

NORTH EAST BUSINESS MIRROR

Vol.No. 03 ■ Issue - 44 ■ North East Business Mirror ■ Thursday, 12 February 2026 ■ Edition - Guwahati

■ Pages - 6 ■ Price ₹ 3

India's GDP likely to grow 6.9 pc in 2026, US trade deal to add 20 bps: Report



Mumbai: India's real GDP growth will likely touch 6.9 per cent in 2026 and 6.8 per cent in 2027, and the recent US-India trade deal should add about 0.2 percentage (20 bps) to annual GDP growth, a new report has

said. The report from Goldman Sachs Research said, "Our analysts expect an incremental growth boost of 0.2 percentage points of GDP (annualised) with these new tariffs, based on India's goods exports exposure of roughly 4 per cent of GDP to US final demand."

The investment bank expects headline inflation to rise to 3.9 per cent in 2026, close to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target of 4 per cent. As the RBI cut rates by 125 basis points last year, with a comprehensive set of measures to inject liquidity into the system, there is limited scope for further easing, said Santanu Sengupta, Goldman Sachs Research's chief India economist.

"In 2025, our economists expect India's GDP to have grown at 7.7 per cent year-on-year, despite headwinds from US tariffs—which was the highest imposed on any country in the Asia Pacific region. That said, nominal GDP growth was at a sixyear low (excluding the pandemic) due to recordlow inflation," the report said.

India's unemployment rate declines in October-December quarter

New Delhi: The unemployment rate among persons aged 15 years and above in India declined in the October-December quarter, both in rural and urban areas, compared to the previous July-September quarter of 2025-26, according to data released by the Ministry of Statistics on Tuesday. The unemployment rate in rural areas declined to 4 per cent in October-December 2025, from 4.4 per cent in the previous quarter, driven by a reduction in UR for both rural male and female. The urban unemployment rate for persons aged 15 years and above decreased to 6.7 per cent as compared to 6.9 per cent reported in the previous quarter, driven by a decline in urban male UR from 6.2 per cent during July-September to 5.9 per cent in the current quarter, the official figures showed.

The overall Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for persons aged 15 years and above increased to 55.8 per cent during October-December, compared to 55.1 per cent in the previous quarter, reflecting the increased employment. Female LFPR (15 years and above) recorded a notable rise to 34.9 per cent in October-December 2025, up from 33.7 per cent during July-September 2025. The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for persons aged 15 years and above, another indicator of employment, improved from 52.2 per cent in July-September 2025 to 53.1 per cent in October-December 2025.

The Rural WPR for persons aged 15 years and above continued to show a steady upward trend across both genders during April-June 2025 to October-December 2025. Self-employment experienced a rise in both rural and urban areas. Self-employed persons of age 15 years and above in rural areas increased to 63.2 per cent during October-December, up from 62.8 per cent recorded in the previous quarter. In urban areas, self-employed persons of the same age group were reported as 39.7 per cent during the October-December quarter compared to 39.3 per cent during the previous quarter.

Sensex, Nifty post moderate gains amid strong domestic earnings cues

Mumbai: The Indian equity markets posted moderate gains on Tuesday, rising for the third consecutive session, supported by strong Q3 earnings data from select companies. At the closing bell, the Sensex gained 208 points, or 0.25 per cent, to settle at 84,065. The Nifty surged 67 points, or 0.26 per cent, to close at 25,935. The broader markets posted stronger gains than benchmark indices, as the Nifty Midcap 100 index added 0.49 per cent, while the NSE Smallcap 100 surged 0.38 per cent. Shares of microcap companies were in demand, as the Nifty Microcap 250 index gained 1 per cent, outperforming the benchmark indices for the second straight day amid strong earnings results in the December 2025 quarter (Q3FY26).

Market sentiment was supported by foreign institutional investor (FII) buying, firm



global cues, and optimism over the India-US interim trade deal. All sectoral indices traded with gains except pharma and PSU Bank. Nifty Media emerged as the top gainer, surging 2.40 per cent, while Nifty Auto climbed 1.37 per cent.

The Indian rupee ended higher by 0.23 per cent against the dollar to 90.52 per USD on Tuesday. For Nifty, immediate support lies at 25,550-25,600, followed by a stronger demand area near 25,450-25,500, market watchers said. Nifty Bank

closed at 60,626.40, down 42.95 points or 0.07 per cent. Immediate support is seen at 60,500, while failure to sustain at higher levels could lead to range-bound movement or mild profit booking. The Nifty 50 fell 3.10 per cent in January but rose 7.71 per cent over the past year. Nifty 500 remained flat in January and closed the year up 6.94 per cent, while midcap and smallcap indices were negative for the month, down about 3.53 per cent to 5.52 per cent.

Dispatched record over 5.85 lakh vehicles via rail in 2025: Maruti Suzuki India

New Delhi: Maruti Suzuki India Limited on Monday said it has set a new benchmark in green logistics by dispatching over 5.85 lakh vehicles through railways in 2025, a growth of 18 per cent over 2024. Maruti Suzuki's share of rail mode in outbound logistics has grown exponentially, rising from 5.1 per cent in 2016 to 26 per cent in 2025, significantly reducing carbon emissions, country's oil imports and easing road congestion, according to the automaker. "The year 2025 marks our highest-ever rail dispatch, with over 5.85 lakh units.

During the year, we strengthened our green logistic efforts through two landmark events - the inauguration of India's largest automobile in-plant railway siding at our Manesar facility, and second was we dispatched vehicles by rail to Kashmir valley through the world's highest railway arch bridge over Chenab River, a first by any automobile manufacturer," said Hisashi Takeuchi, MD and CEO, Maruti Suzuki India Limited.

"Our mid-term goal is to increase railbased vehicle dispatches to 35 per cent by

FY2030-31, contributing to India's netzero ambition by 2070," he added. Since FY 2014-15, Maruti Suzuki has transported over 28 lakh vehicles from 22 destinations servicing over 600 cities pan India through a hub and spoke model. Currently, Maruti Suzuki uses over 45 flexi deck rakes, each with a capacity of carrying around 260 vehicles per trip. In 2025, rail dispatches from Maruti Suzuki's in-plant railway siding at Gujarat and Manesar facility accounted for 53 per cent of the company's total rail dispatches.

Gold, silver prices jump as US dollar weakens



Mumbai: Gold and silver prices surged sharply on Monday due to a weaker US dollar and persistent geopolitical uncertainties. MCX gold February futures jumped 1.31 per cent to Rs 1,57,484 per 10 grams around 10.45 am on an intraday basis. Meanwhile MCX silver March futures climbed 4.81 per cent to Rs 2,61,900 per kg. On the MCX, silver prices, earlier in the day, had jumped as much as 6 per cent to its day's high of Rs 2,64,885 per kg before a round of profit booking.

The US dollar touched its lowest level since February 4, making greenback-priced metals cheaper for overseas buyers. Even as Iran's top diplomat called US-Iran nuclear talks a "good start" on Friday, Tehran has reiterated that the country would retain its right to enrich uranium. Experts anticipate that geopolitical tensions may persist for longer, continuing to drive investors to safehaven assets. Market hopes of further rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve got stronger after San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly called for one or two more interest rate cuts to alleviate weakness in the labour market.

New IT tax related renumbering aims to simplify compliance for taxpayers

Mumbai: The Income Tax Department's draft Income tax Rules proposed a comprehensive renumbering of tax forms that would improve reporting ease and enhance compliance for taxpayers, professionals and institutions as the Income tax Act, 2025 is set to come into force on April 1. The draft rules, released with new form templates, replace legacy form numbers that evolved over decades and will reduce ambiguity and duplication in filings for taxpayers, experts said.



It will better integrate reporting with real time data matching and analytics, but the change will require rapid ad-

aptation and system updates by employers, tax practitioners, registrars and corporate systems. Several commonly used audit and international tax forms have been consolidated or renumbered. Tax audit reports now filed as Forms 3CA, 3CB and 3CD would be consolidated under Form 26, while transfer pricing audit reporting would move from Form 3CEB to Form 48. Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) certification would shift from Form 29B to Form 66.

Inclusive workplaces key to strengthening mental wellbeing and productivity in India

Guwahati: Efforts to build inclusive and mentally healthy workplaces in India are gaining momentum as organisations increasingly recognise that mental health and inclusion must go hand in hand. Experts emphasise that for LGBTQIA+ employees, workplace wellbeing is closely linked to identity, belonging, and the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of judgement or discrimination.

Progressive companies

are moving beyond generic mental health frameworks and adopting policies that acknowledge diverse employee experiences shaped by gender, sexuality, disability, and neurodiversity. Measures such as extending healthcare benefits to partners, ensuring access to mental health professionals familiar with LGBTQIA+ concerns, creating gender-affirmation policies, and establishing grievance redressal systems are being viewed as essential steps

toward genuine inclusion. Organisations are also being encouraged to respect employee privacy and avoid pressuring individuals to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Inclusive systems, experts say, should be accessible to all employees regardless of whether they openly identify themselves.

In Guwahati, several companies and start-ups are gradually adopting inclusive HR practices as part of broader workforce-wellbeing strategies. HR

consultants in the city report that organisations focusing on psychological safety and inclusive benefits are seeing improved employee engagement and retention, indicating that inclusive workplace policies are increasingly becoming a business priority.

Sustained leadership commitment, continuous learning, and long-term cultural change will be crucial for building resilient, equitable workplaces aligned with the vision of a developed India by 2047.

HMSI marks 5 years of road safety training in Guwahati, over 1 lakh people benefited

Guwahati: Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) celebrated the fifth anniversary of its Safety Driving Education Centre (SDEC) in Guwahati, reaffirming its commitment to promoting safer road habits across the country. The event was attended by District Transport Officer Gautam Das and other dignitaries, who acknowledged the centre's role in strengthening awareness of safe riding practices.

Established in February 2021 in association with the Assam Transport Department, the Guwahati SDEC has trained more than 1,00,000 individuals, including school students, college youth and working professionals, through classroom sessions and hands-on riding modules. The anniversary programme included a ceremonial cake-cutting and special safety riding activities for driving licence applicants aimed at enhancing



real-world road awareness.

HMSI said the centre forms part of its larger CSR commitment aligned with the company's global vision of achieving zero traffic collision fatalities by 2050 and supporting India's target of reducing road deaths by half by 2030. Nationwide, the company's road safety initiatives have already reached over 10 million people through training parks, SDECs and digital learning

platforms such as the newly launched "E-Gurukul".

In Guwahati, the initiative is expected to positively influence the city's rapidly expanding two-wheeler segment by encouraging responsible riding behaviour among new buyers and delivery riders, while also strengthening consumer trust in manufacturers actively investing in road safety awareness and community training programmes.

Shringla raises connectivity, tourism and investment implementation issues for Northeast in Parliament

Itanagar: Member of Parliament Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Thursday raised key concerns in Parliament regarding infrastructure expansion, rail connectivity and tourism development in the North Eastern Region, urging the government to ensure timely implementation of projects and effective utilisation of central funds. He also sought details on progress made following commitments announced at the Rising North East Summit and stressed the need to translate investment pledges into employment-generating projects on the ground.

Highlighting the region's tourism potential, Shringla said the Northeast possesses immense natural beauty, vibrant tribal heritage and significant opportunities in eco, cultural and adventure tourism. He emphasised that improved rail and road connectivity linking remote parts of the region with the rest of the country would strengthen trade, enhance tourism flow and bring markets closer, fostering inclusive economic growth.

Quoting his intervention, Shringla said, "Prime



Minister Narendra Modiji has displayed a deep and heartfelt connection with the Northeast... During the recent Northeast Investors' Summit, investors committed investment interests of Rs 4.3 lakh crore."

In Itanagar, traders and tourism-linked businesses are expected to benefit significantly from improved connectivity, which could lower transportation costs, increase tourist inflow and expand market access for local handicrafts, agricultural produce and small enterprises across Arunachal Pradesh.

GCPL backs MAT credit set-off move, says Budget step will unlock cash for growth

Guwahati: Godrej Consumer Products Limited (GCPL) has welcomed the Union Budget provision allowing companies to set off up to 25 per cent of their tax liability against accumulated Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) credits under the new tax regime, terming it a positive step for corporate India.

Commenting on the announcement, Sudhir Sitapati, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Godrej Consumer Products Limited, said the move would significantly ease the transition to the new tax structure for companies carrying legacy MAT credits.

"We particularly welcome the MAT credit set-off being allowed up to 25 per cent of the tax liability under the new tax regime. This move improves cash flows and makes the new tax regime smoother for companies with accumulated credits," Sitapati said in a statement.

He added that the policy change would help unlock capital that was otherwise tied up, enabling companies to channel funds into reinvestment and expansion. According to him, improved liquidity is expected to support growth, especially in consumption-led categories that form the backbone of India's fast-moving consumer goods sector.

The MAT credit relief is likely to encourage more companies to shift to the new tax regime, aligning with the government's broader objective of simplifying taxation while supporting investment and economic growth.

Commemorative stamp marks 50 years of MAGGI in India



Shillong: Nestlé India marked a major milestone on Wednesday with the release of a commemorative postage stamp celebrating 50 years of MAGGI in India. The stamp was unveiled by Manish Tiwary, Chairman and Managing Director of Nestlé India, along with Chirag Paswan, Union Minister of Food Processing Industries, recognising the brand's five-decade journey in Indian households.

Over the years, MAGGI has expanded beyond instant noodles to include masalas, sauces, soups and ready-to-cook products, becoming a familiar presence in homes, hostels and gatherings across the country. The commemorative stamp titled "50 Years of Togetherness" highlights the brand's association with everyday shared food experiences across generations.

Congratulating the brand, Minister Chirag Paswan said India's processed food sector has grown significantly over the decades and pioneering brands have played a key role in strengthening the food ecosystem. Tiwary described the milestone as a reflection of the trust and affection shown by millions of consumers nationwide.

In Shillong, retailers report steady demand for MAGGI products, particularly among students and young professionals, with local distributors noting that the anniversary stamp and ongoing brand campaigns are expected to further boost consumer engagement and sales across the region.

Nestlé India said it will continue focusing on strengthening its connection with consumers through products that bring convenience and shared food moments to families across the country.

ITC's Sunrise Spices launches first-of-its-kind Til Chicken Masala in Assam

Guwahati: ITC Ltd.'s Sunrise Spices has launched Sunrise Til Chicken Masala in Assam, introducing what the company describes as a first-of-its-kind spice blend designed to simplify the preparation of the state's popular festive dish, Til Chicken, while preserving its authentic regional taste.

The new product is part of Sunrise's strategy to develop region-focused spice blends tailored to local culinary traditions. Known for Assam-specific offerings such as Haah-Salkumra (Duck Curry with Ashgourd) masala and other traditional meat blends, the brand said the latest launch reflects its continued emphasis on regional consumer insights and local food heritage.

Til Chicken, a winter favourite in Assamese households, traditionally requires time-intensive processes such as sun-drying, roasting and grinding sesame seeds. The ready-to-use masala, made with pre-roasted black til and a curated blend of spices, aims to deliver the dish's signature nutty flavour, smoky aroma and thick dark gravy while offering convenience for modern kitchens.

Piyush Mishra, Business Head, Sunrise Spices, ITC Ltd., said the product seeks to "honour and preserve rich culinary practices while fitting seamlessly into modern lifestyles."

In Guwahati, retailers expect strong demand as the affordable Rs. 20 (18g pack) pricing and the popularity of traditional convenience products continue to drive growth in the city's packaged spice segment. The product is now available across retail outlets in Guwahati.



Truecaller community blocks nearly 1,200 crore spam calls in India in 2025

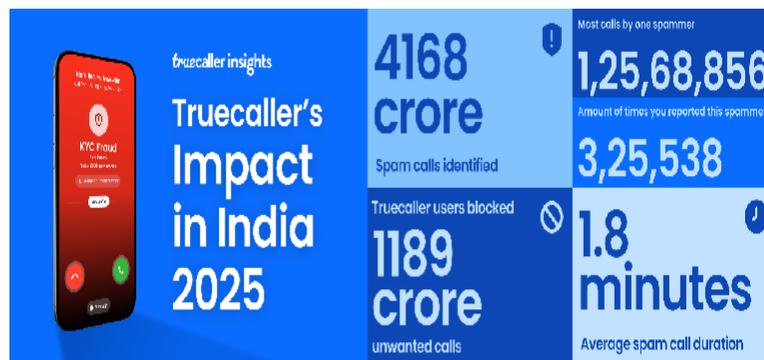
Guwahati: India witnessed an unprecedented surge in unwanted digital communication in 2025, with more than 4,168 crore spam calls identified nationwide, according to Truecaller's latest India Insights Report 2025. The report revealed that the Truecaller community successfully blocked about 1,189 crore unwanted calls, preventing millions of users from potential scams, time loss, and financial fraud.

The study further noted that around 770 crore fraudulent calls impersonating banks, government agencies, payment platforms, and major brands were detected during the year. Spam messaging also remained a major concern, with

over 12,903 crore spam SMS identified, particularly rising during the second half of 2025. According to Truecaller CEO Rishit Jhunjhunwala, trust in communication has become "a critical digital asset," emphasizing the need for technology-driven safeguards to ensure users remain connected without compromising safety.

The report estimated that blocking spam calls helped Indians save nearly 21.7 lakh hours daily, equivalent to about 250 years of human time every day, highlighting the broader economic and productivity benefits of spam protection.

In Guwahati, telecom retailers and



digital service providers report growing consumer demand for caller-identification and fraud-protection tools, as businesses and individuals increas-

ingly rely on verified communication channels to maintain trust in commercial transactions and service interactions across the region.

Inclusive workplaces key to strengthening mental wellbeing and productivity in India

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Progressive companies are moving beyond generic mental health frameworks and adopting policies that acknowledge diverse employee experiences shaped by gender, sexuality, dis-

ability, and neurodiversity. Measures such as extending healthcare benefits to partners, ensuring access to mental health professionals familiar with LGBTQIA+ concerns, creating gender-affirmation policies, and establishing grievance redressal systems are being viewed as essential steps toward genuine inclusion.

Organisations are also being encouraged to respect employee privacy and avoid pressuring individuals to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Inclusive systems, experts say, should be accessible to all employees regardless of whether they openly identify themselves.

In Guwahati, several companies and start-ups are gradually adopting inclusive HR practices as part of broader workforce-wellbeing strategies. HR consultants in the city report that organisations focusing on psychological safety and inclusive benefits are seeing improved employee engagement and retention, indicating that inclusive workplace policies are increasingly becoming a business priority.

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PM India calls for stronger government-industry collaboration to curb illicit tobacco trade

Aizawl: On Anti-Smuggling Day 2026, Philip Morris India Trading Pvt. Ltd. (PM India) reaffirmed its commitment to combating illicit tobacco trade, emphasizing the need for sustained collective action and stronger government collaboration to restrict smuggled cigarette inflows. The company stated that the illegal cigarette market poses serious challenges to legitimate businesses, public revenue, and consumer safety, calling for coordinated interventions amid evolving fiscal and regulatory developments.

With the Government of India rolling out the Track & Trace (T&T) mechanism

to help authorities identify illegal tobacco products, PM India highlighted the importance of strengthening enforcement frameworks. According to government data, customs and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) units seized around 3.93 crore cigarette sticks up to June 2025, reflecting the scale and complexity of smuggling operations. India, with an estimated 267 million tobacco users, remains one of the fastest-growing illegal cigarette markets globally.

In 2025, PM India conducted a survey covering 3,000 shops across more than 500 market clusters in 10 states and provided

training support to over 145 customs and tax officers to improve identification of illicit products. Managing Director Navaneel Kar stressed that continued government-industry cooperation is essential to protect consumers and safeguard legitimate supply chains.

Retail intelligence from northeastern markets, including Aizawl, indicates growing vigilance among traders and enforcement agencies, with increasing awareness campaigns and coordinated inspections expected to curb the circulation of contraband cigarettes while stabilizing legal retail supply chains in the region.

Kotak Mahindra Bank rolls out 'Sehat Ka Safar 4.0' with 45+ health camps for transport workforce

Mumbai: Kotak Mahindra Bank (KMBL) has launched 'Sehat Ka Safar 4.0,' the fourth edition of its flagship CSR healthcare initiative aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of India's transport community, including truck drivers, transporters, and their families.

The programme, which began on December 18, 2025, will continue until March 31, 2026, with 45+ health and eye check-up camps planned across key transport corridors in the country.

The latest edition introduces several new features, including Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) card issuance, expanded laboratory testing, and chest X-ray facilities to strengthen early diagnosis and preventive healthcare. The initiative is expected to benefit nearly 4,500 drivers and their families across states such as Assam, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab.

Since its launch in 2022, the programme has organised over 120 health camps across 75+ cities, reaching nearly 13,500 drivers. Each camp is supported by qualified doctors, paramedical staff, and counsellors who provide medical check-ups, health awareness sessions, and guidance on welfare schemes.

Kotak Mahindra Bank said the expanded initiative reflects its continued commitment to strengthening the health resilience of India's logistics workforce, a key pillar supporting national economic growth.

Hyatt appoints S. Vidyashankar as Regional VP of Human Resources for India & Southwest Asia

Mumbai: Global hospitality major Hyatt has appointed S. Vidyashankar as the Regional Vice President of Human Resources for India and Southwest Asia, reinforcing its leadership team as the company continues to expand across the region. With over 23 years of experience in hospitality human resources, including more than two decades with Hyatt, Vidyashankar is expected to play a key role in shaping the company's regional people strategy.

In his new role, he will work closely with regional

and hotel leadership teams to strengthen leadership capabilities, nurture talent, and promote people practices aligned with Hyatt's global purpose and values. The focus will be on building consistent, future-ready HR systems that support Hyatt's growing operational footprint.

Prior to this elevation, Vidyashankar served as Area Director of Human Resources, leading HR functions for 18 hotels across six states and partnering with general managers and training teams to enhance talent development

India hosts first BRICS Sherpa Meeting under chairship, sets agenda for 2026 cooperation

Mumbai: India hosted the first BRICS Sherpa/Sous-Sherpa Meeting in New Delhi under its current chairship, marking an important step toward shaping the grouping's priorities for the year. The three-day meeting, which began on February 9 and concludes on February 11, has brought together senior representatives from BRICS member and partner countries to deliberate on coordination, cooperation, and key global issues.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, India's BRICS Sherpa and Secretary (Economic Relations) Sudhakar Dalela participated in the discussions, which were also attended by China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu and Belarus Ambassador M. Kasko. Ambassador Kasko expressed appreciation to India for inviting partner countries, noting that such participation had not taken place previously. Dalela outlined India's chairship priorities, guided by the Prime Minister's vision of a "people-centric" and "humanity-first" approach under the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability."

India is chairing BRICS for the fourth time, and the meeting is expected to lay the groundwork for ministerial engagements and the BRICS Summit later this year.



initiatives. Over his career, he has handled multi-location HR leadership, hotel pre-openings, talent management, statutory compliance, and industrial relations.

India's Pioneering PM E-DRIVE Electric Heavy Truck Hits the Road

Aizawl: : Montra Electric has delivered India's first PM E-DRIVE certified electric heavy-duty truck, the Rhino 5538 EV 6x4 tractor trailer, to UltraTech Cement Limited.

In a January 2026 ceremony, Chairman Arun Murugappan flagged off the N3-category certified vehicle, marking Montra Electric (Murugappa Group's e-M&HCV arm) as the nation's first heavy-duty EV truck maker under the government's INR 10,900 crore PM E-DRIVE scheme. The certification unlocks up to ₹9.6 lakh in incentives per vehicle from the scheme's ₹500 crore e-truck allocation, boosting viability for logistics, mining, and infrastructure fleets.

Union Heavy Industries Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy hailed it as progress toward "Atmanirbhar Viksit Bharat" and net-zero logistics. Murugappan emphasized decarbonizing high-emission freight, praising PM Modi's policies. The truck features a 282 kWh LFP battery, 380 HP, 2000 Nm torque, and up to 198 km range, with battery swapping options for hub-to-hub routes.

This advances India's EV adoption in heavy transport.

Maharashtra orders crackdown on illegal mosquito agarbattis 'Comfort' and 'Sleep Well'



Guwahati: The Maharashtra Department of Agriculture has ordered a statewide crackdown on the illegal sale of mosquito agarbattis marketed under the brand names "Comfort" and "Sleep Well," directing insecticide inspectors to initiate raids, seizures, and prosecution of violators under the Insecticides Act, 1968, and the Insecticides Rules, 1971. Retailers and distributors across the state have been instructed to immediately stop stocking and selling the products, with authorities mandated to report enforcement actions to the Commissionerate of Agriculture.

The action follows earlier investigations that detected unapproved insecticides in the two products through laboratory testing in Andhra Pradesh and Mumbai, prompting regulatory scrutiny. Within 15 days of a raid and ban on "Comfort" in Mumbai, the state government escalated the response by issuing a fresh circular directing divisional joint directors and inspectors to enforce strict compliance statewide.

The Home Insect Control Association (HICA) welcomed the move, with its Honorary Secretary Jayant Deshpande stating that the enforcement sends a strong message against the distribution of unregistered insecticide products and protects consumers from potentially unsafe mosquito repellents.

Traders in Guwahati said the Maharashtra action could trigger tighter scrutiny of mosquito repellent products nationwide, prompting distributors to verify regulatory registrations more carefully. Retailers indicated that consumer awareness regarding approved insecticide products is likely to increase, encouraging demand for certified and registered mosquito repellents across northeastern markets.

MSDE, IPE Global join hands to boost women-focused skilling across India

Guwahati: The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship) on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IPE Global Limited to strengthen a gender-responsive and future-ready skilling ecosystem for young women across the country.

The collaboration aims to improve programme design, raise women's participation in aspirational job roles, and create stronger linkages between skill training, employability and inclusive economic growth. The partnership will focus on addressing structural barriers faced by women, aligning training programmes with industry demand, and strengthening placement pathways through enhanced private sector engagement.

Speaking on the occasion, MSDE Secretary Debashree Mukherjee said women's skilling is central to India's inclusive growth and workforce



transformation. She said the partnership reflects the government's commitment to creating an enabling ecosystem where young women, particularly from underserved regions, can access dignified employment opportunities and support systems required to succeed in a changing economy.

As part of the initiative, a multilingual national awareness campaign will be rolled out to encourage women's participation in skilling and formal employment. The collaboration also includes gender-inclusive hiring commitments from employers and strengthened monitoring sys-

tems to support data-driven governance. Special focus will be given to MSDE's skilling programmes for adolescent girls to ensure outcome-oriented results.

In Guwahati, industry stakeholders see the initiative as timely, with local businesses and service sectors facing a growing demand for skilled women workers. Market players believe improved skilling and placement linkages could help bridge workforce gaps, support women's entry into formal employment, and contribute to steady economic activity in the region.

Organic India unveils wellness-focused Valentine's Day gift hampers

Guwahati: Ahead of Valentine's Day, Organic India, part of Tata Consumer Products Limited, has introduced a curated range of wellness-themed gifting hampers designed to promote mindful living and meaningful celebrations. The special "Valentine's Day Gifting Edit" features a selection of gift boxes that combine organic pantry essentials, herbal teas and wellness products, targeting consumers seeking healthier and thoughtful gifting alternatives.

Among the offerings, the Savoury Sweetheart Gift Box priced at ₹1,999 includes certified organic staples such as Himalayan multiflora honey, cow ghee, quinoa, brown rice, chia and flax seeds, jaggery powder, nuts, raisins and the brand's Tulsi detox kahwa, aimed at encouraging nourishing meal rituals. The Wooden Gift Box – 100 Tea Bags (₹1,299) presents assorted Tulsi tea variants including Original, Ginger, Masala Chai and Green Tea Classic, while the Exotic Brew Gift Box (₹1,079) features premium Tulsi loose-leaf blends paired with a stainless-steel infuser for tea enthusiasts.



Retailers in Guwahati report rising demand for wellness-centric gifting options, particularly during festive and seasonal occasions, with organic food and herbal tea hampers gaining popularity among urban consumers seeking premium yet health-focused gifts. Industry observers expect the trend to strengthen Valentine's Day sales in the region as conscious lifestyle choices continue to influence purchasing behaviour.

SEBI chief launches multilingual comic series to boost investor awareness

Guwahati: The CDSL Investor Protection Fund (CDSL IPF), in collaboration with Amar Chitra Katha, has launched a new investor education comic series aimed at simplifying financial concepts and strengthening awareness among investors. The series was unveiled by SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey at CDSL's 3rd Annual Symposium, Reimagine: Securities Market through Data Synergy.

Developed under the guidance of SEBI, the initiative translates complex financial topics into engaging story-based narratives designed to encourage informed participation in India's capital markets. The comics will be available in both digital and print formats and distributed through investor protection programmes in 12 languages, including English, Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Tamil,



and Telugu, to ensure wider reach across urban and rural regions.

SEBI Chairman Pandey said investor awareness is essential for building transparent and inclusive securities markets, noting that initiatives such as "Slam the Scam" and "Atmanirb HER" have already strengthened public confidence. CDSL MD and CEO Nehal Vora added that storytelling can make in-

vestor education more relatable and trustworthy, helping individuals make informed financial decisions.

In Guwahati, the multilingual format, particularly the inclusion of Assamese, is expected to improve financial literacy among first-time investors in the region, potentially encouraging greater participation from smaller towns in the Northeast capital market ecosystem.

Ashoka University offers scholarships to all young India fellows for 2026-27 cohort; final applications close March 23

Mumbai: Ashoka University has announced the opening of applications for the 16th cohort of its flagship Young India Fellowship (YIF) 2026-27, marking 15 years of the programme's impact. In a major accessibility push, the university confirmed that all selected Fellows will receive partial or full scholarships, supported by HDFC Bank. Applications are free and reviewed on a rolling basis, with the priority deadline on February 23, 2026, and the final deadline on March 23, 2026.

Instituted in 2011, the year-long residential programme offers a Postgraduate Diploma

in Interdisciplinary Studies, combining core and elective coursework, experiential learning, critical inquiry, and holistic engagement. Around 100 Fellows will be selected from applicants across academic disciplines, professional backgrounds, age groups, and nationalities. Eligible candidates must hold a recognised undergraduate degree by July 2026.

Vice Chancellor Somak Raychaudhury said the fellowship has produced leaders working across sectors globally, with a 2,400-strong alumni network contributing to government, academia, corporate sectors, entrepreneurship, and civil society.

Union Budget reinforces agriculture's central role in Viksit Bharat vision: Godrej Agrovet

Guwahati: Reacting to the Union Budget, Sunil Kataria, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer of Godrej Agrovet Ltd, said the proposals place strong emphasis on productivity, resilience and inclusive growth, once again reaffirming agriculture as a key pillar in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat.

Kataria said the targeted focus on livestock, fisheries and allied sectors signals a clear policy shift towards diversified

and income-resilient farm systems. He welcomed the introduction of loan-linked capital support for veterinary education, hospitals, diagnostics and breeding infrastructure, noting that the move would expand capacity and improve access to high-quality services across rural India.

He said future science-led interventions in cattle genetics and breeding could play a crucial role in accelerating livestock productivity and boosting

farm incomes. Kataria also appreciated the government's push towards technology-driven agriculture, particularly the introduction of a multilingual AI platform, which he said would enable customised, risk-aware advisory services at scale amid evolving climate and market conditions.

Highlighting fiscal measures, he welcomed the extension of tax deductions to primary cooperatives supplying cattle feed and cotton seed to federal

cooperatives and government organisations, saying it would strengthen formal input supply chains and improve farmer realisation.

According to Kataria, the Budget's calibrated approach integrating productivity, innovation, inclusion and institutional support lays a strong foundation for a future-ready agricultural ecosystem and reinforces agriculture's role as a long-term contributor to India's economic growth.

Bandhan Life launches iInvest Ultima ULIP, introduces Mid Cap Fund at Rs 10 NAV



Guwahati: Bandhan Life Insurance, the life insurance arm of the Bandhan Group, has launched a new Unit Linked Insurance Plan (ULIP) named iInvest Ultima along with a new Mid Cap Fund offering, aimed at helping customers build long-term wealth while ensuring financial protection. The New Fund Launch (NFL), available at a Net Asset Value (NAV) of ₹10, will remain open for subscription until February 18, 2026.

The iInvest Ultima plan provides access to Bandhan Life's 5-star and 4-star rated funds, which have outperformed industry benchmarks, along with features such as an Accidental Death Benefit Rider, loyalty rewards, and a return of 100% mortality charges from the 15th policy year. The plan targets customers aged 30-50 who are comfortable with market-linked investments and can invest ₹2 lakh or more annually. Women customers will receive an additional 0.5% premium allocation benefit for the first five policy years.

The Mid Cap Fund, benchmarked against the Nifty Midcap 150 Index, will invest in mid-sized companies across sectors such as financial services, industrials, healthcare, and capital goods, focusing on firms with strong balance sheets and scalable business models.

In Guwahati, financial advisors note growing interest among investors in ULIPs and mid-cap-focused funds, particularly among emerging middle-income households seeking long-term investment options that combine protection and market-linked growth opportunities.

Wedding Season boosts Godrej home locker sales; 20% growth expected on rising security demand

Guwahati: The Security Solutions business of Godrej Enterprises Group has projected robust growth in its home locker segment during the ongoing wedding season, with sales expected to rise by nearly 20 per cent, driven by increasing consumer preference for secure, long-term gifting and asset protection solutions.

The wedding season has emerged as a key consumption period for home security products, as families invest heavily in gold, jewellery, cash and important documents. With gold prices at elevated levels, the risk associated with storing valuables has increased, prompting households to prioritise secure in-home storage as part of wedding planning. Weddings, the company noted, often mark a phase of asset creation, making security a critical consideration.

Aligned with this trend, Godrej's Security Solutions business offers a wide range of home lockers that are significantly stronger than conventional cupboards. Designed to safeguard valuables from theft, fire and unauthorised access, these lockers blend with modern home interiors and cater to both compact urban homes and larger family residences. The products also address risks from insiders who may have easy access to homes during large social gatherings.

Pushkar Gokhale, Business Head, Security



Solutions, said the wedding season has become strategically important, as secure storage is increasingly integrated into jewellery and asset purchase decisions.

Beyond metros, demand is rising in Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns, which now contribute close to 30 per cent of the company's home locker business. Supported by a network of nearly 5,000 channel partners nationwide, the company is expanding availability and outreach to tap this growth.

In Guwahati, jewellers and electronics retailers report growing interest in home lockers during the wedding season, reflecting higher gold ownership and rising disposable incomes in Assam and the wider Northeast. Consumers in the city are increasingly viewing lockers not just as safety products but as essential household investments, positioning Guwahati as an emerging growth market for organised security solutions.

Axis Max Life holds Arunachal's first state insurance plan workshop to boost coverage

Guwahati: Axis Max Life Insurance Limited, formerly Max Life Insurance Company Limited, on Wednesday hosted the first-ever state-level workshop on the State Insurance Plan (SIP) in Arunachal Pradesh, marking a key step toward expanding insurance awareness and access in the state. Appointed by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) as the Lead Insurer (Life) for Arunachal Pradesh, the company is leading a coordinated effort to improve insurance penetration in the region.

The workshop was attended by Shri Satyajit Tripathi, Member (Distribution), IRDAI, along with senior officials from the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, including Karluk Ronya, Director, Accounts and Treasuries, and Nabam Rajesh, Deputy Director, Panchayati Raj. Senior representatives from Axis Max Life, including Managing Director and CEO Sumit Madan, were also present.

Addressing the gathering, Madan said the

initiative aims to simplify insurance and build long-term financial security at the household level, aligned with IRDAI's vision of "Insurance for All by 2047." The event also saw the release of the State Insurance Plan Report 2025, outlining a roadmap to universal coverage.

The workshop focused on local implementation of the "Bima Trinity" — Bima Sugam, Bima Vistar and Bima Vahak — with a special push to reach remote and underserved communities.

Developments in Arunachal Pradesh are closely tracked by insurers operating out of Guwahati, the region's key insurance and financial hub. With Guwahati-based offices often managing Northeast operations, increased awareness and policy uptake in Arunachal are expected to generate new business opportunities, strengthen distribution networks, and reinforce Guwahati's role as the gateway market for insurance growth across the Northeast.

Kenvue unveils dual hydration strategy with ORSL and eRZL brands in India



Guwahati: Kenvue has strengthened its presence in India's hydration segment by announcing a dual-brand strategy featuring ORSL and the newly introduced eRZL, aimed at addressing both diarrheal dehydration and everyday hydration needs. The company said the move supports its "Double Power for Complete Hydration" approach as dehydration continues to emerge as a major public health concern.

Under the strategy, ORSL will serve as the company's oral rehydration salts (ORS) portfolio based on the World Health Organization formula, available in ready-to-drink and powder formats to manage diarrheal dehydration. Meanwhile, effective January 2026, eRZL becomes the new brand name for the company's electrolyte drinks portfolio, targeting daily hydration and recovery from tiredness and exhaustion. The

improved eRZL composition offers faster hydration, 1.4 times more electrolytes, and eight times less sugar than the previous formulation, while combining sodium, potassium, chloride, vitamin C, and real fruit juice.

Manish Anandani, Managing Director-India, Kenvue, said the strategy reflects the company's continued focus on science-backed hydration solutions and expanding awareness around hydration for both illness and everyday care.

Guwahati is expecting rising demand for electrolyte beverages, particularly during summer months, as consumers increasingly shift toward low-sugar hydration solutions. Industry observers believe the introduction of differentiated products like ORSL and eRZL could intensify competition in the region's fast-growing hydration and wellness category.

CDSL hosts 'Reimagine' Symposium, highlights data-driven future of securities markets

Guwahati: Central Depository Services (India) Limited (CDSL) hosted the third edition of its annual symposium, "Reimagine: Securities Market through Data Synergy," bringing together policymakers, regulators, market infrastructure institutions and technology leaders to discuss the growing role of data in shaping India's securities markets. Central Depository Services (India) Limited said the event also marked the launch of the inaugural Reimagine Ideathon, rewarding five student teams with prizes worth ₹12 lakh.



Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Chairman of Securities and Exchange Board of India, who attended as Chief Guest, emphasised that "data is the new plumbing of capital markets," highlighting the importance of governance, security and quality of market data. The symposium also featured an AI-powered panelist providing real-time insights, reflecting the increasing integration of artificial intelligence in financial market decision-making.

A key highlight included the launch of the CDSL Investor Protection Fund's Amar Chitra Katha comic series in 12 languages to promote investor awareness. The Ideathon winner, Project Sahayak from Goa Institute of Management, secured the top ₹5-lakh prize among over 1,000 participating entries nationwide.

Initiatives focusing on investor education and data-driven infrastructure could further deepen retail participation in emerging regional markets such as Guwahati. With rising demat account penetration in the Northeast, enhanced investor awareness programmes and digital financial infrastructure are expected to support broader capital market participation from the region.

Budget 2026–27 lays Yuva Shakti-led roadmap for Viksit Bharat 2047: Jayant Chaudhary

Guwahati: Union Budget 2026–27 presents a confident and inclusive roadmap for India's next phase of growth, with a strong focus on youth, skills and future-ready sectors, said Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Minister of State for Education Jayant Chaudhary.

Welcoming the Budget, Chaudhary credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's approach of balancing ambition with responsibility. He said the Budget, anchored in the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, prioritises productivity, competitiveness and cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence, while maintaining fiscal discipline and strategic investments.

He highlighted a major push to manufacturing, MSMEs and services, with investments across biopharma, semiconductors, electronics, textiles under SAMARTH 2.0, chemicals, capital goods

and sports manufacturing. Measures such as a three-pronged MSME framework, a ₹10,000 crore SME Growth Fund, TReDS-based liquidity and "Corporate Mitras" are expected to strengthen domestic value chains.

Chaudhary underscored the Budget's decisive commitment to skill development, noting a 62 per cent increase in allocation for the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to ₹9,885.80 crore. He said NSQF-aligned programmes, caregiver training, sports ecosystems and industry-linked pathways would bridge education, employment and entrepreneurship.

The Budget's focus on agriculture, services, social inclusion and sports including initiatives like AI-backed Bharat Vistaar, SheMarts, Biopharma SHAKTI, ISM 2.0, Khelo India Mission and Sports Edge Meerut positions it as a national mission document driving sustainable and inclusive growth.

Hunter Hood Festival brings Royal Enfield street culture celebration to Shillong



Shillong: Royal Enfield expanded its community-driven engagement strategy as its street culture platform Hunter Hood arrived in Shillong this weekend, spotlighting the city's vibrant music, art and youth culture while strengthening the brand's urban lifestyle positioning. Inspired by the Hunter 350 motorcycle designed for agile city riding the initiative aims to build cultural touch points that connect riders, artists and local creative communities.

Shillong, widely recognised for its independent music and underground cultural movements, hosted a multi-format festival featuring BMX and skateboarding showcases, street football zones, interactive challenges, and custom motorcycle displays by JD Customs. Skate sessions curated by the Shillong Skate Mag community and live graffiti by the Mixed Media Art Crew, along with Art of Motorcycling 2024 winner Amit Kumar, highlighted the

city's growing creative ecosystem.

The event also featured indigenous dance performances led by the Shlem Institute of Music alongside hip-hop cyphers anchored by dancer Iamon Kharjana, while artworks by Gauhati Art Project founder Abhishek Choudhury and installations by Sameer Hazari added visual depth. A flea market showcasing Northeast-based independent labels and curated food experiences supported local entrepreneurship.

Music performances by Reble, Grammy-nominated artist Raja Kumari, Nagaland's Trance Effect, and several electronic and folk acts reinforced the festival's regional cultural appeal. With earlier editions held in Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai, Hunter Hood continues to serve as a strategic experiential marketing platform strengthening Royal Enfield's branded community engagement across India.

Bajaj General Insurance launches 'NRInsure' add-on with 35% premium discount for NRIs

Mumbai: Bajaj General Insurance Limited has launched 'NRInsure', a new add-on to its flagship retail health insurance product, My Health Care Plan (MHCP), offering a 35% discount on the base premium for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs). The initiative aims to address the long-standing requirement of Indians living abroad who wish to maintain health insurance coverage in India.

The add-on can be selected at the time of purchasing a new MHCP policy. Eligible customers can avail the discount by declaring their NRI or OCI status and submitting prescribed documents. While the discount applies to the base premium, all features, benefits, and waiting periods under the original policy remain unchanged, ensuring continuity of coverage.

Amarnath Saxena, Chief Technical Officer – Commercial, Bajaj General Insurance, said the offering is designed to simplify healthcare planning for NRIs who continue to stay connected to India and may plan a return in the future. He noted that NRInsure supports customers seeking familiarity and continuity in their health coverage while residing overseas.

Tata AIA launches Enhanced Value Index Funds to boost long-term wealth creation with life protection

Guwahati: Tata AIA Life Insurance on Tuesday announced the launch of two new value-focused equity funds Enhanced Value Index Fund and Enhanced Value Index Pension Fund aimed at helping investors build long-term wealth while benefiting from integrated life insurance protection. The new fund offer (NFO) will remain open from February 9 to 16, 2026, with policies issued at a Net Asset Value (NAV) of ₹10 on February 16.

The funds track the BSE 500 Enhanced Value 50 Customised Index, providing diversified exposure to 50 large-, mid-, and small-cap companies selected using key valuation parameters. The pension variant is available exclusively through

Tata AIA's unit-linked pension plans, helping policyholders create retirement savings alongside life cover. As of December 31, 2025, Tata AIA's assets under management stood at ₹1.45 lakh crore, reflecting a 21% year-on-year growth.

Commenting on the launch, Chief Investment Officer Harshad Patil said, "Equity markets reward patience and discipline over time. Our Enhanced Value Index strategy offers a systematic, fundamentals-driven approach that makes long-term investing transparent and accessible."

There is a growing interest in index-based and value-oriented investment products across regional financial centres including Guwahati



where rising retail participation and increased awareness of market-linked insurance solutions are driving demand for diversified, long-term investment options. The new funds are expected to attract investors seeking disciplined wealth creation combined with financial protection.

J Infratech secures highway maintenance contract for NH-37 stretch in Assam

Guwahati: J Infratech Limited has secured a contract from a Central Public Sector Undertaking (CPSU) for the repair, maintenance, and improvement of riding quality on selected stretches of NH-37 (Old) in Assam. The project was awarded following the company's successful bid, with the CPSU issuing a formal Letter of Acceptance under FY 2025–26 (2nd Call).

The identified highway stretch plays a key role in facilitating daily commuter movement and ensuring smooth transportation of goods across the region. Officials noted that improving riding quality is essential for enhancing traffic reliability, reducing vehicle operating stress, and strengthening overall transport efficiency. The project forms part of broader infrastructure efforts aimed at maintaining and upgrading critical highway networks through timely rehabilitation and targeted improvements.

Commenting on the development, Rajat Jaggi, AGM – Planning & Monitoring at J Infratech Limited, said the project reflects the company's continued commitment to sustaining vital road infrastructure and delivering work within stipulated timelines while maintaining high-quality standards.

In Guwahati, improved highway conditions are expected to support faster cargo movement, benefiting logistics operators, wholesale traders, and supply chains linked to the city's expanding commercial hubs. Better connectivity could also reduce transit delays, improving distribution efficiency for goods moving in and out of the region.

J Infratech has executed multiple infrastructure projects across the North-East, and the latest contract further strengthens its engagement with central government highway programs.

Amazon Prime achieves fastest delivery speeds in India, expands non-metro growth

Mumbai: Amazon announced that 2025 marked its fastest delivery performance for Prime members in India, with more than 55 crore products delivered the same or next day, reflecting a 40% year-on-year increase. The company said Prime members saved more than twice the annual membership cost on average, while the top 10% of members saved over eight times the membership value through free delivery, deals, and cashback benefits.

Amazon reported that over 70% of new Prime signups came from non-metro cities, highlighting growing adoption beyond major urban centres. Members were also found to shop five times more frequently than non-Prime customers. The company's ultra-fast delivery service, Amazon Now, currently operating in parts of Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, and Mumbai, is driving higher engagement, with Prime members tripling their shopping



frequency after using the service.

Abhinav Agarwal, Director and Head of Prime, Amazon India, said the company continues to focus on "speed, unmatched value and convenience" for customers. Supporting this expansion, Amazon India invested over ₹2,000 crore in 2025 to strengthen logistics infrastructure, enhance safety, and introduce new technology across its operations network.

Prime memberships in India are available in multiple tiers, offering shopping, delivery, and entertainment benefits across the Amazon ecosystem.