament was extremely important for me, especially with the World Championships coming up next month. The singles final tested my patience and fitness, and I'm really happy with the way I responded after losing the first set. (PTI)

India never began well, youngsters need to emulate Kohli's mindset: Gavaskar

NEW DELHI, Jan 19: Former captain Sunil Gavaskar says India's failure to make good starts cost them the ODI series against New Zealand and the team's batters should take a leaf out of Virat Kohli's book to understand how an innings should be paced while chasing difficult targets.

India went down in the third and final ODI in Indore by 41 runs to lose their first ever 50-over home series against New Zealand, continuing the trend of recent underwhelming results. Kohli top-scored with a 108-ball 124 but could not get a stable partner to steer the challenging chase of 338.

"Unless Virat Kohli got substantial support, it was always going to be difficult, and he got very little of it. The real problem for India throughout the series has been the starts. As they say, well begun is half



done," Gavaskar said on 'Amul Cricket Live' on JioStar.

"India never began well, and that's one of the main reasons they weren't able to chase these big scores," he pointed out.

who hadn't really done justice to his ability until this innings of 53 runs and then Harshit Rana, someone you are never quite sure what you are going to get, it becomes an uphill climb. That's exactly what India found," Gavaskar explained.

The legendary former batter lauded Kohli for trying till the end and urged the others to emulate his mindset and consistency.

"The thing about him is that he's not tied down to an image. A lot of batters and bowlers are constrained by how they're perceived, and they feel they must live up to that image. Virat isn't like that," he said.

"He's tied to the job at hand, and that job is to score runs. Sometimes, that means starting watchfully and then opening up. Sometimes, it means attacking early and then spreading the field and picking up ones and twos. He's not governed by expecta-

tions of how he should play," he added.

"That temperament is the key. He doesn't think, 'I'm expected to hit a six.' He plays according to the situation. He never gives up. Even till the end, he was trying. For youngsters, that's the biggest lesson, don't live up to an image. Play the situation, and you'll be far more consistent than you ever imagined."

On Harshit Rana's lower-order half century that raised hopes of an unlikely win, Gavaskar said he was impressed by his ability to stay in the moment and not let past failures affect him mentally.

"It was a very good innings by Harshit Rana. He batted exactly like a lower-order batter should, without worry and without expectations... What impressed me was that Harshit didn't get hassled by earlier failures, especially with someone like Virat Kohli at the other end," he said. (PTI)