

**6** WORLD

**7** ARUNACHAL

- Russia, Ukraine envoys meet in Abu Dhabi for US-brokered talks
- Israel strikes Gaza, killing 19 including women and children
- Khemchand elected BJP legislature party leader, set to be Manipur CM
- Union Budget forward-looking, beneficial for Arunachal: DY CM Chowna Mein

## BJP's Y Khemchand Singh sworn-in as CM; Kuki, Naga MLAs become Dy CMs

# Manipur get a govt after year-long PR

## Land-grabbing slur: Himanta to sue Gaurav

**IMPHAL, Feb 4:** BJP leader Y Khemchand Singh was sworn in as the chief minister of Manipur on Wednesday.

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla administered the oath of office and secrecy to the 62-year-old legislator.

BJP MLA Nemcha Kipgen, who belongs to the Kuki community, and Naga People's Front legislator L Dikho took oath as the deputy chief ministers of Manipur.

BJP's Govindas Konthoujam and K Loken Singh of NPP were also sworn in as ministers. Kipgen took oath virtually from Manipur Bhavan in New Delhi.

The swearing-in ceremony was held at Lok Bhavan here, hours after the President's rule in the state was revoked.

Restive Manipur had been under the President's rule since February last year.

The ceremony was attended by several BJP legislators, senior party functionaries, and top leaders of the NDA in the state.

Manipur has been witnessing ethnic violence since May 3, 2023, after a tribal solidarity march was taken out in the hill districts, in protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Since then, at least 260 people, including members of both the Kuki and Meitei communities as well as security personnel, have been killed in the violence, while thousands



become homeless.

Notably, the BJP legislature party of Manipur had on Tuesday elected Y Khemchand Singh as its leader at a meeting held at the party headquarters in New Delhi.

The meeting was attended by 35 of the 37 BJP MLAs, besides the party's central observer Tarun Chugh, its northeast in-charge Sambit Patra, and BJP state president A Sharda Devi, among others.

Subsequently, another meeting was

held at the Manipur Bhavan in the national capital, where MLAs of NDA constituents in Manipur -- six of the National People's Party (NPP), five of the Naga People's Front (NPF) and three Independents -- and BJP legislators were

in attendance.

Biren Singh had relinquished the post on February 9 last year amid rumblings within the state BJP seeking a change of leadership in strife-torn Manipur.

The opposition was also demanding his resignation for allegedly failing to bring the situation under control.

In August 2023, Biren Singh alleged that certain misunderstandings, actions of vested interests and foreign conspiracies to destabilise Manipur led to the violence.

Intermittent violence continued during the following months, and pressure mounted on Biren Singh from inside the ruling BJP and outside. The Kuki-Zo leaders also demanded a separate administrative unit for the community.

On January 3, 2025, former Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla was sworn in as the governor of the state.

Biren Singh left for Delhi on five days later and held a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The CM returned to Imphal on February 9 and tendered his resignation to Bhalla.

President's Rule was imposed in the state on February 13, as the BJP could not find a consensus Chief Ministerial candidate. During the President's Rule, the state witnessed a decline in gun-firing incidents between the two warring groups. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Khandu assures strict action in Assembly

### House session: Cong MLA raises Frontier Highway compensation scam issue



**ITANAGAR, Feb 4:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday said all those involved in the alleged land compensation scam linked to the Lada-Sarli stretch of the ambitious Frontier Highway project will be dealt with a strong hand.

Responding to a zero-hour discussion by lone Congress MLA Kumar Waii in the Assembly, the chief minister said bank accounts of several persons involved were under scrutiny.

"Those who have fraudulently taken money in the name of compensation will have to deposit the amount back into the government exchequer. They will not be spared and stringent action will be initiated against them," Khandu said.

He said the state government had constituted a fact-finding committee on August 30 last year, which submitted its report on November 5.

"Based on the findings, the government suspended five officials and constituted three committees to reverify genuine landowners for the highway stretch being constructed under five packages," he informed, adding that the re-verification process began on January 14 and reports would be submitted soon. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'India to lower tariffs on vast array of US goods to zero pc'

**NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Feb 4:** India will lower tariffs on a "vast array" of American industrial and agricultural goods, such as "fruits" and "vegetables", to zero per cent under the trade deal announced by President Donald Trump, a top US official has said.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer described the deal as a "big win" while noting that India will continue to control "certain key areas" that enjoy protection. "This is it. The time has come, and now we have the deal. We'll finish papering it, but we know the specifics. We know the details. It's a very exciting opportunity," Greer told CNBC Squawk Box on Tuesday.

Greer said the US will continue to maintain some level of tariff against India - 18 per cent - "because we have this giant trade deficit with them, but



they've also agreed to reduce their tariffs for us on a variety of agricultural products, manufactured goods, chemicals, medical devices, etc. It's an exciting

opportunity for both countries."

Separately, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt on Tuesday said India has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Three minor sisters jump to death from Ghaziabad highrise

**GHAZIABAD (UP), Feb 4:** Three minor sisters died after allegedly jumping off the balcony of a ninth-floor flat in Ghaziabad early on Wednesday, with police intensifying probe into their mobile phone addiction and the influence of an online Korean game, officials said. Assistant Commissioner of Police (Shalimar Garden) Atul Kumar Singh said preliminary investigation suggested that the sisters were addicted to a Korean task-based interactive "love game", and their parents had objected to their excessive use of mobile phones in recent days. Deputy Commissioner of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Khemchand Singh vows to live up to confidence of Modi, Shah

**IMPHAL, Feb 4:** In his first reaction after being sworn-in, Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Wednesday said he wanted to fulfil the faith reposed in him by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Talking to reporters at Lok Bhavan soon after taking oath, Singh said Manipur comprises 36 communities and that the state was taken care of for long by these communities.

"Our hope now is for all to help in bringing a peaceful atmosphere," he said.

He added, "Modi and Shah have placed great faith in me and

I want to take that faith forward," he added.

Deputy CM L Dikho said, "We hope to fulfill the aspirations of the people of the state. Our first task is to reach out to them."

"Inclusiveness is the new mantra of the government," he said.

Asked whether action would be taken against armed groups that have issued threats to Kuki legislators participating in government formation, Dikho replied, "Why not.."

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla administered the oath of office and secrecy to the 62-year-old Singh at the Lok Bhavan this evening. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Cong insulted Assamese pride, ignored northeastern state: Union Min Margherita

**NEW DELHI, Feb 4:** Union Minister Pabitra Margherita on Wednesday slammed the Congress for insulting Assamese pride and ignoring the northeastern state, while crediting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for various development works in the region.

Participating in a discussion on the Motion of Thanks on President Droupadi Murmu's address to the joint sitting of Parliament, he also accused the Congress leadership of "almost" handing over Assam to Pakistan.

Margherita said Assam has been an integral part of India for thousands of years.

"But it pains me to say that



during the time of partition, the top Congress leadership had almost handed over Assam to Group C, that is to Pakistan," he said. Margherita, who is also the BJP's Rajya Sabha member from

Assam, mentioned interview records dated April 11, 1947, related to the conversation between Lord Mountbatten (first Governor-General of India) and the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

"I was shocked and astonished to read about that conversation between Mountbatten and Jawaharlal Nehru. In that conversation, Mountbatten warned Nehru that (Muhammad Ali) Jinnah might demand the partition of Assam and Nehru ji responded that it was a perfectly reasonable request and could be agreed to," he said, amid opposition from the Congress party leaders present in the House. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Gaurav to head Cong's Assam poll panel

**NEW DELHI, Feb 4:** Ahead of the assembly polls, the Congress on Tuesday constituted its Pradesh Election Committee in Assam with state unit chief Gaurav Gogoi as its chairman.

The 35-member committee includes Debabrata Saikia, Rakibul Hussain, Pradyut Bordoloi, Bhupen Kumar Borah, Ripun Borah, Paban Singh Ghatowar, Wajid Ali Chaudhary, Rosilina Tirkey, Jakir Hussain Sikdar, Pradeep Sarkar and Arun Dutta Mazumdar. In addition to the 35 members, the committee will include Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) General Secretary (Organisation); heads of all frontal organisations, APCC; Chairpersons of SC, OBC, Minority, Adivasi Congress Departments and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Late diagnosis, awareness gaps drive lung, cervical cancer burden: Oncologists

# Importance of integrating screening into routine care stressed

**KOLKATA, Feb 4:** Despite major advances in diagnostics, treatment, and technology, lung and cervical cancers in India continue to be diagnosed at advanced stages, largely due to gaps in awareness, screening, and access, oncologists from leading hospitals in Kolkata said on World Cancer Day.

Late diagnosis is not limited to cervical cancer, with lung cancer also often detected at advanced stages, even among non-smokers, women, and younger Indians, they said.

World Cancer Day, observed on February 4, is a global awareness initiative led by the Union for International Cancer Control to promote cancer prevention, early detection and treatment.

Dr Arunava Roy, Head of the Department and Senior Consultant of Gynaecologic Oncology at Manipal Hospital, told PTI that cervical cancer is still detected late due to low awareness, stigma, lack of routine screening, and delayed referrals at the primary care

level.

He emphasised the importance of integrating screening into routine care.

On the persistence of high cervical cancer mortality despite preventability, Roy pointed to vaccination and social barriers.

"The key gaps are low HPV vaccination coverage, poor screening participation, and persistent social stigma. Myths, fear, and poor follow-up further delay care," he said, adding that solutions include "school-based HPV vaccination, community-level screening programs, and sustained, culturally sensitive awareness initiatives."

The HPV vaccine is a series of injections that protects against the human papillomavirus (HPV), a common virus causing more than 90 per cent of cervical and several other cancers.

Doctors said delays often begin at the first signs of illness.

Senior Consultant, Medical Oncology, Apollo Cancer Centre, Kolkata, Dr



Sandip Ganguly, said late presentation is largely driven by misinterpretation of symptoms rather than limitations in treatment.

"So it's a lack of awareness that

makes lung cancer patients present at an advanced stage. People often think this is tuberculosis or just a normal infection, and as many patients have COPD, they believe these are COPD

symptoms," he said, adding that cervical cancer, particularly in low socioeconomic groups, is similarly overlooked. "There is also a lack of awareness about symptoms such as excessive discharge or vaginal bleeding. People consider these normal and ignore them," he added.

Ganguly also flagged environmental factors, noting that "the most important cause of lung cancer as per WHO is environmental tobacco smoke or environmental pollution," including indoor exposures such as incense sticks.

Pulmonologist Dr Shyam Krishnan of CK Birla Hospitals, CMRI, said lung and cervical cancers often go undetected in early stages because symptoms are vague or ignored.

"Despite significant advances in diagnostics and treatment, lung and cervical cancers in India continue to present at advanced stages primarily due to gaps in awareness, screening and primary care integration," he said.

"In lung cancer, persistent cough or breathlessness is often attributed to pollution, smoking, or infections," he added.

Dr Krishnan further highlighted the rising incidence among non-smokers, women, and younger patients.

"The rising incidence of lung cancer among non-smokers, women, and younger individuals reflects changing environmental and biological risk factors," he said, adding that public messaging must move away from the outdated notion that lung cancer is only a smoker's disease.

Gynaecologist Dr Parnamita Bhattacharya of CK Birla Hospitals, CMRI, said preventable cervical cancer deaths persist due to low vaccination coverage, limited screening uptake, and social stigma. "High cervical cancer mortality in India is driven by low HPV vaccination coverage, limited screening uptake and persistent social stigma," she told PTI. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Stock markets marginally higher as heavy sell-off in IT counters spoils sentiment

**MUMBAI, Feb 4:** Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed slightly higher on Wednesday as gains in major stocks like ICICI Bank, Reliance Industries, and Eternal were partly negated by a sharp correction in IT shares due to weak global cues.

Investors turned cautious as profit booking emerged on select counters after the recent rally amid renewed optimism about the India-US trade deal, traders said.

After swinging between gains and losses throughout the session, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 78.56 points or 0.09 per cent higher at 83,817.69. During the day, it touched a high of 83,947.53 and a low of 83,119.95, gyrating about 827.58 points.

A total of 2,726 stocks advanced, while 1,477 declined and 163 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 48.45 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 25,776.

"Sentiment stayed cautious amid mixed global cues and some profit-booking following the recent rally. Weakness in global technology stocks weighed on domestic IT counters, leading to sectoral divergence."

"At the same time, optimism surrounding the India-US trade agreement and expectations of improved foreign participation continued to support cyclical stocks and select heavyweight names," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

From the Sensex firms, Eternal, Trent, NTPC, Adani Ports, Power Grid, Maruti, Reliance Industries and ICICI Bank were the biggest gainers.

Infosys, Tata Consultancy Serv-

**Ather Energy posts highest ever revenue of ₹995.7 cr in Q3 FY26**

## HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 4:** Ather Energy one of India's leading electric two-wheeler manufacturers, delivered its strongest-ever quarter performance, with robust growth in market share and revenue alongside a sharp narrowing of EBITDA losses. The performance was driven by geographic expansion, portfolio depth, and non-vehicle revenue led by software offerings. During the quarter, the company sold 67,851 units, captured a national market share of 18.8%, and improved EBITDA margin by ~1,600 basis points (bps) year-on-year (YoY) to (-3%), reflecting strong operating leverage, disciplined cost management, and continued investments in research and development (R&D).

For the quarter ended December 2025, Ather Energy reported total income of ₹995.7 crore, up 53% YoY, driven by robust volume growth and a rising contribution of non-vehicle revenue, including software subscriptions, charging, accessories, spares, and service, which rose to 14% of revenue. This strong revenue growth was accompanied by a sharp increase in margins. Adjusted Gross Margin (AGM) reached ₹251.3 crore in Q3 FY26, up 111% YoY, while AGM excluding incentives improved to 23%, up ~1,100 bps YoY. This was driven by Ather's value engineering capabilities and the ability to command strong premiums, reflecting a continued focus on healthier unit economics and structurally stronger margins.

## NAME CORRECTION

I, Jainal Abdin son of Late Monuhar Ali a resident of Vill-Sutarpur, P.O.-Joynagar, P.S.-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam) That, I am known as Jainal Abdin & Kutu Chand but my actual name is Jainal Abdin. That, Jainal Abdin & Kutu Chand are the names of same person i.e. of mine. Jainal Abdin s/o-Late Monuhar Ali Vill-Sutarpur, P.O.-Joynagar, P.S.-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

## NAME CORRECTION

I, Mohammed Muhibur Rohman, S/O- Jainal Abdin, R/O- Sutarpur, P.O. & P.S.-Murajhar, Dist- Hojai, (Assam) That my actual and correct name is Mohammed Muhibur Rohman and my father's actual and correct name is Jainal Abdin. That in some documents my name has been recorded as Mohammed Muhibur Rohman and Muhibur Rohman both the names one and same person i.e. mine and Jainal Abdin and Kutuchan Miya one and same person i.e. my father. Mohammed Muhibur Rohman S/O- Jainal Abdin, R/O- Sutarpur, P.O. & P.S.-Murajhar, Dist- Hojai, (Assam)



ices, HCL Tech and Tech Mahindra were the biggest laggards, declining as much as 7 per cent.

IT shares witnessed a sharp correction due to weakness in global technology stocks, as investors became cautious over concerns of overvaluation, which dented market sentiment, according to traders.

Among sectoral indices, IT tumbled 5.49 per cent, and the BSE Focused IT tanked 5.06 per cent.

On the other hand, Utilities climbed 2.72 per cent, oil & gas (2.37 per cent), consumer durables (2.36 per cent), power (2.18 per cent), energy (1.91 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.56 per cent) and metal (1.27 per cent).

"While Oil & Gas, consumer durables, metal and automobile stocks recorded strong gains, IT stocks faced sharp selling pressure, tracking weakness in global technology shares."

"Sentiment in the sector deteriorated after AI startup Anthropic unveiled an end-to-end workflow automation productivity tool,

which Washington will bring down tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the current 50 per cent. The announcement is important because the US has imposed a steep tariff on Indian goods entering American markets, effective August 27, 2025.

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

European markets were trading on a mixed note.

US markets ended lower on Tuesday. The Nasdaq Composite index tanked 1.43 per cent, the S&P 500 declined by 0.84 per cent, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 0.34 per cent.

"Domestic equities witnessed a volatile session, swinging between gains and losses as rising US-Iran tensions kept investors on edge. Mid-cap and small-cap stocks outperformed large caps as value buying emerged following a recent correction...market sentiment will largely be guided by the upcoming RBI policy decision and greater clarity on the newly announced US-India trade agreement," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Overall upside remained limited due to weakness in IT stocks amid concerns over reduced demand for traditional outsourcing following Anthropic's introduction of new AI-driven automation tools, he added.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.36 per cent to USD 67.57 per barrel. On Tuesday, the Sensex ended at 83,739.13, up 2,072.67 points or 2.54 per cent. The Nifty zoomed 639.15 points or 2.55 per cent to settle at 25,727.55. (PTI)

rekindling concerns that rapid advances in AI could disrupt traditional software business models and weigh on industry-wide profitability," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The rupee depreciated 11 paise to 90.43 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday.

Gold and silver prices extended gains as investors continued to shift funds into safe-haven assets amid global geopolitical uncertainties.

Precious metals extended their sharp rally for the second straight day in the national capital on Wednesday, with silver prices surging to ₹ 2.98 lakh per kg, while gold rose to ₹ 1.65 lakh per 10 grams.

Foreign institutional investors turned buyers on Tuesday as they bought equities worth ₹ 5,236.28 crore, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 1,014.24 crore.

India and the US have agreed on a framework for a trade deal under

## Cracks in INDI Alliance in Tamil Nadu as Congress appears indecisive: Sitharaman

**NEW DELHI, Feb 4:** Suggesting cracks within the INDI Alliance in Tamil Nadu, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman questioned the Congress party's commitment to the DMK-led coalition, saying it was dilly-dallying on deciding whether to contest the upcoming assembly elections on its own or with DMK.

In an interview with PTI Videos, she said actor Vijay's entry has "stirred the electoral pot in Tamil Nadu", but only election results will be the best judge on his showing.

She also questioned why the ruling DMK appeared "insecure" despite completing a full five-year term while claiming good governance.

Sitharaman accused the DMK government of failing to address law and order issues, including drug trafficking, crimes against Scheduled Castes and women, and rising insecurity on university campuses.

"These are questions any opposition must raise," she said.

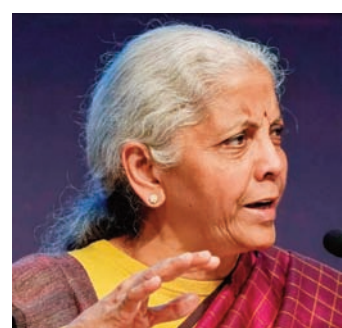
Commenting on the entry of actor Vijay into Tamil Nadu politics, Sitharaman said his presence had heightened interest in the state's elections and unsettled the ruling DMK.

"Only the final results of the election can prove it, but I think he stirred the electoral pot. And in fact, a lot of interest in Tamil Nadu's elections now is because of the way in which his party and he are playing," she said, adding that his entry has made DMK "insecure".

On speculation about the BJP courting Vijay, Sitharaman said politics was not about "who needs whom," adding that anyone was welcome, while stressing that the NDA alliance was united and moving forward.

She, however, turned her criticism on the INDI Alliance, questioning the Congress party's role and commitment in Tamil Nadu. Sitharaman said the Congress appeared dependent on alliances and uncertain about its political direction even months before elections.

"Questions must be asked of both



Congress and DMK. After five years in power together, why the hesitation to continue?" she said.

"After five full years of claiming that they've done very good governance, Tamil Nadu's growth, Tamil Nadu has done this...very well, the state has done well. But why should there be that sense of insecurity now? Any number of people can enter electoral politics. A film actor or any other professional or anybody. So, in that league, if Vijay has come in, which is very well. The voters have a choice," she said.

She went on to launch a scathing attack on the ruling DMK alliance in the state, saying "lawlessness, drug (and other) offences are going unpunished".

"For a party, which speaks about social justice, the crimes against the scheduled caste, crimes against women of poorer sections of the society are going unpunished," she said, adding that questions are being raised about the close association of the drug mafia with people in higher-ups in the ruling dispensation.

"None of this has been answered," she said. "Universities are becoming unsafe places in Tamil Nadu. It was never like that. So, despite being in power for a full five years, the DMK has not answered any of these questions."

Questioning the Congress party's intent of continuing alliance with DMK, she said the party appears to be split. "Do they want to go with DMK or do they want to be alone? Or do they want to go with somebody else?"

## Next 20-25 years will be era of India, says BlackRock CEO Larry Fink

**MUMBAI, Feb 4:** The next 20-25 years will be the era of India, which over the next decade or more is going to grow at 8-10 per cent, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink said on Wednesday.

Speaking at a fireside chat with billionaire Mukesh Ambani on 'Investing For a New Era', the CEO of the US multinational investment management company said India is the country he would want to invest.

"In the era for India, our focus is to explain people what it means to be the 'Era of India'. When you think about the growth of India... It's not a quarter, it's not a day or week, it's not a year, it's a long horizon. And you can say maybe this is the era for India and over the next 20-25 years," he said. India, he said, has less need for the importation of capital.

"I do believe the combination of importation of capital from foreign investors who believe in the era of India, but the fundamental foundation of any country is having the domestic economy being built on the back of retire-

ment savings," he said.

He went on to say that India over the next 10-plus years is going to grow from 8-10 per cent. "That is where I want to invest and encourage Indians to invest in."

Praising the Modi government, he said digitised rupee has transformed commerce in the country. "Across the board, I am very worried about other countries, even the United States is falling behind," he added.

He said there is a need to get more people to invest in the capital markets, to grow as the country grows.

"We need to be compelling people to think about the horizon of investing over a long period of time, to grow with great companies of India, to be a part of that and to participate in that," he said.

Fink further said he does not believe in the "AI bubble". "The greatest risk is that if we don't invest in AI, China will win."

AI is among the most topical conversations because it is the most disruptive, he added. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Manipur get a govt after

Security forces launched widespread operations in the hills and valley districts of the state against armed miscreants and militants, leading to the arrest of over 1000 of them and recovering more than 3000 arms. Currently, there are 37 BJP MLAs in Manipur. Originally, a total of 32 BJP MLAs had won the 2022 assembly elections. The JD(U) had won six seats, and five of its MLAs later defected to the BJP, taking the strength of the saffron party to 37.

Among the other MLAs, six are from the National People's Party (NPP), five from the Naga People's Front, five from the Congress, two from the Kuki People's Alliance (KPA), one from Janata Dal (United) and three Independents. There is one vacant seat following the death of a sitting MLA. (PTI)

## Land-grabbing slur: Himanta

Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel. "The era of hit-and-run politics is over. If they have even an ounce of courage or evidence, let them prove every allegation before a court of law," Sarma said. "I will not be intimidated by propaganda, coordinated slander, or political theatrics of so called slaves of Gandhi family," he added. Gogoi alleged that Sarma's family has grabbed around 12,000 bighas of land across the state. (PTI)

## Arunachal CM assures strict

Admitting that there had been both overestimation and underestimation in land compensation, Khandu said the discrepancies would be rectified. He also said the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) had constituted an inter-ministerial committee to investigate the matter, while the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had initiated a preliminary probe at its own level.

The chief minister said the 1,840-km Frontier Highway, stretching from Bomdila in West Kameng district to Vijaynagar in Changlang district along the Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Myanmar borders, was sanctioned on March 19, 2018, following sustained efforts by the state government. Of the total length, 586 km will be executed by private agencies, 536 km by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), and the remaining 718 km by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), he added. Khandu said the case had been handed over to the State Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), which found that compensation paid to affected landowners was on the higher side. "The ACB has arrested four persons in this connection and seized ₹ 11.5 crore from their bank accounts. There are many more people involved in the scam," he said. Acknowledging that corruption still persists in the state, the chief minister said it could only be eradicated through collective efforts.

He said the Special Investigation Cell (SIC), constituted in 2005, had arrested 142 officials between 2016 and 2025 after the BJP came to power, compared to about 20 arrests between 2005 and 2015. "Our vision is to make Arunachal Pradesh corruption-free. We are working as 'Team Arunachal' and strengthening the ACB to deal with corruption with iron hands," he added.

The Lada-Sarli stretch of the highway has remained at the centre of controversy amid allegations of a multi-crore land compensation scam, triggering public outcry and political criticism. Civil society groups, activists and local landowners have alleged that compensation meant for genuine landowners was diverted through inflated valuations and fraudulent claims, with the total alleged irregularities pegged at around Rs 130 crore for the 125.55-km stretch. (PTI)

## India to lower tariffs on vast

committed to "no longer" purchasing Russian oil, with PM Modi also agreeing on investments of USD 500 billion across key American sectors.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio "welcomed" the trade deal and discussed "formalising" bilateral cooperation on critical minerals exploration and mining during their meeting in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. A State Department readout of the meeting said that the two leaders "emphasised the importance of our democracies working together to unlock new economic opportunities and advance our shared energy security goals." In a Truth Social post on Monday, Trump said that, effective immediately, the two sides agreed to a trade deal under which the US will lower its reciprocal tariff imposed on India from 25 per cent to 18 per cent. India will "likewise move forward to reduce their tariffs and non-tariff barriers against the US to zero," he said.

Trump said Modi also committed to buy American goods at a much higher level, in addition to over USD 500 billion of US energy, technology, agricultural, coal, and many other products.

Giving details of the deal, Greer said the average tariff on industrial goods in India is currently around 13.5 per cent. "That's going to go to zero for virtually everything. When I say virtually, I mean 98-99%." On the agricultural side, there's a vast, vast array of agricultural goods. So it will go to zero," he said.

"India, like every country in the world, including the US, has some protection around certain key areas where they'll continue to control that. We'll continue to work on access. But for a variety of things, tree nuts, wine, spirits, fruits, vegetables, etc, they're going down to zero. This is a big win," Greer said.

In a post on X, the USTR said that "India will lower tariffs on a wide array of US industrial and agricultural goods to 0%. President Trump's historic deal with India delivers unprecedented market access for American farmers and producers." On the non-tariff barriers, he said that getting rid of tariffs is one thing, but often, the non-tariff barriers pose problems. "So we have an understanding and agreement with the Indians as well on a variety of technical barriers to trade areas where they have not accepted US standards." (PTI)

## Khemchand Singh vows to live

BJP MLA Nemcha Kipgen, who belongs to the Kuki community, and Naga People's Front legislator L Dikho took oath as the deputy chief ministers. BJP's Govindas Konthoujam and K Loken Singh of NPP were sworn in as ministers. Kipgen took oath virtually from Manipur Bhuvan in New Delhi.

The swearing-in ceremony was held hours after the President's rule in the state was revoked. BJP Manipur spokesperson Laimayum Bhashanta Sharma said the formation of a new government will pave the way for peace, normalcy and development in the state.

"The formation of a new government will pave the way for peace, normalcy and development in the state once more. We have known the chief minister for such a long time. He is very much in touch with leaders of different communities. The restoration of a popular government also says that the Centre knows what is best for the state of Manipur," Sharma told PTI.

Another senior BJP functionary said having three leaders from three major communities in the top three posts in the state will ensure stability soon in both hills and valley. "This development is a good step for the Centre," he told PTI. A Manipur University professor said, "I just wanted Nemcha Kipgen to come to Imphal. There is no threat to any community in Imphal valley. The oath-taking should not have been done virtually from New Delhi. It shows that there is a certain lack of will on the part of the Centre to enforce unity in the state." (PTI)

## Cong insulted Assamese pride

He said these details were "documented by selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru, series 2, volume 2, page number 87, which is sponsored by Congress", and that the details were not his invention. Margherita, the Union Minister of State for External Affairs, said this was not possible because the great son of Assam Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi and the residents of the state opposed it.

He said that for five decades, people of Assam demanded that rightful honour be given to Bordoloi, but it was not fulfilled by the Congress government. "It was only under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1999, Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi was conferred with the Bharat Ratna award," the BJP leader said. Margherita praised PM Modi for working towards the welfare of the tea workers of Assam.

"The British came and went. The Congress government came. But our tea workers kept on being exploited...Even after living on the same land for 200 years, the tea workers were not given rights to live on the same land...and with the inspiration of Narendra Modi ji, today, 200 years later, 3,30,000 tea workers have got land rights," he said. Margherita said that demands for giving Bharat Ratna to music maestro Bhupen Hazarika were also ignored by the Congress government. The honour was finally given by the Modi government, he added. (PTI)

## Gaurav to head Cong's Assam

Tea-Garden Cell of APCC. The Congress is seeking to wrest power from the BJP in the northeastern state, where elections are due in the next few months. (PTI)

## Importance of integrating

Bhattacharya added that community initiatives have made an impact. "Under an initiative led by Arpit Jain, Vice President, CK Birla Hospitals, free HPV vaccination has been provided to over 5,000 girls across Kolkata and Jaipur."

The oncologists further highlighted that rural patients face compounded challenges due to limited infrastructure and specialist access.

Dr S K Bala, a specialist in Surgical Oncology and Robotic Surgery at CK Birla Hospitals, CMRI, said, "The outcome gap between urban and rural cancer patients remains substantial, with rural patients more likely to be diagnosed at advanced stages and experience treatment delays."

He added that models like "tele-oncology for specialist consultations, mobile screening units for early detection, decentralised diagnostics, and task-shifting to trained nurses and primary care providers" are showing results. (PTI)

## Three minor sisters jump to death

Police Nimish Patil said further investigation revealed that the girls were influenced by Korean content and spent a significant amount of time on their mobile phones. "Family members had restricted their mobile phone usage for the past few days, which left them distressed and may have triggered the decision (to take the extreme step)," he said.

The police received information around 2.15 am that three girls had jumped off the balcony of a ninth-floor flat in a tower of Bharat City under the Teela Mor police station limits in the Sahibabad area. On reaching the spot, the police found that the girls -- Nishika (16), Prachi (14) and Pakhi (12) -- daughters of Chetan Kumar, had fallen to the ground floor and suffered fatal injuries. They were rushed by an ambulance to a hospital in Lonli, where doctors declared them dead on arrival.

According to the police, the sisters became addicted to online gaming during the COVID-19 period and had been continuously playing the Korean game, mostly together. "The three did everything together - from bathing, eating and sleeping to going to school," ACP Singh said.

DCP Patil said the girls' education had been irregular and they had not attended school for the past two years. Earlier, their academic performance had not been satisfactory, he added. He said it is still not clear when exactly the mobile phone and gaming addiction began, and the investigation is at an initial stage. But it is evident that the girls were highly addicted to mobile phone usage, he said. (PTI)

Historic theatre gets a modern facelift, CM hails Sivasagar's rich dramatic tradition

## Sivasagar Natya Mandir reopens after renovation with CM's ₹ 1.94 crore support

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Feb 4:** The historic Sivasagar Natya Mandir received a new lease of life on Wednesday with the inauguration of its renovated premises, funded with ₹ 1.94 crore from the Chief Minister's financial aid, after being closed for nearly five years.

Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, inaugurating the new-look Natya Mandir, recalled the contributions of the first president Phanidhar Chaliha, first secretary Benudhar Rajkhowa and others who laid the foundation of Sivasagar Natya Samaj in 1899. He also paid tribute to 'Seuj Konwar' Paragdhara Chaliha, who modernised the institution and strengthened its cultural legacy.

Dr Sarma highlighted that Sivasagar's theatrical tradition dates back to the Ahom era, when Vaishnavite Satras were encouraged by the Ahom kings to stage Bhainas and other cultural programmes. He cited the staging of 'Ravan Badh' Bhama under Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha in Rangpur, the erstwhile name of Sivasagar and said the tradition



continued through Chandrakanta Singha's reign. The first modern drama in Sivasagar was staged by students of Sivasagar Government School in 1886. Noted lyricist Parbat Prasad Baruah later revived the genuine Assamese drama tradition by staging plays like 'Sonit Konwari' and 'Chakradwaj

Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. He noted that various drama groups that emerged after independence have continued to uphold the rich tradition of dramatic art in the region.

Dr Sarma said the state government has been supporting theatres with funding and modern technology, citing institutions like Sankardev Kala Kshetra, Madhabdev Auditorium in Guwahati and Badala Ata Auditorium in Narayanpur. The event was attended by Education Minister Dr Ranuj Pegu, MLA Sushanta Borgohain, Sivasagar District Commissioner Mridul Yadav, noted artist Pranjal Saikia, Sivasagar Natya Samaj president Dipali Chaliha, Kirip Chaliha, Surov Chaliha and others. Special appreciation was also extended to Parag Chaliha's wife, educationist Dipali Chaliha and architect Ashok Saikia for their efforts in the renovation.

The reopening marks a significant moment in preserving and promoting Sivasagar's century-old theatrical heritage while providing modern facilities for artists and audiences alike.

## AAU launches purple rice cookies and cakes for commercial sale



**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Feb 4:** Assam Agricultural University (AAU) has unveiled cookies and cakes made from its innovative purple rice variety 'Labanya', branded as IndiGo Purple Rice Cookies, which will soon be available commercially. The launch took place at the Vice-Chancellor's Conference Hall on Tuesday.

A 29-member NABARD delegation, led by Chief General Manager Loken Das, attended the event. The products are produced by the Bajalbari Na-Kuhipat Farmer Producer Company, an initiative of the Assam Rice Research

Institute under AAU. Purple rice, known for its low glycaemic index and rich nutritional profile—including flavonoids, antioxidants, amylase and phenolic compounds has gained popularity for its health benefits.

Vice-Chancellor Dr Bidyut Chandan Deka expressed confidence that the products would be well received and promote public health awareness. Director of Research Dr Sanjay Kumar Chetta and Director of Extension Education Dr Manoranjan Neog showcased AAU's recent innovations and achievements through an audio-visual presentation.

The programme, anchored by Registrar Tapan Kumar Gohain, was attended by senior officials and faculty, including Dr Prasanna Kumar Pathak, Dr Anup Kumar Das, Dr Nandita Bhattacharyya, Dr Ranjit Kumar Saud and Dr Mrinal Saikia.

The NABARD team also toured AAU's departments and farms, interacting with scientists and researchers, coordinated by NABARD District Development Manager Montu Das. The launch underscores AAU's efforts to promote value-added agricultural products while supporting local farmers and public health.

## World Cancer Day observation

Awareness programmes highlight early detection and healthy lifestyle



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 4:** World Cancer Day was observed across Kokrajhar district on Wednesday with a series of awareness programmes aimed at promoting early detection, prevention and treatment of cancer.

The programmes were organised by the Kokrajhar Cancer Hospital in collaboration with the District Health Society and a range of awareness activities were conducted at different locations across the district to sensitise people about cancer-related issues.

As part of the observance, an awareness rally was taken out from the Nursing College to the Kokrajhar Cancer Centre. The rally was flagged off by Kokrajhar MLA Lawrence Islay in the presence of Dr Atul Chandra Boro, principal of KMCH and Dr Nirmal Kumar Singha, medical superintendent of the Kokrajhar Cancer Centre, among others.

The rally saw active participation from nursing students, faculty members, health staff and volunteers, who carried placards and raised slogans highlighting cancer prevention and the importance of early diagnosis.

Addressing the participants, Dr Atul Chandra Boro spoke on cancer prevention and the role of a healthy lifestyle. He also highlighted the success of screening programmes in detecting cancer at an early stage. Dr Boro urged people to abstain from tobacco-related addictions and called for greater efforts to sensitise the general population about the harmful effects of tobacco in order to promote a healthier community.

Dr Bhubaneswar Saikia, medical superintendent of KMCH, also emphasised the importance of healthy food habits, lifestyle changes and sustained awareness to prevent cancer.

**Our Margherita Correspondent adds:** World Cancer Day was observed along with a cancer awareness and screening programme at the auditorium hall of Digboi Women's College on Wednesday. The programme was organised by the Indian Red Cross Society, Margherita sub-district branch, in collaboration with Indian Oil Corporation Limited (Assam Oil Division), Digboi, the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of Digboi Women's College and the Indian Red Cross Society Assam State Branch. The event was held under the chairmanship of Dr Manoj Kumar Gogoi, president of the Indian Red Cross Society, Margherita sub-district branch. The programme began with

the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by the distinguished guests and resource persons, followed by a Borgeet presented by Lakh Bora.

The welcome address was delivered by Pabitra Borgohain, secretary of the Indian Red Cross Society, Tinsukia district branch. In his speech, he highlighted the rising incidence of cancer and spoke about its causes, symptoms and treatment methods. He stressed the importance of creating awareness among the general public and said the awareness meeting and screening camp were organised in line with the objectives of World Cancer Day.

Renowned cancer specialist Dr Duncan Khanikor, MD, medical oncologist of the Assam Cancer Care Foundation, attended the programme as a resource person. He elaborated on the causes, symptoms and treatment of cancer, preventive and control measures and the treatment facilities currently available. Dr Khanikor emphasised that cancer can be prevented and overcome through awareness and adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

Several distinguished guests attended the programme, including Deb Prasad Sharma, general secretary of the Indian Red Cross Society Assam State Committee, Co-District Commissioner of Digboi Phyllis VL Hmunsiam, Co-District Police Officer of Digboi Pranjal Gohain, noted educationist and retired principal Hitendra Nath Sharma, retired district commissioner Lakh Nandan Gogoi, retired secretary to the Government of Assam Jugesh Baruah, president of the Tinsukia District Journalists Association Rana Jyoti Neog, senior citizens of Digboi Anil Saikia and Gopal Das, noted social worker Diganta Saikia and principal of AOD Nursing College Dr Aparajita Phukan, among others.

More than 500 people attended the programme, during which breast and cervical cancer screening for women was conducted by Dr Mamata Upadhyay of the Assam Cancer Care Foundation, Tinsukia unit.

Students of the Indian Oil Corporation Limited (AOD) Digboi Nursing School also performed an awareness street play on cancer, drawing attention to early detection and prevention.

The programme effectively combined expert knowledge, public awareness, community participation and on-the-spot screening, making the observance of World Cancer Day meaningful in the Digboi region.

## AAU Jorhat to host seminar on AI and Big Data for students

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Feb 4:** The Viksit Bharat Cell of the College of Community Science, Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Jorhat, will organise a two-day seminar titled "Upskilling Students with AI & Big Data Sciences in Education: Building Future-Ready Innovators" on February 6 and 7.

The seminar aims to strengthen students' skills in emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data Sciences, which are rapidly transforming the education sector and innovation landscape. It seeks to prepare students for future challenges by fostering digital literacy, critical thinking, and innovation-oriented learning.

Aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, the seminar is expected to contribute to building a future-ready academic community through the integration of technology-driven approaches in higher education.

## KA community holds rituals for smooth passage of Karbi-Dimanchal Bill

**HT Correspondent**

**HAMREN, Feb 4:** With the Union Budget Session of Parliament approaching and the Karbi-Dimanchal Bill scheduled to be introduced on February 6, expectations are running high in the hill districts of Assam. In this backdrop, the Karbi Anglong District Autonomous State Demand Committee (KADHASCOM) organised a traditional Karbi sacrificial ritual on Tuesday, seeking divine blessings for the smooth passage of the bill.

The ritual was held at the Jengkha Sports Association ground under the aegis of the KADHASCOM central committee. The primary objective of the spiritual gathering was to pray for the successful implementation of Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution, which provides for the creation of an autonomous state comprising Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts.

Organisers said the prayers were offered to ensure that Members of Parliament from all political parties, including the BJP, Congress and regional parties,



extend unanimous support to the bill, preferably through a voice vote, thereby fulfilling the long-standing political aspirations of the hill people.

The ceremony was conducted strictly in accordance with Karbi tribal customs and spiritual traditions. Priests performed the Longri Sarp and Ajjam Sarp Karkli prayers, followed by sacrificial rites. As per tradition, two goats and fowls were sacrificed to appease the deities and seek blessings for a favourable political future for the region.

Several prominent leaders and

social activists attended the event, including Mohan Sing Kro, president of West Karbi Anglong district KADHASCOM and Anthony Tisso, former secretary of the Karbi Students' Association (KSA), Hamren Regional Committee. A large number of local elders and community members also took part in the ritual.

The atmosphere at Jengkha was marked by cautious optimism as the community looked towards New Delhi, hoping that the traditional prayers would pave the way for a new administrative chapter in the hill districts of Assam.

## Child marriage-free chariot rally launched in Hojai

**HT Correspondent**

**HOJAI, Feb 4:** Assam's campaign against child marriage gained further momentum in Hojai district with the launch of the Child Marriage-Free Chariot Rally on Tuesday, reinforcing the state government's zero-tolerance policy under the leadership of Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The rally was inaugurated by Hojai District Commissioner Vidut Vikas Bhagwati following the nationwide 100-day awareness campaign for a "Child Marriage-Free India" launched on December 4, 2025, by Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi. The programme was organised by Koshi Lok Manch and "Access to Justice for All" with

the support of the Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights and the district administration.

Addressing officials, staff members and local residents, the district commissioner described child marriage as a grave social evil. "Child marriage is not just a social issue, it is a curse on humanity. Ending this practice is a top priority of our Chief Minister and the central government is equally committed to this cause," Bhagwati said.

He explained that the main objective of the chariot rally is to reach child marriage-prone areas across Hojai district and spread awareness about children's rights, justice and safety. Emphasising the role of public participation, the DC said no government

scheme could succeed without people's support. "This chariot will touch hearts, make people aware of the dangers of child marriage and empower society to take a stand against it," he added.

Several dignitaries were present at the event, including Koshi Lok Manch executive director Rishikant, additional deputy commissioner Bonny Inam Sadab, assistant commissioner Bibhuti Handique, Rubu Bora, Hojai coordinator Barbi Barik, officials of the District Child Protection Unit and others.

The rally is expected to play a key role in strengthening awareness at the grassroots level and supporting Assam's ongoing efforts to make the state free from child marriage.

## Governor reviews NEP 2020 implementation in Upper Assam schools and colleges

Focus on student skills, healthcare training, NCC and patriotism.

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 4:** Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Wednesday reviewed the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in schools and higher education institutions in Upper Assam. The meeting was held at Dibrugarh University and included an interactive session with officials of secondary education.

The Governor took feedback from Vice Chancellors, Principals, senior government officials and educationists on academic reforms, institutional development and effective implementation of NEP objectives. He stressed the importance of student-centric approaches and emphasised the role of educational institutions in realising the vision of NEP 2020. Director of Secondary Education, Mamata Hojai, presented a report highlighting initiatives under NEP, including skill-oriented education, promotion of gender equality and healthcare training for students in basic nursing, first aid and CPR. She also shared details of a skill carnival held in Kamrup Metro where students conducted elementary health check-ups for dignitaries.

Governor Acharya encouraged regular Parent-Teacher Meetings, annual programs



to showcase student talents and student-teacher interaction sessions. He urged teachers to foster a supportive environment and suggested extending National Cadet Corps (NCC) facilities to remote areas. He also highlighted the importance of sanitation and hygiene in schools, including providing san-

itary pads under supervision of lady teachers and proposed patriotic initiatives such as Vande Mataram singing competitions to instill nationalism. The session included a detailed question-and-answer interaction covering education challenges beyond financial and faculty constraints.

Officials present included OSD Governor's Secretariat Prof Bechan Lal, VC Dibrugarh University Prof Jiten Hazarika, DC Dibrugarh Bikram Kairi, C&S School Education Dept Narayan Konwar, Director Secondary Education Assam Mamata Hojai and inspectors from 10 Upper Assam districts.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

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

## Nirmala's Union Budget

The Union Budget's political messaging has been read as carefully as its fiscal arithmetic, particularly in states heading into elections where expectations of targeted concessions were unusually high. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman arrived in Parliament draped in a Kancheepuram silk saree, a gesture that appeared designed to signal a cultural and political bridge to Tamil Nadu. Symbolism, however, proved to be the most tangible nod. Beyond allocations that Tamil Nadu accessed only because it happened to be part of broader, pan-India or multi-state schemes, there was no bespoke fiscal attention that could be construed as an electoral olive branch to the state. In a political climate where budgets are often used to underline federal sensitivity and electoral intent, that absence has become the most discussed feature of the exercise. The sense of neglect has not been confined to Tamil Nadu alone. Kerala, governed by the Left Democratic Front led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), has responded with rare sharpness. Senior voices from the state government have argued that Kerala was treated as if it did not exist on the country's fiscal map, pointing to the absence of announcements addressing its long-standing demands on infrastructure support, disaster mitigation, or fiscal relief for a state grappling with tight borrowing limits and high social sector spending. West Bengal's reaction has followed a similar trajectory, albeit expressed in the characteristically combative idiom of Mamata Banerjee. For Banerjee, who has consistently framed her politics around resistance to what she portrays as a centralising and partisan Union government, the budget has reinforced a familiar narrative of exclusion rather than partnership. What makes these reactions politically significant is that Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal are all poll-bound, and in each case the Bharatiya Janata Party enters the electoral cycle as a challenger rather than an incumbent force. Historically, Union budgets in election years have often been deployed as instruments of political signalling, using infrastructure projects, institutional announcements, or sector-specific incentives to reshape local narratives and demonstrate central largesse. The expectation, therefore, was that the budget would contain proposals that could be marketed as state-specific gains, potentially boosting the BJP's prospects or at least softening resistance. The fact that this did not happen has led to a more unsettling interpretation: that the absence of special focus is itself a message, suggesting that the ruling party does not see these states as electorally recoverable in the near term.

This reading has been seized upon most forcefully in Tamil Nadu by M. K. Stalin, who has argued that the budget's treatment of his state reflects the BJP's lack of confidence and an implicit acknowledgement of likely defeat. From Stalin's perspective, the reliance on generic schemes rather than Tamil Nadu-specific initiatives underlines a political resignation rather than oversight. The argument resonates in a state where the BJP has struggled to expand beyond a limited footprint and where regional identity politics remains a potent force.

## The rape epidemic - A call for societal change and legal reform

By: Dr Vinod Chandrashekhar Dixit

Rape is a heinous crime that affects individuals, families, and communities worldwide, leaving deep emotional, psychological, and social scars. The punishment for rape varies significantly across jurisdictions, reflecting different legal frameworks, cultural norms, and societal values. In India, the legal framework for addressing rape is outlined in Sections 375 and 376 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which define rape and prescribe punishments. However, there is an ongoing debate about the adequacy of these laws and the need for reforms to ensure justice for survivors and accountability for perpetrators. Women, who were once silent sufferers, are now coming forward to report crimes thanks to increased awareness and police sensitization. This shift is attributed to various factors, including the growing women's rights movement, increased media coverage, and government initiatives aimed at promoting women's safety. However, despite these efforts, societal structures and law enforcement agencies still need significant improvement to effectively address this issue. The prevalence of crimes against women is often linked to the social environment, highlighting the need for a change in societal attitudes.

To combat rape, punishments for rape, battering, molestation, and related crimes should be reviewed and increased. Government and law enforcement agencies must work efficiently to curb such crimes, and laws alone cannot solve the problem; a broader societal change is necessary. This includes promoting gender equality, challenging patriarchal norms, and encouraging a culture of respect and consent. Education and awareness programs can play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and behaviors, especially among young people.

The current laws in India are being reformed to match international standards. Suggestions for reform include automatic disqualification of accused individuals from elections, assigning the toughest lawyers for prosecution, and making laws gender-neutral to address various types of assault and violence. To effectively combat rape, a multifaceted approach is needed, including deterrent punishment for rapists, self-defense training for women, societal change, and strict law enforcement with transparency.

### Some key statistics highlight the urgency of the issue:

- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), there were over 88,000 reported cases of rape in India in 2020.

- The conviction rate for rape cases in India is around 30%, indicating a significant gap in the justice system.

- A large number of rape cases go unreported due to fear, stigma, and lack of trust in the system.

In order to address these challenges, it's essential to strengthen laws and ensure their effective implementation. Improve support services for survivors, including counseling, medical care, and legal aid, Promote education and awareness about consent, gender equality, and respect for women's rights, Encourage community engagement and participation in preventing crimes against women and Provide training for law enforcement agencies to handle cases sensitively and efficiently.

The onus is on both the government and society to create an environment where women feel safe and protected, and where perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. By working together, we can strive towards a society where women can live without fear of violence or oppression. *(The author is a freelance journalist, writer and cartoonist. He is also a 7 times Limca Book of Record holder & can be reached at dixitpa-trakar@yahoo.in)*

# The risks of cutting Russian oil overnight

When news emerges that India could be pushed to end its purchases of Russian oil immediately as part of a trade understanding with the United States and that such a move would cause major disruption, as warned by Moody's, it naturally triggers anxiety across markets, policy circles and ordinary households. Oil is not just another imported commodity for India. It is the lifeblood of transport, industry, agriculture and daily living. Any sudden change in how India sources its crude oil has consequences that ripple far beyond refineries and balance sheets. To understand why an abrupt halt to Russian oil would be so disruptive, one has to look at how deeply energy choices are woven into India's economic story over the past few years and how global politics has reshaped that story in unexpected ways.

India is the third largest consumer of oil in the world and depends heavily on imports to meet its needs. Domestic production covers only a small fraction of demand, making foreign suppliers critical to keeping prices stable and supplies reliable. For decades, India diversified its oil basket to reduce risk, buying from the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and occasionally Russia. This diversification was not ideological but practical. Policymakers knew that relying too much on one region could expose the country to geopolitical shocks, wars or supply disruptions.

The global energy landscape changed sharply after the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Western nations imposed sanctions on Moscow, and many European buyers cut back or stopped buying Russian crude. Russia, looking for alternative markets, offered its oil at significant discounts. India, facing rising global prices and the need to protect its economy from imported inflation, stepped in as a major buyer. Russian oil soon became a large part of India's import mix. This shift helped Indian refiners lower their input costs, allowed fuel prices to be managed more smoothly at home and improved the trade balance by reducing the overall import bill.

This is the context in which Moody's warning needs to be understood. When an international ratings agency says that an immediate end to Russian oil imports would be a big disruption, it is not making a political statement. It is assessing economic risk. Russian oil has become embedded in India's supply chains, pricing strategies and refining operations. Removing it overnight would be like pulling out a key thread from a tightly woven fabric.

One of the most immediate impacts would be on costs. Russian crude has been available to India at prices lower than many other global benchmarks. If India were to stop buying it suddenly, refiners would have to source replacement barrels from elsewhere, often at higher prices. The Middle East could supply some of this oil, but Middle Eastern grades are typically priced closer to global benchmarks. African and American oil could fill part of the gap, but shipping distances are longer and freight costs higher. All of this would raise the landed cost of crude.

Higher crude costs do not stay confined to oil companies. They feed into the price of petrol, diesel, aviation fuel, cooking gas and a wide range of petrochemicals. Transport becomes more expensive, pushing up the cost of moving goods. Farmers feel the pinch through higher diesel prices for irrigation and machinery. Airlines pass on higher fuel costs to passengers. Manufac-



turers face increased input costs, which can translate into higher prices for consumers. In an economy where price stability is already a sensitive issue, this kind of shock can be deeply unsettling.

Another layer of disruption lies in refining. Indian refineries are among the most complex and flexible in the world, capable of processing a wide variety of crude grades. Even so, refiners optimize their operations based on the types of crude they expect to receive. Over the past few years, many Indian refiners adjusted their procurement and processing strategies to take advantage of Russian oil. A sudden stop would force rapid adjustments. While technically possible, such changes are not cost free and not instantaneous. Operational efficiency could suffer in the short term, affecting output and margins.

There is also the matter of contracts and logistics. Oil trade is not like buying groceries off a shelf. It involves long term contracts, shipping arrangements, insurance and financing. Unwinding these relationships abruptly can create legal and financial complications. Tankers already en route would have to be rerouted or canceled. Payment mechanisms set up to navigate sanctions would become redundant overnight. New arrangements with alternative suppliers would need to be negotiated under time pressure, which rarely leads to the best terms.

From a macroeconomic perspective, the trade balance is a key concern. Cheaper Russian oil helped India manage its import bill during a period of high global energy prices. If India is forced to buy more expensive oil, the import bill will rise, potentially widening the current account deficit. This can put pressure on the currency, making imports even more expensive and complicating monetary policy. The central bank might then face tougher choices between supporting growth and controlling inflation.

The link to a trade deal with the United States adds another layer of complexity. The United States is one of India's most important trading partners, a major source of investment, technology and strategic cooperation. Strengthening trade ties with Washington has clear benefits, from better access to markets to deeper collaboration in areas like defense, digital technology and clean energy. However, tying a trade deal to immediate changes in energy sourcing puts India in a difficult position.

Energy security has always been a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. The guiding principle has been to keep energy decisions as insulated as possible from political pressure, focusing instead on reliability, affordability and diversification. An abrupt

demand to end Russian oil imports challenges this principle. It forces India to weigh short term economic pain against longer term strategic gains. Moody's assessment suggests that the short term pain would be significant.

There is also a domestic political dimension. Fuel prices are a sensitive issue in India, affecting public sentiment and electoral outcomes. Governments are acutely aware of how quickly anger over rising prices can spread. An immediate end to discounted oil supplies would limit the government's ability to cushion consumers from global price swings. Even if prices do not spike dramatically, the perception of vulnerability can be damaging.

Beyond economics and politics, there is the question of precedent. If India agrees to abruptly change its energy sourcing under external pressure once, it may face similar demands in the future. Other suppliers or partners could seek concessions, knowing that energy is a pressure point. This could reduce India's strategic autonomy over time, something policymakers have traditionally guarded closely.

None of this means that India is locked into buying Russian oil forever or that it cannot gradually reduce its dependence. In fact, Indian officials have repeatedly said that purchases are driven by market conditions and national interest, not ideology. Over time, as global supply chains adjust and new sources of energy come online, India can and likely will rebalance its oil basket again. The key word here is gradually. Gradual change allows markets to adapt, contracts to be renegotiated, refiners to adjust and consumers to absorb price changes without shock.

Moody's use of the word immediate is crucial. A phased reduction in Russian oil imports, coordinated with efforts to secure alternative supplies and manage prices, would be far less disruptive than an overnight halt. It would give policymakers room to maneuver, allowing them to align energy decisions with broader trade and strategic goals without destabilizing the economy.

The warning also reflects broader global realities. The world is in a period of energy transition, but oil remains central to the global economy. Supply disruptions in one part of the world can quickly affect prices everywhere. Expecting large consumers like India to make sudden changes without economic fallout underestimates how interconnected and finely balanced energy markets are.

From the perspective of the United States, encouraging partners to reduce dependence on Russian energy is part of a broader strat-

egy to isolate Moscow economically. This goal is understandable from Washington's viewpoint. However, the costs of such a strategy are not evenly distributed. For developing economies like India, which prioritize growth, poverty reduction and stability, the immediate costs can be much higher than for wealthier nations with greater fiscal space and alternative energy options.

This is where diplomacy becomes crucial. A trade deal between India and the United States does not have to be a zero sum game. There are ways to align interests without causing major disruption. For instance, the United States could increase its own energy exports to India on competitive terms, helping replace some Russian supplies over time. Joint investments in energy infrastructure and storage could improve resilience. Cooperation on renewable energy and efficiency could reduce oil demand growth in the long run, easing dependence on any single supplier.

Moody's assessment serves as a reminder that economic realities cannot be wished away by political agreements alone. Trade deals work best when they recognize and accommodate these realities rather than ignoring them. For India, maintaining economic stability while navigating complex global pressures is a delicate balancing act.

At the human level, these decisions affect millions of lives. A truck driver paying more for diesel, a farmer facing higher irrigation costs, a small business owner dealing with rising transport expenses, a family budgeting for cooking gas, all feel the impact of energy policy choices. When analysts talk about disruption, this is what it looks like on the ground.

The debate over Russian oil, US trade ties and economic disruption is about choices and timing. India has choices, but none are cost free. Ending Russian oil imports immediately would carry heavy economic costs, as Moody's has pointed out. Delaying or phasing such a move carries diplomatic and strategic considerations. The challenge for policymakers is to find a path that protects India's economic interests while strengthening its global partnerships.

The situation also highlights the importance of long term planning. Reducing vulnerability to such shocks requires accelerating the shift towards cleaner energy, improving efficiency and expanding domestic energy production where possible. These steps take time, investment and consistent policy support. They cannot be rushed to meet the deadlines of external negotiations.

Moody's warning should not be read as resistance to change but as a call for realism. Energy transitions and geopolitical realignments work best when they are managed carefully, with attention to economic and social consequences. For India, an immediate end to Russian oil in the context of a trade deal would be a shock to the system. A more measured approach, grounded in dialogue and mutual understanding, stands a better chance of delivering both economic stability and stronger international partnerships.

As global power dynamics continue to shift, India will face more moments like this, where economics, energy and diplomacy intersect. How it handles them will shape not only growth figures and trade balances but also the everyday experience of its people. In that sense, the question is not just about oil or trade deals, but about the kind of economic resilience India wants to build in an uncertain world.

## Siang Dialogue 3.0: Reimagining India's North East from the ground

By: Mohan Singh Dhangar & Shivendra Shandilya

As academic observers of Siang Dialogue 3.0, an annual event organised by Red Lantern Analytica at Pasighat from 29th to 31st January 2026, it was not that we got an impression by seeing any one panel discussion or presentation; the message that came across loud and clear during three days worth of intensive discussions was much more intense. The central argument raised was that you can no longer meet the challenges of dealing with the complex landscape of India's North East through patchwork policy silos or siloed sectoral responses. Conventional policy frameworks that take economy, ecology, and security into account independently and distinctly are fundamentally inadequate for this area. Rather, these terms are closely linked components of daily existence in the North East, one affecting the other, and vice versa. This tie is now closely tied to India's geopolitical orientation in the region and necessitates an integrated whole approach.

This interdependence featured prominently in the dialogue on connectivity infrastructure. Infrastructure development in the North East of India is most often assessed objectively in terms of development alone, including in terms of the number of roads constructed, bridges engineered, or level of capital sunk. But the message from speakers in the Dialogue is that connectivity is much more strategic than that. Road, bridge and transport corridors are more than physical structures that allow goods, and people, to flow between markets; they are strategic tools through which the wide expanse of the North East is folded into the broader country's mental space — for its geographical coverage and

security. Furthermore, these networks shape regional geopolitics by connecting India's northeastern frontier with neighbouring states, and by enabling India's Act East policy to grow.

Connectivity hence becomes a means of integrating not only space but also identities, governance and strategic posts. As well, several voices, however, offered grave warnings about the speed and the way connectivity was to be built. "Creating these infrastructure projects without inclusion of the ecological sustainability and social aspects risks atone for the very territorial coherence and community resilience that these projects claim to promote... development should therefore be balanced over these factors with protecting the environment and sensitivity to the local socio-cultural conditions." This results in an even deeper paradigm shift, however; ecology, previously seen as an economic constraint or growth brake was reinterpreted during Dialogue as strategic capital. This is a crucial refiguring — one that has policy and academic implications.

The session was particularly remarkable in that section that looked at the Bengal Florican, a critically endangered bird species that is emblematic of the environmental condition of the grassland ecosystem. Bengal Florican represents the wider ecological integrity of this habitat which sustains biodiversity and local agricultural occupations and river systems. Academically, transforming conservation discourse from moralizing ethical imperative to policy-relevant strategic priority would change the way in which ecological issues are embedded in economic planning and national security strategy.

Such ecological disruptions are thus not localized but cascade downstream in a mostly riverine region like Arunachal Pradesh pro-



ducing economic, environmental and political ramifications that reach well beyond state boundaries. Such expanded ideas informed much of the discourses and highlighted the requirement for cross-border ecological cooperation and planning. Such a broader perspective was also expressed greatly in the context of security matters. Instead of viewing the North East as an area grappling purely with its internal insurgent problems or political instability, the Dialogue cast it as an important front line that was defined by cross-border rivers, shifting border politics, and deeper political hostilities. Governance quality and environmental stability emerged as vital securities in their own right — factors that were as important as the conventional military or law enforcement's readiness. This represented a strong break from narrow, threat-focused security narratives to a comprehensive "total security" that acknowledges lasting regional stability depends and is a function of institutional confidence, ecological resilience and sustainability in addition to defense preparedness.

The key was also the investment in instilling those conversations with young minds, and with the

communities. A look at interaction amongst Sainik School students at the event made clear a commitment to intellectual inclusion was not a tokenistic gesture but a substantive exercise in active outreach. Grounded in nuanced, specific discourse to the youth of the North East, the Dialogue established that the region is not simply a passive site of policy decision-making; it provides the basis on which to shape the future of thought, work, and knowledge-holders. By the educational and policy ecosystem perspective it is essential: on the road to sustainable development, we require something more — not only top-down execution but also participatory participation and co-production. In the larger context of the Siang Dialogue, the conclave illuminated an area at a critical axis. The path taken today — one of fragmented development programs, reactive rather than proactive security responses, and where ecological challenges are treated only after they've deeply impacted people — jeopardizes long-term stability. In contrast, many speakers implicitly and explicitly called for an alternate path — one of integrated thought that is built on local realities and in-

formed by longer-term, strategic vision.

For those who have closely followed these discussions and developments, the lessons are clear. If India is serious about fulfilling the intent of its Act East policy, and to meet its climate commitments while encouraging regional stability, then the North East cannot be consigned to the fringe as only one more study of research or policy proposal. The Siang — both a large river system to which the region is connected and the dialogue forum itself — represents the important coherence India must push to achieve: between development on the one hand, and ecological control on the other, between economic growth and environmental protection, between security needs and sustainable objectives. Essentially, Siang stands as a paradigm in which India must re-imagine the strategic development of its North East from a bottom-up perspective through integrated, inclusive and sustainable approaches. The region will not be a hard borderland only, but India will play its economic future, and this is where they will find their ecological health and geopolitical stability. *(Authors are PhD scholar at Central University of Jammu)*

# Assam's green energy and semiconductor future

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Assam is entering one of the most decisive phases in its modern history. A state long identified with tea estates, floodplains, oil and gas fields, and rich biodiversity is now deliberately repositioning itself at the intersection of clean energy production and frontier semiconductor technology. This is not a case of adding two unrelated sectors to the economic portfolio. The two domains are deeply interdependent and, when developed together, create powerful reinforcing effects that can alter the long-term development trajectory of the entire region.

The renewable energy foundation rests on the state's natural geography. The Brahmaputra basin and its hundreds of tributaries provide one of the most extensive networks of flowing water in the country, giving Assam meaningful small and medium hydropower capacity. At the same time, large areas of non-agricultural, non-forest wasteland — carefully mapped using high-resolution satellite imagery — have dramatically expanded the realistic potential for ground-mounted solar generation. Recent assessments place this figure close to 28 gigawatts, more than double earlier conservative estimates. Floating solar arrays on wetlands, beels, and reservoirs offer yet another layer of opportunity without competing for scarce dry land. Wind corridors in the hilly tracts, biomass from agricultural residues, and small-scale waste-to-energy plants complete a diverse renewable basket.

These resources are no longer theoretical. Policy ambition has caught up. The state has set a clear 2030 target of 11.7 gigawatts of installed renewable capacity. Solar is expected to form the largest portion, with repeated public commitments to reach at least 3.5 gigawatts in the coming years. Execution is visible on the ground. The recently commissioned 70 MW solar project in Dhubri is already generating clean units and demonstrating bankable long-term performance. Much larger moves are underway. Adani Group has committed massive capital for two pumped storage projects that together exceed 3 gigawatts, directly addressing the grid stability challenge that accompanies high renewable penetration. Tata Power has signed agreements covering several thousand megawatts of solar, wind, and bioenergy assets. These are not isolated announcements; they form part of a widening pipeline of serious, financially backed projects.

The state is also moving early into next-generation clean vectors. Assam Petro-Chemicals Limited is participating in green e-methanol production — a molecule that can serve as both fuel and chemical feedstock —



showing intent to climb the value chain beyond electrons into molecules. Green budgeting practices, rapid rollout of smart prepaid metering, solar-powered irrigation schemes, and streamlined incentives under the state's renewable energy policy are creating a supportive ecosystem for both large-scale projects and distributed generation.

Parallel to this clean energy build-out is an equally bold industrial play: semiconductors. The Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test facility being built in Jagiroo is India's first major indigenous outsourced semiconductor assembly and test plant. When it reaches full scale in 2026–27, it is projected to output tens of millions of chips daily in advanced packaging formats required by electric vehicles, power electronics, telecommunications, consumer devices, and strategic sectors. The choice of Assam for such a high-precision, high-cleanliness industry is not accidental. The site benefits from abundant water of suitable quality, a relatively low baseline of industrial air pollution, and locational advantages linked to the Act East corridor.

The project has moved with unusual speed for an initiative of this complexity. Construction has incorporated environmentally conscious en-

gineering — including measures to dampen vibration and protect adjacent wildlife corridors. Central government support through the India Semiconductor Mission has been decisive, but so has the state's ability to offer land, water, power connectivity, and a young workforce. The direct employment footprint is expected to reach 15,000–20,000 high-skill positions, with several times that number arising indirectly through suppliers, logistics, testing and calibration labs, precision component manufacturing, and design-adjacent services.

What makes the Assam story distinctive is how tightly the two sectors interlock. Semiconductor assembly and test facilities are among the most electricity-intensive industrial operations. Clean, reliable, cost-competitive power becomes a major location advantage. At the same time, the advanced chips that will be produced in Jagiroo are exactly the components needed to manufacture more efficient solar inverters, battery management systems for energy storage, smart grid controllers, green hydrogen electrolyzers, EV power-trains, and AI algorithms that optimise renewable energy forecasting and dispatch. In other words, the clean energy ecosystem feeds the semiconductor plant with low-carbon electricity, while the semicon-

ductor plant supplies the intelligent hardware that makes clean energy systems cheaper, smarter, and more widely deployable.

This mutual reinforcement creates the possibility of a genuine industrial cluster rather than two parallel growth stories. Very few locations in India — or indeed in the developing world — are attempting to build such a closed-loop relationship between renewable energy and advanced electronics manufacturing at this scale and with this degree of intentionality.

The economic consequences could be profound. Assam has historically depended heavily on primary commodities and central transfers. A combined investment pipeline that already exceeds ninety thousand crore rupees from credible players signals the potential for structural diversification. The semiconductor ecosystem, in particular, brings significantly higher average wages than agriculture or conventional manufacturing. Ancillary industries — chemicals, ultra-pure water treatment, precision tooling, packaging substrates, specialised logistics — will create additional layers of opportunity. Rural households stand to gain directly from solar irrigation, improved electricity reliability through smart metering, and the broader income effects of large-scale employ-

ment generation.

Socially, the shift could begin to reverse longstanding patterns of out-migration of educated youth. Specialised training programmes for semiconductor technicians, process engineers, quality assurance specialists, and renewable energy installation & maintenance personnel are being rolled out. If these efforts succeed, the Northeast could retain far more of its human capital than in previous decades.

Environmentally, the direction is encouraging but requires constant vigilance. Renewable projects must be flood-resilient, avoid fragmenting wildlife corridors, and respect community land rights — especially near sensitive zones such as Kaziranga. Semiconductor facilities demand world-class effluent management, circular water use, and zero-tolerance for chemical contamination. When executed responsibly, however, these industries can collectively reduce the state's reliance on coal-based power imports, lower the carbon intensity of its grid, and position Assam as a net contributor to India's climate commitments.

Several risks remain. Land acquisition in a densely settled, flood-vulnerable geography is always contentious. Building a deep skilled workforce takes time and sustained investment in education and vocational training. Global semiconductor supply chains are subject to geopolitical turbulence and technology shocks. Integrating very high levels of variable renewable energy requires massive upgrades in transmission infrastructure and energy storage capacity. Yet recent years have shown that the state can move with clarity and speed when the political and administrative intent is aligned — whether in finalising peace process development funds earmarked for green energy and higher education, accelerating land allocation for the semiconductor plant, or maintaining consistent investor engagement through successive Advantage Assam initiatives.

Ultimately, Assam is attempting something rare: converting its natural advantages — abundant water, sunlight, flowing rivers, low industrial pollution baseline, and strategic eastern location — into long-term technological and economic leadership. Success will depend on relentless execution discipline, uncompromising environmental safeguards, continuous skill ecosystem development, and consistent policy support across state and central levels. If these elements come together, Assam will not merely participate in India's clean energy transition and semiconductor self-reliance story. It has the potential to become one of the defining geographies where those two national priorities converge most powerfully. *(The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Samman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)*

## When wildlife is lost, humanity loses with it

By: Anshika Thakran

For most of us, wildlife exists in fragments. A documentary watched late at night, a tiger on a calendar, an elephant in a news report after a train accident. We admire wildlife from a distance, treating it as something separate from our daily lives. But the truth is far more uncomfortable: wildlife is not "out there" somewhere. It is deeply connected to how we live, eat, breathe, and survive.

India is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. From the mangroves of the Sundarbans to the forests of the Western Ghats, our land has supported countless species for centuries. Yet today, these ecosystems are shrinking at an alarming rate. Forests are cleared for highways, industries, and urban expansion, often justified in the name of development. In this process, wildlife is pushed out, ignored, or destroyed — and rarely consulted in decisions that affect their existence.

One of the most common phrases we hear today is "human-wildlife conflict." Leopards entering villages, elephants destroying crops, monkeys invading cities. These incidents are often portrayed as wildlife becoming aggressive or uncontrollable. But when looked at closely, the conflict is not accidental. It is a direct result of human intrusion into natural habitats. When forests are cut and corridors are blocked, animals are left with no choice but to enter human spaces to survive. Calling it conflict hides the reality that wildlife is reacting to loss, not initiating chaos.

Climate change has further intensified this crisis. Rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, forest fires, and floods are altering ecosystems faster than animals can adapt. Species that once migrated naturally now find their paths blocked by roads and settlements. Coral reefs are bleaching, wetlands are drying up, and forests are becoming more vulnerable to fires. Each ecological disruption pushes wildlife closer to extinction — quietly, often unnoticed.

What makes this loss even more tragic is that wildlife extinction is rarely sudden. It

happens slowly. A species becomes rare, then endangered, then critically endangered — until one day it disappears entirely. By the time society reacts, it is often too late. The extinction of the dodo is taught as history, but today's extinctions are happening in real time, right in front of us.

The loss of wildlife is not just an emotional or ethical issue; it is a practical one. Ecosystems function like a web, where every species plays a role. Predators regulate prey populations, forests maintain rainfall cycles, bees and insects pollinate crops. When one species disappears, the balance collapses. The consequences eventually reach humans in the form of food insecurity, water shortages, disease outbreaks, and climate disasters. In trying to dominate nature, humanity has made itself more vulnerable.

Despite this reality, wildlife protection often becomes a low priority. Conservation is seen as a "luxury" concern, something to be addressed only after economic goals are met. But this mindset ignores the fact that economic stability itself depends on healthy ecosystems. Development that destroys nature is not progress; it is delayed destruction.

For young people, this crisis can feel overwhelming. Policies are made far away, industries feel untouchable, and individual actions seem insignificant. Many of us are told that we are "too young" to influence change. But history tells a different story. Environmental movements across the world have been powered by youth who refused to accept destruction as inevitable. Awareness, resistance, and responsibility have always started with questioning the status quo. Supporting wildlife does not always mean standing in protests or working in forests. It can begin with conscious choices in daily life — reducing plastic consumption, avoiding products that exploit animals, questioning irresponsible tourism, and educating others about conservation. Writing, speaking, and sharing information are powerful tools, especially in a digital age where youth voices travel far and fast.

Education also plays a crucial role. Schools

often teach wildlife conservation as a chapter to be memorised, not a reality to be understood. But conservation is not about remembering species names for exams; it is about recognising our role in protecting them. When young people connect emotionally with wildlife, conservation stops being an obligation and becomes a responsibility.

Equally important is holding systems accountable. Governments and corporations must be questioned for projects that destroy habitats without adequate safeguards. Environmental impact assessments should not be reduced to paperwork. Wildlife corridors must be protected, not sacrificed. Laws exist, but enforcement often fails due to political and economic pressure. Youth engagement can act as a moral reminder that future generations are watching.

At its core, wildlife conservation is about coexistence. Humans are not separate from nature; we are part of it. The belief that humans are superior to all other species has caused irreversible damage. True progress lies not in domination, but in balance — in learning to share space, resources, and responsibility. When forests fall silent, it is not just animals that disappear. Indigenous communities, who have lived in harmony with nature for generations, are displaced. Cultures, livelihoods, and knowledge systems are lost alongside wildlife. Protecting animals also means protecting the people who protect forests without calling it conservation.

Wildlife does not have a voice in courts, parliaments, or boardrooms. But we do. As the generation that will inherit the consequences of today's decisions, young people cannot afford to stay indifferent. Silence is not neutrality; it is complicity.

Protecting wildlife is not about saving animals for sympathy or aesthetics. It is about safeguarding life itself — including our own. If we continue to treat nature as expendable, the cost will be irreversible. The question is no longer whether we can afford to protect wildlife. It is whether we can afford not to. *(Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)*

## Himalaya-Karakoram glacial flood risks poorly assessed, study warns

By: Akshit Sangomla

The growing number, size, and volume of glacial lakes across the Himalaya-Karakoram ranges have not been adequately assessed for risk, despite the increasing likelihood of catastrophic flooding events, according to a new study. A paper published in the journal *npj Natural Hazards* on January 22, 2026, has warned that lack of enough research is making it harder for nearly one million people living within 10 kilometres of glacial lakes to prepare for sudden and potentially devastating floods.

A Glacial Lake Outburst Flood, or GLOF, occurs when a natural dam holding back water in a glacial lake collapses, releasing a sudden surge of water downstream in a large flash flood. These floods often gather debris from the surrounding mountains like rocks, soil, and trees, intensifying their destructive force.

Natural dams can be formed in two main ways. Moraine-dammed lakes are held back by loose rock and soil left behind by retreating glaciers, while ice-dammed lakes are restrained mainly by ice.

India has experienced some of the most severe GLOF disasters in recent years. In June 2013, a GLOF event in the Uttarakashi area of Uttarakhand killed an estimated 5,000 people, with thousands more reported missing. The disaster was triggered when a moraine dam at the upstream Chorabari glacial lake failed after an ice avalanche, which was set off by extreme rainfall.

More recently, in October 2023, a GLOF in Sikkim killed 55 people, injured many more and caused widespread damage to homes and infrastructure. The flood followed the sudden collapse of part of the lake's north-western wall, which broke the large ice blocks and released floodwaters downstream.

**Hundreds of floods across the region**  
The study documented 388 GLOF events across the Himalaya-Karakoram region to date. The highest number, 196, occurred in the Karakoram, despite it having fewer glacial lakes than other sub-regions. The central Himalayas recorded 99 events, the eastern Himalayas 72, and the western Himalayas 21.

programme remains a key pillar of national policy.

**The Way Forward: A Balanced Approach**

The challenge, therefore, is not to roll back ethanol blending, but to calibrate it carefully. Policymakers must ensure that biofuel expansion does not come at the cost of essential food crops. This calls for a diversified feedstock strategy, greater emphasis on second-generation biofuels, and stronger policy support for pulses and oilseeds through pricing, procurement and research.

Equally important is a region-specific approach to cropping patterns, aligned with agro-climatic conditions and water availability. Without such balance, the gains in energy security could inadvertently undermine long-term food and nutritional security.

Conclusion

India's ethanol-blending programme stands as a symbol of policy innovation and strategic intent. Yet, as the Economic Survey rightly highlights, its success must be measured not only in litres of fuel substituted or foreign exchange saved, but also in its broader impact on agriculture, nutrition and price stability. Achieving true self-reliance will require harmonising the goals of energy security and food security, ensuring that progress in one domain does not weaken the foundations of the other. (The author is a poet, Science Writer, Sustainability Advocate, Former Director, Assam Seed & Organic Certification Agency, Ex-Joint Director of Agriculture, Assam., Advisor, Media and Publicity, Assam Science Society and Advisor, Ankurita Asom)

## Ethanol blending and food security: Balancing energy self-reliance with nutritional needs

By: Mowsam Hazarika

India's ambitious ethanol-blending programme has often been showcased as a major policy success — reducing crude oil imports, saving foreign exchange, cutting emissions and improving farm incomes. However, the latest Economic Survey, tabled in Parliament, has raised an important cautionary flag: the rapid expansion of ethanol production, particularly through increased maize cultivation, has non-trivial implications for food security.

**The Changing Cropping Pattern**

At the heart of the concern lies a visible shift in agricultural land use. Encouraged by assured demand and better prices linked to ethanol production, farmers in several States — especially Maharashtra and Karnataka — are increasingly turning to maize. This expansion has come largely at the cost of other crops such as pulses, oilseeds, soybean, millets and cotton, all of which compete for the same finite resources: land, water and labour.

Contrary to earlier expectations, the Survey notes that the anticipated reduction in paddy acreage has not materialised. Instead, maize is increasingly displacing crops that are central to India's nutritional security. Pulses and oilseeds, in particular, form the backbone of protein and fat intake for a large section of the population. Their marginalisation in cropping priorities raises serious concerns for both nutrition and price stability.

**Food Security at Risk**

Drawing on international experience, the Economic Survey warns that a sustained increase in maize cultivation for ethanol could deepen India's dependence on edible oil imports. India already relies heavily on imports to meet its edible oil requirements, making domestic food prices vulnerable to global supply shocks and geopolitical disruptions. "From a food security perspective, the implications are non-trivial," the Survey observes, stressing that pulses and oilseeds are structurally vital to India's consumption basket and nutritional outcomes. As these crops slide down the priority order for cultivators, the risk of price volatility and supply imbalances in essential food items increases. Over time, this imbalance could entrench a paradox: while India moves closer to energy self-sufficiency, it may simultaneously weaken its position in food self-sufficiency. The Survey aptly describes this as an emerging tension between Aatmanirbharta in energy and Aatmanirbharta in food.

**Tangible Gains from Ethanol Blending**

The concerns, however, do not negate the substantial gains achieved through ethanol blending. As of August 2025, the programme has saved India over ₹1.44 lakh crore in foreign exchange and enabled the substitution of around 245 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil. These gains have reduced import dependence, lowered emissions and increased payments to farmers, particularly those engaged in feedstock crops. Ethanol blending has also strengthened India's energy security and contributed to climate goals by reducing fossil fuel consumption. These achievements underscore why the

Moraine-dammed lakes accounted for the largest share of GLOF events, with 163 incidents, followed by ice-dammed lakes with 144. Around 50 floods were linked to supraglacial lakes, where sudden surface warming and melting can rapidly destabilise stored water. Supraglacial lakes form on the surface of glaciers and can drain suddenly when surface ice melts rapidly.

By countries in the region, Pakistan recorded the highest number of GLOF events at 131, followed by China with 123. India experienced 59 such events, while Nepal recorded 54.

Several glaciers in the Karakoram, including Khurdopin and Kyagar, have experienced repeated GLOF events in recent decades, mostly involving ice-dammed or supraglacial lakes.

**Warning, expanding lakes and research gaps**

Climate change is intensifying GLOF risks. Rising rates and intensity of warming in the Himalaya-Karakoram region, especially at higher elevations because of a phenomenon called elevation-dependent warming, are driving a steady increase in the number, area, and volume of glacial lakes.

Since 1990, the number of glacial lakes in the region has risen by 53 per cent, their total area by 51 per cent, and their volume by 48 per cent. Glaciers that end in lakes are also retreating faster than those that terminate on land, creating a feedback loop that further accelerates lake expansion and glacier loss.

Despite these trends, the authors say research has not kept pace with the growing threat, pointing to limited assessments of social vulnerability among downstream communities. Generally "the analysis revealed significant gaps in GLOF research, including limited social vulnerability assessments for populations near glacial lakes, insufficient studies on the impacts of climate change on GLOF frequency, and inadequate focus on mitigation measures like early warning systems (EWSs) in the region", the scientists wrote in the paper.

The study also points to major inconsistencies across existing GLOF datasets, making comparisons difficult, along with a lack of ground-based observations, particularly in the Himalaya-Karakoram region. "Discrepancies in glacial lake definitions and varying size thresholds have resulted in significant inconsistencies among independently created datasets for the H-K region and the broader Third Pole region," the paper stated.

While glacial lake datasets now cover most regions of the world, the study noted that the Himalayas remain particularly difficult to assess because of their challenging terrain and harsh climate, which limit field-based glacier and glacial lake research. "Consequently, most studies in this region rely heavily on remotely-sensed data, which often suffer from limitations such as coarse spatial and temporal resolution, introducing ambiguities in understanding ground-level processes", according to the paper. Other issues are a lack of standardised mapping thresholds, varying definitions of what constitutes a glacial lake — including whether supraglacial and ice-contact lakes are included — and differing classification methods introduced significant uncertainty when inventories are compared across regions or over time.

"Furthermore, most inventories are static snapshots in time and do not adequately capture seasonal variability, rapid lake evolution, or short-lived lakes that may still pose substantial GLOF hazards," the authors wrote in the study. "These findings underscore the need for more integrated and region-specific research to address the growing risks of GLOFs effectively," they added. *(Courtesy: Down to Earth)*

# Russia, Ukraine envoys meet in Abu Dhabi for US-brokered talks

**KYIV, Feb 4:** Envoys from Russia and Ukraine met in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday for another round of US-brokered talks on ending the almost four-year war, a Ukrainian negotiator said.

The delegations from Moscow and Kyiv were joined in the United Arab Emirates by US officials, Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council chief, who was present at the meeting, said on social media.

Umerov said the planned two-day negotiations started with all three negotiators present, after which negotiators were to break into groups according to topics and then meet as a full group again at the end. The American team was due to include special envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who also attended last month's meeting, according to the White House.

The current talks also coincide with the expiry of the last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the United States on Thursday. Trump and Putin could extend the terms of the treaty or renegotiate its conditions in an effort to prevent a new nuclear arms race.

Last month's discussions in the Emirati capital, part of a US push to end the fighting, yielded some progress but no breakthrough on key issues, officials said.

The Abu Dhabi talks were held amid Ukrainian outrage over major Russian attacks on its energy system, which have occurred each winter since Russia launched its all-out invasion of its neighbour on Feb 24, 2022.

A huge Russian bombardment overnight from Monday to Tuesday included hundreds of drones and a record 32 ballistic missiles, wounding at least 10 people. This came despite Ukraine's understanding that Russian President Vladimir Putin had told Trump he would temporarily halt strikes on Ukraine's power grid.

Ukrainian civilians are struggling with one of the coldest winters in years, which saw temperatures around minus 20 degrees Celsius.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov wouldn't offer any details on the Abu Dhabi talks and said that Moscow wasn't planning any

comment on their results.

He said that "the doors for a peaceful settlement are open," but noted that Moscow will press its military action until Kyiv meets its demands. Russia is hitting Ukraine's energy facilities because its armed forces believe the targets are associated with Kyiv's military effort, Peskov said.

There has been a lack of clarity about how long Putin promised to observe a pause on power grid attacks, and Moscow hasn't stopped its aerial attacks on other targets in Ukraine despite a Kremlin official saying last week that Russia had agreed to halt strikes on Kyiv for a week until Feb 1.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Tuesday barely four days had passed and a fresh wave of attacks targeted Ukraine's power grid, accusing Putin of duplicity.

Trump claimed Tuesday that Putin "kept his word" on the temporary pause. Meanwhile, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump was "unfortunately unsurprised" by Moscow's resumption of attacks.



The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said the developments were part of Moscow's negotiating strategy.

"The Kremlin will likely attempt to portray its adherence to this short-term energy strikes moratorium as a significant concession to gain leverage in the upcoming peace talks, even though the Kremlin used these few days to stockpile missiles for a larger strike package," it said late Tuesday.

Russia launched 105 drones against Ukraine overnight, and air defences shot down 88 of them, the Ukrainian air force said Wednesday. Strikes by 17 drones were recorded at 14 locations, as well as falling debris at five sites, it said.

In the central Dnipropetrovsk region, a Russian strike on a residential area killed a 68-year-old woman and a 38-year-old man, regional military administration head Oleksandr Hancha said.

The southern city of Odesa also came under a large-scale attack, regional military administration head Oleh Kiper said. About 20 residential buildings were damaged, with four people rescued from under the rubble, he said. (AP)

# Israel strikes Gaza, killing 19 including women and children

**DEIR AL-BALAH, Feb 4:** Israeli strikes in Gaza killed at least 19 Palestinians, most of them women and children, by midday Wednesday, according to hospital officials. Israel pledged to continue strikes, saying that it was responding to a militant attack on Israeli soldiers that seriously wounded one.

Among the Palestinians killed were five children, including a 5-month-old and a baby just 10 days old; seven women; and a paramedic, said hospital officials. They are the latest Palestinians in Gaza to die since a ceasefire deal, which has been punctuated by deadly Israeli strikes, came into effect on Oct. 10, 2025.

The escalating Palestinian death toll has rocked the U.S.-backed truce and caused Palestinians in the strip to say it does not feel like the war has ended.

"The genocidal war against our people in the Gaza Strip continues," said Dr. Mohamed Abu Selmiya, director of Gaza City's Shifa Hospital, in a Facebook post. "Where is the ceasefire? Where are the mediators?"

Deadly strikes have continued despite ceasefire deal.

The deal attempted to halt a more than two-year war between Israel and Hamas. While the heaviest fighting has subsided, it has been marred by repeated flareups of violence.

More than 530 Palestinians have been killed by Israel since the ceasefire went into effect, according to Gaza health officials, while Israel's military says four Israeli soldiers have been killed.

Israel's military has said its continuing strikes are responses to Hamas violations or militant attacks on its soldiers, but dozens of civilians have been killed. Eight Arab and Muslim countries, including mediators Egypt and Qatar, recently condemned what they called Israel's "repeated violations" of the deal.

An Israeli military official, speaking on the condition of anonymity in line with military policy, told The Associated Press

that Israel was striking the strip in response to militant gunfire that badly wounded a reservist soldier Wednesday morning.

Early morning strike kills 11, including two children

Israeli troops fired on a building in the Tuffah neighbourhood in north Gaza, killing at least 11 people, most from the same family, said Shifa Hospital, which received the bodies. The dead included two parents, their 10-day-old girl, her 5-month-old cousin and their grandmother.

Mourners gathered in the courtyard of Shifa hospital Wednesday morning for funeral prayers.

"What did this child do? Was she (affiliated with) Hamas or Fatah? ... Why are they killing the children?" asked a relative of the family killed in Tuffah, Mohammad Jaser.

"We don't understand why this is happening to us. What do we do? Where do we go? This isn't life," he said.

Two young children were seen kneeling at the body of their father, as a woman told them to bid him farewell.

"Kiss him," the woman told a young girl, who knelt and kissed his father's cheeks.

**Strikes on Gaza continue into Wednesday afternoon**

Meanwhile, the strikes continued. An Israeli strike on a family's tent in the southern city of Khan Younis killed three people including a 12-year-old boy, said Nasser hospital, which received the bodies.

Tank shelling in Gaza City's eastern neighbourhood of Zaytoun killed another three Palestinians, according to Shifa Hospital, including a husband and his wife.

A strike on a tent in the Muwasi area of Khan Younis killed at least two people and wounded five others, according to a field hospital run by the Palestinian Red Crescent in the area.

The dead included Hussein Hassan Hussein al-Semier, a paramedic for the Palestinian Red Crescent who was on duty at the time, said the hospital. (AP)

# Trump looks to rebuild critical mineral supply chains for everything

**WASHINGTON, Feb 4:** President Donald Trump's administration is expected to unveil its grandest plan yet to rebuild supply chains of critical minerals needed for everything from jet engines to smartphones, likely through purchase agreements with partners on top of creating a USD 12 billion US strategic reserve to help counter China's dominance.

Vice President JD Vance is set to deliver a keynote address Wednesday at a meeting that Secretary of State Marco Rubio is hosting with officials from several dozen European, Asian and African nations.

The US is expected to sign deals on supply chain logistics, though details have not been revealed. Rubio met Tuesday with foreign ministers from South Korea and India to discuss critical minerals mining and processing. The meeting and expected agreements will come just two days after Trump announced Project Vault, or a stockpile of critical minerals to be funded with a USD 10 billion loan from the US Export-Import Bank and nearly USD 1.67 billion in private capital.

Trump's Republican administration is making such bold moves after China, which controls 70 per cent of the world's rare earths mining and 90 per cent of the processing, choked off the flow of the elements in response to Trump's tariff war.

The two superpowers are in a one-year truce after Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in October and agreed to pull back on high tariffs and stepped-up rare earth restrictions. (AP)

# BNP to pursue 'economy-based foreign policy' if voted to power in upcoming election: Rahman

**DHAKA, Feb 4:** The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) would pursue an "economy-based foreign policy" if elected to power in the upcoming February 12 general election, the party's new chairman Tarique Rahman has said.

"Our foreign policy will be a 'Bangladesh First' policy," the state-run BSS news agency on Wednesday quoted him as saying in an interview with the US-based The Diplomat magazine.

He added that if elected to power, "we will prioritise an economy-based foreign policy that safeguards Bangladesh's interests".

"We believe in mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual benefit in our foreign relations," he said.

Rahman's response came as the

outlet said that there was criticism that during deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime, there was an "India-oriented foreign policy" while the United States, China and India had their eyes on Bangladesh. The diplomat asked him what would be his foreign policy outlook, to which the BNP chairman also said "no matter which countries we engage with, our national interest must come first".

The news outlet on Wednesday carried an analysis on Bangladesh's February 12 elections predicting Rahman would emerge as the South Asian nation's next prime minister.

The article titled "An Interview With Tarique Rahman - Likely Bangladesh's Next Prime Minister" referred to several opinion polls

ahead of the elections suggesting Rahman to be the next premier as well. The diplomat's prediction came as global news outlets like the Bloomberg, Time and The Economist in their recent analyses called Rahman as the frontrunner ahead of the polls. The analyses suggested the BNP's once crucial ally Jamaat-e-Islami would emerge as its main rival in the absence of the Awami League, disbanded by the interim government of Muhammad Yunus under an executive order.

The diplomat observed the youths dubbed "Gen Z" to be a major deciding factor in the voting, saying "a large portion of voters in this election are from Gen Z, meaning Bangladesh's youth will decide the next prime minister". (PTI)

# India committed to no longer purchasing Russian oil, \$500 billion of investments into US: White House

**NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Feb 4:** The White House has hailed a new trade agreement with India, saying the country has committed to "no longer" purchasing Russian oil, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi also agreeing on investments of USD 500 billion across key American sectors.

These remarks were made by White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt on Tuesday.

"The President struck another great trade deal with India. He spoke with Prime Minister Modi directly. They share a very good relationship. India is committed to not only no longer purchasing Russian oil, but buying oil from the United States, also perhaps from Venezuela too, which we know will now have a direct benefit on the United States and the American people," Leavitt told reporters Tuesday.

She further said that in addition to that, Prime Minister Modi "committed to \$500 billion of investments into the United States, including for transportation, for energy and for agricultural products as well. So this is another great trade deal thanks to President Trump."

Earlier, speaking to Fox News about the India-US trade deal, Leavitt said the two leaders had a "great call" on Monday, following which the bilateral trade deal was announced.

"...when it comes to Prime Minister Modi, I know he (Trump) particularly enjoys their relationship and has a deep respect for the Prime Min-

ister and for his country of India.

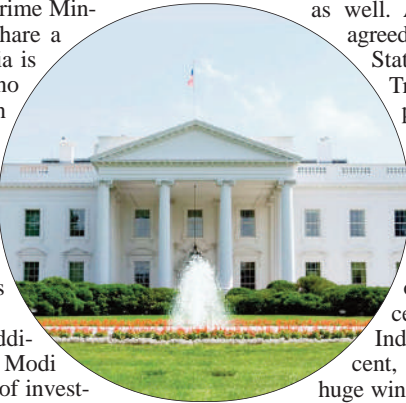
"They had a great call. It was very productive yesterday, and they struck a deal in which India has agreed to stop purchasing Russian oil to buy more American oil from the United States of America, and potentially from Venezuela too," she said. Leavitt added that Trump and his national security team are "now dictating" the commerce of Venezuela and those oil sales.

"So this directly benefits the American people as well. And in addition, India has agreed to invest more in the United States because of President Trump's call to action on that phone call yesterday. Prime Minister Modi committed to USD 500 billion of purchases of US energy, transportation, and agricultural products," she said.

Leavitt said the US tariff on India will now be at 18 per cent, but American exports to India will face a tariff of 0 per cent, so this is a great deal and a huge win for American workers, businesses and consumers alike.

The Trump administration had imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India, including 25 per cent for Delhi's purchases of Russian oil.

In a Truth Social post on Monday, Trump had said that, effective immediately, the two sides agreed to a trade deal under which the US will lower its reciprocal tariff imposed on India from 25 per cent to 18 per cent. India will also move forward to reduce its tariffs and non-tariff barriers against the United States to "zero". (PTI)



## KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

### DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, S.E., WORKS, KAAC :: SECRETARIAT

#### DIPHU-782460

No. KAAC/SE-W-161 (Pt)/2025-26/235 (A) Dtd. 09/01/2026

### TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender affixing non refundable KAAC court fee stamp (receipt) Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only eventually to be drawn up in form are hereby invited from KAAC registered contractor/reputed firms of works department and will be received by the undersigned up to **4 P.M. on 09/02/2026**. and will be opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the tenderer or their authorized agent if any.

If the day of the opening of tender happens to be a holiday/non-working days, the tender will be opened in the next day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject any tender without any assigning reason thereof and will not be bound to accept the lowest tender quoted rate.

SL No.	Name of Works	Tender Amount (Rs)	A/A Amount (Rs.)	Earnest money	Time allowed for completion
1.	Providing New Conference Hall at New KAAC, Secretariat Building (Second Floor) Diphu	Rs. 96,00,000.00	Rs. 96,00,000.00	ST/SC/OBC=1% General =2%	90 days

**Terms & Condition**

**NB**

- The rate to be quoted as % (Percent) above/below/as per schedule rate for building/sanitary works for all division under CPWD-2020-21
- Earnest money should be deposited in favour of the undersigned in the form of call deposit/bank draft & should be anached with the tender without which no tender will be accepted.
- The Contractor shall repair/re-Construction if the works executed failed due inferior quality of works, The KAAC Authority will take legal action if the contractor refuse to repair/re-construction the woks
- The work must be carried on as directed by the E.E (W), KAAC Diphu Authority
- The following up to date documents should be enclosed with the tender
  - Professional Tax Clearance Certificate.
  - Sale Tax Clearance Certificate/GST.
  - Council Registration.
  - Call Deposit
  - Council receipt
  - Caste Certificate
  - Pan Card/Adhaar Card
  - Account number
  - Payment will be made subject to availabilities of fund
  - The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest quoted rate.

Sd/-  
Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer,  
P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.

Memo No.ACEH/CS/AAP/83/2025-26/3- (A)    Date 03/02/2026

Sd/-  
Superintending Engineer (SE), Works.  
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council,  
**DIPHU**

## 8 Arunachal govt officers transferred in bureaucratic reshuffle

**ITANAGAR, Feb 4:** Eight Arunachal Pradesh Civil Service (APCS) officers were transferred by the state government, according to an official notification.

Joint Secretary to the Chief Minister and Additional Resident Commissioner, Guwahati, Dilip Kumar Chutia has been posted as West Kameng Deputy Commissioner, according to the notification issued by Chief Secretary Manish Gupta on Tuesday. Tax, Excise & Narcotics Commissioner Lobsang Tsering will take charge as Papum Pare Deputy Commissioner.

Kalaktang Additional Deputy Commissioner Mindo Loyi will replace Techu Aran as the West Siang Deputy Commissioner. Aran has been transferred and posted as Tirap Deputy Commissioner.

Social Justice Empowerment & Tribal Affairs Joint Secretary Gobi Nygyor has been posted as Gobi Nygyor Deputy Commissioner, in place of Rujum Rakshap, who will be the Tourism Director.

Tirap Deputy Commissioner Liji Bagra has been posted as Director of the State Council of Educational Research and Training. (PTI)

# Return of popular government likely after a year of President's Rule

## Yumnam Khemchand elected BJP legislature party leader, set to be Manipur chief minister

**IMPHAL, Feb 4:** President's rule in Manipur was revoked on Wednesday, hours before the formation of a new state government with NDA legislature party leader Y Khemchand Singh as the chief minister.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (2) of article 356 of the Constitution, I, Droupadi Murmu, President of India hereby revoke the Proclamation issued by me under the said article on the 13th day of February, 2025, in relation to the State of Manipur with effect from the 4th day of February, 2026," a Proclamation issued by the President said.

The move comes hours before Singh takes oath as the chief minister at 6 PM at Lok Bhavan in Imphal.

Nemcha Kipgen, a Kuki leader and former minister, is set to be appointed deputy chief minister in the new Manipur government.

Manipur has been under President's rule since February 13, 2025. The 60-member assembly, which has tenure till 2027, was put on suspended animation after President's rule was imposed.

President's rule was imposed in the state after the BJP-led government headed by Biren Singh resigned on February 9 last year, following months of ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities.

An NDA delegation led by Singh met Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Lok Bhavan and staked the



claim to form a popular government. Two MLAs from the Kuki-Zo majority districts of Churachandpur and

Pherzawl were in the delegation.

"The swearing-in ceremony of Shri @YKhemchandSingh as the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur will take place today, 4th February 2026, at 6:00 PM at Lok Bhavan," BJP Manipur said in a post on X.

"Under his experienced and visionary leadership, Manipur is set to move forward on the path of peace, development and good governance, ushering in a new era of stability and progress for the state," it added.

The violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities started in May 2023 after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribes status.

At least 260 people lost their lives and thousands were displaced during the violence.

The development comes a day after the BJP legislature party of Manipur elected 62-year-old Singh as its leader at a meeting held at the party headquarters in New Delhi.

Khemchand, in a post on social media, said, "Pleased to stake claim to form the new government before the Hon'ble Governor, Shri Ajay Kumar Bhalla Ji, at Lok Bhavan today, following my arrival from New Delhi, in the august presence of BJP National General Secretary, Shri Tarun Chugh Ji, and BJP

Northeast Coordinator, Shri Sambit Patra Ji."

The meeting was attended by 35 of the 37 BJP MLAs, besides the party's central observer Tarun Chugh, its northeast in-charge Sambit Patra, and BJP state president A Sharda Devi, among others.

Subsequently, another meeting was held at the Manipur Bhavan in the national capital, where MLAs of NDA constituents in Manipur -- six of the National People's Party (NPP), five of the Naga People's Front (NPF) and three Independents -- and BJP legislators were in attendance.

They endorsed Singh as the leader and Nemcha Kipgen, who belongs to the Kuki community, as the deputy leader of the NDA legislature party.

Singh said, "The oath-taking ceremony will follow shortly. I am confident that, with the formation of the new Council of Ministers, peace and development will serve as the guiding principles of the new government."

The Singjamei legislator also said, "The political journey towards the vision of #ViksitBharatViksit and Viksit Manipur is not without challenges, but our priorities will remain firmly aligned with achieving these ambitious goals. I extend my sincere gratitude to all for the trust, responsibility, and honour bestowed upon me." (PTI)

## Union Budget forward-looking, beneficial for Arunachal: DY CM Chowna Mein

Says focus on infrastructure, border connectivity and Northeast will boost growth



**ITANAGAR, Feb 4:** Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Wednesday welcomed the Union Budget, describing it as robust and forward-looking that truly reflects the aspirations of all Indians, with special focus on aspirational and frontier regions, including Arunachal Pradesh.

Congratulating Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for presenting the Budget, Mein said the document strengthens the foundations of inclusive growth, infrastructure development and social empowerment. Addressing a press conference on the Assembly premises, he said the Budget reaffirms the Centre's firm commitment to balanced and sustainable development across the country.

"A ₹ 12.2 lakh-crore infrastructure push, ₹ 20,000 crore allocation for carbon capture, ₹ 10,000 crore for biopharma, deep MSME liquidity reforms and a strong thrust on semiconductors, logistics and clean industries clearly underline a strategy of long-term capacity building rather than short-term optics," he said.

He added that the emphasis shows a clear intent to strengthen India's economic fundamentals for the future.

Referring specifically to Arunachal Pradesh, the deputy chief minister said the Budget's continued focus on strategic infrastructure, border connectivity, hydropower development and North East-specific schemes will significantly accelerate the growth momentum.

He further pointed out that the announcement of special Buddhist tourist circuits across Arunachal Pradesh and other Northeastern states will strengthen cultural tourism and create new livelihood opportunities.

Mein also underlined the broader impact of the Budget on the state, saying, enhanced investments in roads, energy, livelihoods and human capital will not only improve the quality of life of the people but also reinforce Arunachal Pradesh's vital role in India's national security and economic progress.

"This Budget strongly aligns our state's aspirations with the national vision of a Viksit Bharat by 2047," he added. (PTI)

## Guv calls for people-centric governance to realise Viksit Arunachal vision

**ITANAGAR, Feb 4:** Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) KT Parmaik on Wednesday urged the MLAs to maintain the dignity of the Assembly and ensure people-centric governance to steer the state towards peace, progress and prosperity. Addressing the inaugural day of the two-day Assembly session, the governor said the occasion was an opportunity to honour its proud legacy by strengthening democratic values and cooperative functioning.

Expressing confidence in the collective wisdom of the members, he said the Assembly would continue to guide the state in alignment with the national vision of Viksit Bharat and a Viksit Arunachal, through inclusive, sustainable and transformative development.

Parmaik expressed gratitude to the Centre, particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for sustained support and visionary leadership.

He referred to the PM's visit to Itanagar, during which development projects worth over ₹ 5,100 crore were inaugurated, as a reflection of the Centre's focused commitment to the state.

Highlighting improved Centre-state cooperation, Parmaik observed that since 2014, the state's share of central taxes has crossed ₹ 1 lakh crore.



He also mentioned the launch of the GST Bachat Utsav as a step towards transparent, citizen-friendly governance and a stronger business environment. Outlining the state government's vision for a viksit Arunachal, the governor said the beginning of the year was a time for both reflection and renewed resolve to build a prosperous, inclusive and self-reliant state.

He said the vision focuses on empowering youth through education and employment, enabling women to lead social and economic change, ensuring equitable benefits of development to all communities and allowing cultural

heritage to flourish alongside modern growth, reflecting the spirit of 'Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi'.

Parmaik also highlighted the 'panch pratyayas' (five pledges) articulated by the state government under the leadership of the chief minister as a clear roadmap towards viksit Arunachal and Viksit Bharat@2047.

He said the five commitments place youth and human capital at the centre of development, strengthen livelihoods and rural self-reliance, ensure growth in harmony with nature, promote green energy and hydropower-led transformation and encourage sustainable tourism that preserves identity while generating livelihoods.

Emphasising the role of the legislature, the governor said the Assembly has a pivotal responsibility in shaping the future of Arunachal Pradesh, with each member entrusted to voice the aspirations of their constituents and work for the collective good of the state.

Stressing that human capital is the foundation of a developed Arunachal, the governor underscored the importance of quality education, a growing knowledge economy, youth aspirations and sports in building discipline and national pride. (PTI)

## Arunachal Assembly pays tribute to former MLAs, recalls their legacy of public service



Oyan in East Siang district.

Born in 1954, she was among the few women leaders elected to the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly and represented the Pasighat West constituency from 1995 to 1999.

She was also the publisher of The Arunachal Times.

She is survived by her husband, former chief minister Gegong Apang and six children, including former Union minister Omak Apang.

Former minister Takar Marde died at a hospital in New Delhi on January 28. He was 64 and is survived by three wives, three sons and a daughter.

Marde was first elected from the Dimpurjo constituency on a Congress ticket in 1999 and was re-elected in 2004. During his career,

he served as Panchayati Raj and Rural Development minister, Deputy Speaker and Chairman of the State Planning Board.

Former MLA Nima Tsering Khrimey died on Wednesday at his residence in Kalaktang in West Kameng district.

A familiar and respected figure in the district's political and social life, he was remembered for his simplicity, accessibility and close engagement with local communities, consistently raising issues related to development and welfare.

Summing up the obituary references, Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein said the former legislators had left behind a legacy of brotherhood and a vision of a Viksit Arunachal, which should be carried forward by the present Members of the House.

The Assembly later observed a two-minute silence as a mark of respect to the departed leaders. (PTI)

**ITANAGAR, Feb 4:** The Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Wednesday paid tributes to six former legislators who died in the recent past, recalling their contributions to the state's political life and development.

Leading the obituary references, Speaker Tesam Pongte described the departed leaders as "great legislators" whose service and commitment helped shape the state.

He also conveyed condolences on behalf of the members to the bereaved families through the Assembly secretary.

Members cutting across party lines joined in paying homage.

Former MLA Kapchen Rajkumar, who represented the then Khonsa North Assembly constituency in Tirap district from 1985 to 1990, was killed in a wild elephant attack on July 9 last year.

The 65-year-old was walking from Namsang village to Deomali town when he was trampled by a rogue elephant, police said.

He is survived by his wife, two daughters and a son.

Former lawmaker Thingphap

Taiju died on August 29 last year at his residence after a prolonged illness.

He was 68 and is survived by his wife, two sons and a daughter.

Born on March 1, 1957, Taiju was first elected to the Assembly from Changlang North constituency in 1994 and was re-elected in 1999. He was remembered for his humility and dedication to public welfare.

Five-time MLA from Taliha Assembly constituency in Upper Subansiri district, Punji Mara died on November 18 last year at his residence in Daporijo. He was 81.

One of the senior-most politicians of the state, Mara had suffered a major brain stroke in February 2019 and had been bedridden since.

Born on September 1, 1944, he

was first elected in 1980 from the undivided Taksing-Taliha constituency and later represented Taliha constituency from 1995 to 2019. He is survived by his wife, eight sons and seven daughters.

Former MLA Yadap Apang died on December 26 at her residence in

## New Manipur CM: Veteran politician, administrator and Taekwondo black belt

**IMPHAL, Feb 4:** Two-time BJP legislator Yumnam Khemchand Singh, who was sworn in as the Manipur Chief Minister on Wednesday, is a long-time RSS functionary and an organisation-focused leader who has held key constitutional and ministerial positions in the state.

Apart from politics, he has had a long association with Taekwondo. A black belt holder, he is a former vice-president of the Taekwondo Federation of India and has been involved in the promotion of the sport in the Northeast.

Though Singh has been in politics for decades, the 62-year-old leader made his debut in the Assembly in 2017 from Singjamei constituency in Imphal West district. Singh was elected Speaker of the Assembly, a position he held during the first Biren Singh-led BJP government in the state.

In 2022, he was inducted into the

second Biren Singh ministry as a Cabinet Minister and held key portfolios, including municipal administration, housing and urban development (MAHUD), rural development and panchayati raj, and education departments.

He served in the Cabinet till February 2025, when President's rule was imposed in the state, days after N Biren Singh resigned as the chief minister amid criticisms of his government's handling of the ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kukis, which broke out in May 2023.

Khemchand Singh first contested in the 2012 Assembly polls on an All India Trinamool Congress ticket, but lost to a Congress candidate. He formally joined the BJP in 2013. Born at Singjamei Yumnam Leikai, he completed his High School Leaving Certificate in 1978 from Ram Lal Paul High School in Imphal. He is married and has a son. (PTI)

## Nagaland MP flags staff shortages in Doordarshan, AIR

HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, Feb 4:** Nagaland Lok Sabha MP S Supongmeren Jamir on Wednesday raised concerns in Parliament over severe staff shortages in central broadcasting institutions in Nagaland. Speaking under Rule 377, Jamir highlighted that long-standing recruitment issues have disadvantaged local candidates in Staff Selection Commission (SSC) exams.

He pointed out that despite vacancies for 15 posts of programme executive and transmission executive being advertised in 2013, no candidates from Nagaland qualified due to the Hindi Paper-II requirement, creating a major barrier. Jamir noted that at Doordarshan Kendra, Kohima, 89 of 144 sanctioned posts remain vacant. At All India Radio, Kohima, 64 of 79 programme section posts, 56 of 90 administrative posts and 50 of 91 engineering posts are unfilled. He warned that such vacancies hamper the functioning and outreach of public broadcasting, vital for information dissemination, cultural preservation, and regional representation. The MP urged the ministry to consider a special recruitment drive.

Prem Singh Tamang announces job security, women-only bus service and housing push

## Sikkim govt to regularise service of 27,860 ad-hoc employees: CM

**GANGTOK, Feb 4:** Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Wednesday said that his government will regularise the service of 27,860 ad-hoc employees working in various departments.

Tamang said that the state government is committed to safeguard the future of all ad-hoc employees by providing them with job security through a structured regularisation process.

"A total of 27,860 ad-hoc employees currently serving in various government departments across the state will be regularised soon," he said while addressing the 14th founding day celebrations of the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) at Rangpo ground.

The CM said that the decision reflects the government's people-centric approach and its resolve to strengthen the workforce by ensuring stability and dignity for employees who have been contributing to public service.

He said that the state government will follow the due procedures to implement the regularisation process for the ad-hoc employees within a stipulated



timeline.

The government will also launch the "Pink City Runner", a bus service exclusively for women passengers in Gangtok from April.

"The Pink City Runner will ensure convenience and safety of women during daily travel," the chief minister said, adding the

service will strengthen women-friendly mobility in the capital.

This reflects the state government's continued focus on women's safety and empowerment, he said.

Tamang further announced his government's commitment to ensure housing for all eligible and

deserving families in the state and said that 11,000 houses will be constructed for as many beneficiaries by 2027.

He said that the housing initiative will be implemented without any discrimination against any section of society.

The SKM supremo thanked about 80,000 party leaders, workers, besides general public for attending the party's 14th foundation day function, saying the warm reception reflects our collective journey and shared vision for a better Sikkim.

"I sincerely thank all citizens, karyakartas, supporters and well-wishers for making this day truly special. Your blessings inspire us to serve with greater commitment and take Sikkim forward together," he said.

The SKM supremo also welcomed a number of leaders and workers from the opposition Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) and the Citizen Action Party (CAP) into his party and urged them to work with dedication for the service of the people of Sikkim. (PTI)



### Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) : VB - G RAM G

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## ASIAN SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIP

### Pistol shooter Esha helps India win two gold, Samrat settles for bronze



**NEW DELHI, Feb 4:** Olympian Esha Singh carried her excellent form from last year into the new season, clinching the women's individual 10m air pistol gold and helping the home team to another top-podium finish, even as world champion Samrat Rana settled for bronze on the opening day of the Asian Championship (pistol/rifle) here on Wednesday.

Esha, 21, came from behind to score 239.8 in the final, fending off challenges from two Chinese Taipei shooters -- Cheng Yen-Ching (235.4, silver) and Yu Ai-Wen (217.7, bronze) -- as well as compatriot Suruchi Singh, to claim her second individual senior Asian Championship gold.

The shooter, who had earlier secured the season-ending ISSF World Cup gold in Ningbo, China last year, had won her first continental title in Jakarta in 2024 at the age of 19.

Suruchi, 19, who led the final after the first 10-shot stage, slipped dramatically in the elimination round to finish fourth, while Manu Bhaker, a double bronze medalist at the Paris Olympics and the third Indian to reach the eight-shooter final, ended up in seventh place.

In a competition that didn't rise to great levels, with all the shooters' scores swaying between the highs of upper 10s and the lows of 8s, it was Esha who kept her cool with three scores of 10.4 and above to take a big leap for gold, while the two Chinese Taipei shooters fell back sharply, with some of their scores in the 9s and 8s.

In the qualification round, Suruchi finished second with a score of 576, while Manu and Esha both ended on 575. Manu edged ahead of Esha for qualification based on a higher 'inner 10' count, with all three advancing to the final.

The trio of Suruchi (576), Manu (575), and Esha (575) went on to win the team gold

with a combined total of 1,726, comfortably ahead of Vietnam (1,713) and Chinese Taipei (1,711), who claimed the silver and bronze respectively.

**Samrat settles for bronze**  
Samrat, who was the standout performer at last year's World Championships in Cairo -- where the Karnal shooter showed nerves of steel to win gold -- raised hopes of another top-podium finish in the season opener.

He seemed set to carry his form into the new season after shooting 581 in the qualification round, which placed him second going into the final.

But, in the medal round, the 21-year-old shot 220.3 to finish behind Vladimir Svechnikov of Uzbekistan (242.0, gold) and Kazakhstan's Valeriy Rakhimzhan (241.0, silver).

The other Indian to make it to the eight-shooter final, Sharvan Kumar, came in fourth.

India claimed the team silver in the event, with Samrat (581), Shruvan (578), and world champion Varun Tomar (573) combining for a total of 1,732 points.

Uzbekistan won the gold with an identical aggregate of 1,732, but edged out India with a superior 'inner 10' score of 58 compared to the hosts' 52. Kazakhstan finished a close third with 1,731 points.

India has entered the largest squad of 118 shooters with Kazakhstan fielding the second biggest contingent of 35 athletes.

Regional powerhouses South Korea and Japan have also fielded strong squads and shooters from Chinese Taipei, Vietnam and Hong Kong are also expected to put up good performances.

**Other Results:**  
**Men's 10m air pistol (Junior):** 1. Gavin Antony (Ind, 240.9), Imandos Bektenov (Kz, 236.7), Maruf Aulia (Ina, 215.6).  
**Team:** 1. India 1735 points, 2. Kazakhstan 1680. (PTI)

# Tale of two squads: India's 2026 unit is a big step up on title-winning batch of 2024

**NEW DELHI, Feb 4:** A seemingly unstoppable force in the shortest format, the current India squad has an aura of invincibility around it unlike the one that ended the cricketing powerhouse's long wait for an ICC title in Barbados 19 months ago.

Rohit Sharma, the captain of that T20 World Cup-winning outfit, led from the front with his fearless play at the top of the order as India finally found a successful T20 template after years of holding back in the shortest format. Fair to say, the current lot has built on that approach and taken India's T20 game to the next level. It appears that only an extremely bad day in office can deny them the trophy at home.

"There are a few changes (to the side) but this team has gone to the next level since Rohit inspired his team to that trophy couple of years ago. The way they played against New Zealand recently was something special.

"Unless they have one bad day, which can happen in this format, India should be able to win the trophy again," former India wicket-keeper Deep Dasgupta told PTI.

Eight members of the Suryakumar Yadav-led squad were a part of the winning campaign in the Caribbean.

There is no Rohit or Virat Kohli but such is the depth of Indian cricket, the side did not take long to move from the superstars even though all-rounder Hardik Pandya has endured in his role as the glue that holds the squad together.

Since that come-from-behind win over South Africa in the 2024 final in Barbados,



the additions to the national team have been Abhishek Sharma and Varun Chakaravathy, who currently lead the charts in the ICC batting and bowling rankings.

Tilak Varma too is a welcome addition to the unit, having come of age in the Asia Cup last year. Shivam Dube, who was a part of the 2024 edition, is now delivering on his promise both as a batter and bowler.

Jasprit Bumrah and Arshdeep Singh are two frontline pacers and if needed, Harshit Rana is available as an able back-up, having made an impact recently with both bat and ball. Ishan Kishan was a surprise inclusion

in the World Cup squad as a back-up wicket-keeper batter but is certain to start in the lung-opener against USA after a memorable comeback series against New Zealand.

The dominance over New Zealand in the series was a warning sign to the rival teams and came despite Sanju Samson being in poor form at the top of the order alongside a marauding Abhishek Sharma.

To put India's superiority in perspective, they have amassed the most amount of 200 plus totals (20) since October 2023 and go into the World Cup as the leading six-hitting side (10.99 balls per sixes).

## India thrash Bhutan to set up SAFF U19 Women's C'ship final date with Bangladesh

**POKHARA (NEPAL), Feb 4:** The Indian Under-17 women's team crushed Bhutan 8-0 in its last round-robin fixture of the SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship to set up a summit showdown with Bangladesh at the Pokhara Rangasala Stadium on Wednesday.

Pearl Fernandes (16', 39', 41') scored a first-half hat-trick, while Pritika Barman (25', 90') got one goal in each half for India. Alisha Lyngdoh (6'), Abhista Basnett (10'), and Divyani Linda (17') netted one apiece.

In the other semifinal, Bangladesh defeated hosts Nepal 4-0, in the second match of the day.

India finished second on the table with six points from three matches, three behind leaders Bangladesh. The hosts ended third with three points, while Bhutan were at bottom of the heap with none.

The top two teams, India and Bangladesh, will now cross swords in the final on Saturday.

The Indian U17 team is participating in the higher age-group SAFF championship as part of its preparations for the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup China 2026.

From the very outset, Bhutan were no match for the Pamela Conti-coached Young Tigresses. (PTI)

## Dhoni backs 'Ro-Ko' to continue; says India will be dangerous at T20WC

**NEW DELHI, Feb 4:** Former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni has thrown his weight behind senior batting stars Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, saying nobody should tell them whether they can continue or not, while backing the "dangerous" Indian T20 team to defend its world title on home turf.

In an interview to sports broadcaster Jatin Sapru facilitated by tile and stone-installation company MYK Laticrete, which roped in Dhoni as its brand ambassador, the reclusive superstar gave rare views on Indian cricketing matters.

"Sorry, what's the question?" he quipped at first when the debate surrounding the possibility of Rohit (38) and Kohli (37) playing the 2027 ODI World Cup was brought up during the nearly half-hour interaction. But he quickly took a more serious tone and asked, "Why not, why somebody should not play the World Cup?" "For me, age is not a criteria, performance, fitness these are criteria. I always feel nobody should be told anything. But things should be clear that everyone will be treated the same way.

"When I made my debut I was 24, nobody told me anything and now when I am playing for India for 10 years, 20 years or whatever, nobody needs to come and tell me about my age," he asserted.

The 44-year-old, who still plays in



the IPL for Chennai Super Kings, stressed on the need for experience in the side.

"Whether Rohit or Virat or other names that will come up in next five years... whether they can or cannot play the next World Cup, it's not for us to decide, it's for them to decide. If they keep playing well, if they have the urge to do well for the country, then why not," he said.

"You can't get experienced people. You can't get a 20-year-old who is experienced unless it's a Sachin Tendulkar! You know you get experience at that age only if you start playing when you're 16 or 17."

Dhoni said a player cannot be considered experienced unless he has handled pressure for a prolonged time in his career.

"If you're calling 20 games and 25 games as experience, then they are not experienced because you need people to be under the pump in the job that they are doing.

"...I have to play 80 games, 85

games to experience that and then to know how to tame my heart, how to tame my emotion, how to handle the pressure. So I feel the right combination of experience and youthfulness is very important."

India's current head coach Gautam Gambhir has been non-committal on the future of Rohit and Kohli, both of whom only play ODIs now. Dhoni said any player who is able to stay fit and perform should be able to keep his place irrespective of their age.

"Treat everyone equally. People are performing, they won't be there...if the guy is not fit you can chuck him out at any point of time. If he's not performing anyways you'll chuck him out.

"So there should not be any question regarding any individual when it comes to selection. There's only one criteria. You're performing, you're fit, keep on playing."

**India dangerous but beware of dew**

The discussion then moved towards the T20 World Cup starting February 7 in India and Sri Lanka.

Dhoni was the first Indian captain to win it back in 2007 and when asked about the chances of the Suryakumar Yadav-led current side, he said the hosts will have to be mindful of the dew factor at this time of the year. (PTI)

## Marseille beats Rennes 3-0 to reach French Cup quarterfinals

**MARSEILLE (FRANCE), Feb 4:** Marseille avoided plunging into crisis by defeating Rennes 3-0 on Tuesday to move into the French Cup quarterfinals.

The southern club had no room for mistake after exiting the Champions League last week with a 3-0 loss at Club Brugge. It was an embarrassing defeat that was followed by a 2-2 draw at Paris FC in Ligue 1 on Saturday after Roberto De Zerbi's players threw away a two-goal lead.

Marseille needed just two minutes to break the deadlock against Rennes when Amine Gouiri scored from close range against his former club, after excellent work from Timothy Weah to recover the ball in the box. Gouiri then turned provider to set up Mason Greenwood in the 46th minute, with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang sealing the win on the break with seven minutes left.

Marseille recruit Ethan Nwaneri was lucky to escape a red card after an awful tackle near the hour-mark on Glen Kamara, who was forced off.

Reims also progressed to the quarterfinals with a 3-0 defeat of Le Mans. Marseille's 3-0 loss at Club Brugge on Wednesday, coupled with Benfica's remarkable injury-time goal against Real Madrid, sent De Zerbi's side into 25th place in the Champions League table and out of the competition. (AP)

# Fire 'n' Ice: Gambhir's authority and Surya's freedom form a heady cocktail for India

**New Delhi, Feb 4:** Soon after Rahul Dravid ended his eventful and highly successful stint as Indian team's head coach, Rohit Sharma penned an emotional tribute on his Instagram wall where one sentence summed up the coach-captain relationship.

"My wife (Ritika Sajdeh) refers to you as my 'work wife' and I'm lucky to get to call you that too."

Those who know Rohit would vouch that he never speaks or exists in vacuum and meant every word when he compared the captain-coach relationship to a marriage where two people need to have a shared philosophy and sing from the same hymn sheet.

As India start their T20 World Cup title defence in less than 72 hours, one is tempted to look at Suryakumar Yadav and Gautam Gambhir's working relationship which has been fantastic, at least so going by the results -- a whopping 31 wins in 39 games with a winning percentage of 79.48. In Indian cricket, coaches have always played the second fiddle for most successful captains.

Even the gregarious Ravi Shastri, who despite being one of the most astute brains, always drove home the point that it was Virat



Kohli's team and the skipper was its general. Ditto for John Wright-Sourav Ganguly, Gary Kirsten-MS Dhoni and Dravid-Rohit where the skipper was the real boss of the team. After the Chappell-Dravid era, this is probably the first coach-captain duo where

the gaffer has way more overwhelming presence in terms of strategic decision making.

Perhaps, T20 has evolved the quickest in terms of changes in template and that has warranted a more hands on football-manager style coaching, something that suits Gamb-

hir's temperament.

And to give Gambhir's plans the shape it required, one needed Surya 2.0, a man sure of his skills and aware of his capabilities to execute them to the 'T'. But in the past one year, there have been more examples than one to suggest that Gambhir is the planner and Surya is the executioner.

Obviously, there is a sweet history between the two as Surya the player first came into national limelight when he played the finisher's role for KKR under Gambhir's captaincy and his now famous acronym 'SKY' was actually given to him by the current head coach.

And in Indian cricket, it is an open secret that in 2024, the then newly-appointed head coach did have a huge say in Surya pipping Hardik Pandya to the post of T20 captaincy.

Another example was when Shubman Gill was straightaway made the vice-captain for the Asia Cup in Dubai. Those who had tracked the developments in Indian cricket can vouch that pushing Sanju Samson down the order, perhaps, was the last item on skipper's agenda. Obviously, both chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar and Gambhir had a role in that decision making. (PTI)