

**6** WORLD

- Putin: Russia prefers Biden to Trump because he's 'more experienced and predictable'
- Gunfire at Chiefs' Super Bowl celebration kills 1 and wounds nearly two-dozen

**8** NATION

- Electoral bonds brought for transparency in poll funding, we respect SC verdict: BJP
- Panel of 3 Union ministers to hold talks with farmer leaders in Chandigarh

**Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee**

**Prosperous Farmers, Prosperous Nation**

**5 fold rise in agriculture budget in last 10 years; Loan facility of ₹ 1 lakh crore under Agriculture Infrastructure Fund**

Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

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## No need for Oppn in state, says CM

Himanta called upon the Cong to cease internal conflicts and focus towards the development

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday asserted that the ruling government's performance has rendered the need for opposition irrelevant in the state.

Speaking to the media in Jorhat's Lahdoigarh, Sarma also claimed that all Congress MLAs are eager to join the saffron camp, despite the BJP's limited capacity to accommodate them.

"There is no need for any opposition or Congress in the state when the ruling government is consistently delivering positive results," Sarma emphasised.

However, the chief minister noted that in a democracy, if the ruling party engages in misconduct, the Opposition can strengthen and challenge them. Predicting that all members of the Congress party would eventually transition to the BJP, Sarma said, "Many who are vocal in the press are the ones who will later join the BJP."

Later, speaking on the Assam's prevailing 'chanda' (donation) and



'andolan' (protest) culture, CM Sarma emphasised that progress in the state hinges on eliminating these practices.

"Assam will emerge as one of the most progressive states in the country only when we bid farewell to protest-driven governance and reliance on donations," he stated.

Sarma further called upon the Congress to cease internal conflicts and redirect their focus towards the development of the state.

It is worth mentioning that two Congress MLAs -- Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Basanta Das -- have decided to "support the government" without leaving the grand old party now.

Purkayastha was the working president of the opposition party and Das was a minister in the Tarun Gogoi government. As per Sarma, Purkayastha, who resigned as the Working President of Congress on (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## 'PM to unveil 125 feet statue of Bir Lachit Borphukan in March'

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will unveil the imposing 125 feet statue of Bir Lachit Borphukan at Lahdoigarh, Hologapar in Jorhat in the first week of March this year, said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday.

"The state government has extended an invitation to the Prime Minister to dedicate the astounding statue of Bir Lachit and pay tribute to him," an official statement quoted Sarma as saying.

He further informed that the Prime Minister Modi during his proposed visit to Jorhat will also lay the foundation of Sivasagar Medical College and Hospital and ceremoniously initiate the Griha Pravesh ceremony for 5.5 lakh homes constructed under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana scheme for the state of Assam.

In this regard, the chief minister also visited Jorhat to personally oversee the preparations for these momentous events. "He visited Lachit Moidam Memorial and Cultural Complex at Lahdoigarh and took stock of the progress of its construction. He also took stock and expressed satisfaction over the progress of the statue of Bir Lachit Borphukan and its peripheral areas," the statement added.

Sarma also held a meeting with the engineers of Ahluwalia Contract (India) Limited, the executing agency and asked them to expedite their work for unveiling the statue. He asked them to ensure completion of its finishing touches by the end of this month.

Besides this, Sarma further visited Meleng Meteli Pothar, the proposed venue of the Prime Minister's meeting and took stock of all round preparations to be undertaken for the meeting. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## India-Qatar ties growing stronger and stronger: PM

**DOHA, Feb 15:** India-Qatar ties are growing "stronger and stronger" and both sides are looking at collaborating in futuristic sectors, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday following his talks with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani that came days after the Gulf nation freed eight former Indian Navy personnel who were sentenced to death.

Modi described his meeting with the Emir as "wonderful" and said ways to deepen cooperation across various sectors were discussed.

"Had a wonderful meeting with HH Sheikh @TamimBinHamad. We reviewed the full range of India-Qatar relations and discussed ways to deepen cooperation across various sectors. Our nations also look forward to collaborating in futuristic sectors which will benefit our planet," Modi said on 'X'.

The discussions centred around bolstering bilateral relations, with a focus on deepening cooperation in areas of trade and investment, energy, space, cultural and people-to-people ties.

"India and Qatar ties are growing stronger and stronger!," Modi said in another post along with photographs of ceremonial welcome accorded to him in Doha.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal described the meeting between Modi and the Emir as "productive"



and said the prime minister thanked the Qatari leader for the welfare of the Indian community in that country.

Modi arrived in this Qatari capital city last night after concluding a two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates.

"The two leaders held wide-ranging discussions on bolstering bilateral relations, with a focus on deepening trade & investment, energy, space, cultural & people to people ties," Jaiswal said on 'X'.

"They also exchanged perspectives on regional and global issues. PM thanked Amir for the welfare of the Indian community in Qatar," he said.

Shortly after his arrival in Doha last night, Modi met Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. Abdulrahman is Qatar's foreign minister as well. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

সম্মেলন সন্মানে  
অসম চৰকাৰ

মিছন বসুন্ধৰা ২.০ৰ সামৰণি অনুষ্ঠান  
আৰু  
নতুন সেৱাৰে  
মিছন বসুন্ধৰা ৩.০ৰ প্ৰস্তুতিৰ আৰম্ভণি

মুখ্য অতিথি  
ড° হিমন্ত বিশ্ব শৰ্মা  
মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, অসম

বিশিষ্ট অতিথি  
শ্ৰী যোগেন মোহন  
মন্ত্রী, ৰাজহ আৰু দুৰ্যোগ ব্যৱস্থাপনা বিভাগ, অসম চৰকাৰ

স্থান - শ্ৰীমন্ত শংকৰদেৱৰ আন্তৰ্জাতিক প্ৰেক্ষাগৃহ, শ্ৰীমন্ত শংকৰদেৱৰ কলাক্ষেত্ৰ, পাঞ্জাবাৰী, গুৱাহাটী  
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ৰাজহ আৰু দুৰ্যোগ ব্যৱস্থাপনা বিভাগ  
অসম চৰকাৰ

তথ্য আৰু জনসংযোগ সঞ্চালকালয়, অসমৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত

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অসম বার্তা ছাৰ্কুলাইব কবিতলৈ ৭৬৩৬৮৩৪৯৪৩ ত Assam লিখি বাটছপ কবক

Janasanyog/D/17842/23/16-Feb-24

# Assam to get ₹ 25000 cr semiconductor plant

## Digital India #futureSKILLS Summit in Guwahati

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 15: Union minister of state for electronics and IT Rajevee Chandrasekhar on Thursday said that Assam is soon going to have a Rs 25,000 cr semiconductor packaging plant.

He was speaking at the Digital India #futureSKILLS Summit held in Guwahati. "A semiconductor plant will be here in Assam. This is the proposal from Tata is being actively evaluated," he said.

Assuring the student community Chandrasekhar said that after coming up of this plant, those from NE or Assam having aspirations to work in semiconductor space will not have to go to countries like Taiwan, USA or any other countries in search of jobs.

"In few years vibrant opportunities will be here in the state," he said. He said that in the next 4-5 years India is going to be global spectrum of semiconductor development.

Earlier speaking at the same event Assam education minister speaking at the same event said that Assam government has allotted 160 acre of land for the purpose of setting up of semiconductor industry nearby Guwahati. He further stated that Assam government would soon allot a plot of land to National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT) in Guwahati have a full-fledged institute.

Chandrasekhar further said that it was not enough to have education however, it was extremely important to be skilled. He stressed on the importance of youth having experience to be employable and successful.

Chandrasekhar shedding light upon skills in the future he said that youth skills is related to emerging world of opportunities.

"These future skills are related to AI, semi-conductors, electronics, automobiles, cyber security among others," he said.

"The summit is being held in the country for the first time and I have been asked why it is being held here and not in Hyderabad or Delhi. The reason is that under the dynamic leadership of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, a semiconductor plant will come up very soon in the state, allowing interested youth to find employment opportunities without hav-



Union Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajevee Chandrasekhar speaking at a podium during the Digital India #futureSKILLS Summit in Guwahati.

ing to leave," the Union minister said. Chandrasekhar emphasised that due to the leadership and policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, various opportunities have emerged in sectors like Artificial Intelligence, semiconductors, electronics, cybersecurity, and internet technology.

"I want to tell the youth present here that due to the leadership and policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there are many opportunities which will emerge before the students and as such they have to study and develop their skills," he said.

Chandrasekhar highlighted the participation of globally renowned technology companies like NBD, Intel, AMD, HCL, Wipro, and IBM at the summit, all conveying a message of abundant job opportunities available for skilled individuals.

The objective of the summit is to motivate students to understand the requirements of these companies, develop their skills, and seize the opportunities presented, he added.

He mentioned that various universities in the country, including IIT Bombay and IIT Guwahati, will skill the youth of the region in various technological sectors.

Additionally, the summit aims to ensure that the youth of Northeast India have access to equal employment opportunities in these sec-

tors, aligning with Modi's vision for balanced regional development.

Reflecting on the economic progress made in the last decade, Chandrasekhar highlighted India's transformation from being labeled as part of the 'fragile five' to becoming one of the top economies globally.

The digital economy, which was at 4 per cent of the GDP before 2014, has now risen to 11 per cent, with projections to reach 20% by 2026-27. He emphasized the shift towards a self-reliant India, where technology is being manufactured domestically and exported, contributing to India's journey towards becoming one of the top three economies globally.

"We are marching towards a 'Viksit Bharat' and will be among the top three economies of the world soon and this will be possible by the youth of the country who must be involved and get themselves skilled", Chandrasekhar said.

The first session of Digital India future SKILLS Summit laid importance on the skill set the youth of the country needs in order to become technologically empowered to get ready for jobs.

The panelists discussed on the topic "Semi-conductor India Future Skills".

The session was chaired by Qualcomm engineering senior director Sumit Goswami. Bangkok University Center of Research Di-

rector Dr. Karel Stercks stated that with proper guidance the youth of the country can become technologically laden to get the desired skills. In this regard he said that chip developing companies offering internships to youth can help them in the semiconductor industry.

He further said that universities joining hands with companies will help students to get first hand training in chip making and semiconductor industry.

He warned students against being over-enthusiastic but rather motivated and put in efforts.

Russia based Optimizing Technologies CEO Alexander Drozdov said that research and development in chip making field will help the youth to cover extra mile in the vast world of semiconductor industry.

Drozdov urged students community with required training and by acquired desired skill set they can get employed in space companies and AI companies. He said that specialization is much important along with being educated.

AICTE chairman prof Dr T G Sitharam urged students to enroll into training to get ready for jobs. Sitharam further said that youth of the country in the present scenario don't have to go for internships in other country as the many avenues are currently opening up in the India to cater to the need of internship for students.

Siemens EDA vice president and country manager Ruchir Dixit suggested that students should believe in yourself and by using the platform that is available, to take them a long way to enable themselves digitally to make a mark in the semiconductor industry.

The panelists laid stress on the fact that the semi conductor industry that would have a presence in India in years to come there will be huge requirement of semiconductor engineers. They felt that as long as the youth of the country is motivated India can become chip capital in the world.

Shastra University vice chancellor Dr S Vaidhyasubramaniam and IIT Hyderabad prof Siva Rama Krishna Vanzari were also present during the panel discussion. (with inputs from PTI)

## Exports rise 3.12 pc to USD 36.92 bn in January

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** The country's exports increased 3.12 per cent on-year to USD 36.92 billion in January, according to the data released by the government on Thursday. Imports rose by about 3 per cent year-on-year to USD 54.41 billion in January this year.

Trade deficit in January, 2024 stood at USD 17.49 billion. (PTI)

## LOST

I lost my HSLC Admit Card bearing Roll - B22-0459 No.- 0302 with Registration No.- 15/RP/0022/711527/20 around Bakalia Market in the morning at 10 am on February 15.

Sarmirjeng Teron, Vill.- Longki Engti Village, PO- Disobai PS- Bakalia, Karbi Anglong, Assam, 782482

## RUNNING OF SPECIAL TRAINS BETWEEN KANYAKUMARI-DIBRUGARH-KANYAKUMARI

It has been decided to run fortnightly Superfast TOD special trains between Kanyakumari-Dibrugarh-Kanyakumari in the vacant path of Train No. 22503/22504 Kanyakumari-Dibrugarh-Kanyakumari SF Express. The details are given below:

Train No. 06103	Train No. 06104					
From Kanyakumari on 16-02-2024, 01-03-2024, 15-03-2024 & 29-03-2024 (Friday) Trips= 04	From Dibrugarh on 21-02-2024, 06-03-2024, 20-03-2024 & 03-04-2024 (Wednesday) Trips= 04					
DAYS	ARR.	DEP.	STATION	ARR.	DEP.	DAYS
Friday	---	17.25	Kanyakumari	21.55	---	Saturday
Saturday	09.55	10.00	Katpadi Jn.	05.10	05.15	Friday
	23.45	00.05	Visakhapatnam	15.30	15.50	Thursday
	00.05	00.15	New Jalpaiguri	14.55	15.05	Wednesday
	05.33	05.35	Goalpara Town	09.00	09.02	Tuesday
Monday	12.08	12.13	Lumding Jn.	03.05	03.10	Monday
	13.38	13.45	Dimapur	01.35	01.42	Sunday
	19.35	19.45	New Tinsukia	20.40	20.50	Saturday
	20.50	---	Dibrugarh	---	19.55	Friday

Composition: AC- 3 Tier (Three), AC- 3 Tier Economy Class (Twelve), Sleeper Class (Two), General Second Class (Two), SLRD- (One), Luggage Van (One) = 21 coaches.

Train No. 06105	Train No. 06106					
From Kanyakumari on 23-02-2024, 08-03-2024, 22-03-2024 & 05-04-2024 (Friday) Trips= 04	From Dibrugarh on 28-02-2024, 13-03-2024, 27-03-2024 & 10-04-2024 (Wednesday) Trips= 04					
DAYS	ARR.	DEP.	STATION	ARR.	DEP.	DAYS
Friday	---	17.25	Kanyakumari	21.55	---	Saturday
Saturday	09.55	10.00	Katpadi Jn.	05.10	05.15	Friday
	23.45	00.05	Visakhapatnam	15.30	15.50	Thursday
	00.05	00.15	New Jalpaiguri	14.55	15.05	Wednesday
	05.33	05.35	Goalpara Town	09.00	09.02	Tuesday
Monday	12.08	12.13	Lumding Jn.	03.05	03.10	Monday
	13.38	13.45	Dimapur	01.35	01.42	Sunday
	19.35	19.45	New Tinsukia	20.40	20.50	Saturday
	20.50	---	Dibrugarh	---	19.55	Friday

Composition: AC- 2 Tier (One), AC- 3 Tier (One), Sleeper Class (Three), General Second Class (Sixteen), SLRD-2 = 23 IRS coaches.

Others commercial stoppages: Nagarcoll Jn., Thiruvananthapuram Central, Kollam Jn., Chengannur, Kottayam, Ernakulam Town, Aluva, Thiruv. Palakkad, Coimbatore Jn., Tiruppur, Erode Jn., Salem Jn., Renigunta Jn., Nellore, Ongole, Vijayawada Jn., Eluru, Rajamundry, Samalkot Jn., Duvvada, Vizianagram Jn., Srikakulam Road, Palasa, Brahmapur, Khurda Road Jn., Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Bhadrakh, Balasore, Kharagpur Jn., Dankuni, Bardhaman, Rampur Hat, Malda Town, Kishanganj, Jalpaiguri Road, Mathabhanga, New Cooch Behar, New Alipurduar, Kokrajhar, New Bongaigaon, Guwahati, Jagji Road, Hojai, Diphu, Furkating Jn., Mariani Jn., Simalguri Jn. & Naharkatya.

General Manager (Operations)  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
Serving Customers With A Smile

## HDFC Bank reports robust growth in home loan business

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 15: HDFC Bank, India's largest private sector bank, has announced significant growth in its Home Loan Business following the merger of HDFC Ltd with itself. The Home Loan business has experienced stable and healthy double-digit year-on-year growth for two consecutive quarters, ending December 31, 2023. The bank recorded a sequential growth of 3.6%, the highest among its peers in home loans. It has seen a substantial increase in savings accounts for incremental disbursements, rising from 35% to 80%. This shift highlights a stronger digital connection with incremental customers. Market share has also grown approximately by 18% to 20% on incremental disbursements following the merger, showcasing robust growth.

The bank's strategy includes a renewed focus on the self-employed segment and expansion of product offerings through banking surrogates and GST programs. As for the future plans, it includes launching seamless straight-through journeys for Home Refurbishment Loans by mid-March and a Home Saver product by April 2024.

Arvind Kapil, country head, Mortgage Banking, Home Loan, LAP, HDFC Bank, emphasized the bank's success in generating CASA, with around 80% of incremental disbursements now going to customers with an HDFC Bank savings account. He highlighted the Home Loan Business as both an asset and liability generator, contributing to a stronger customer connect and higher stickiness quotient with the bank.

## Gold slips ₹ 80; silver rallies ₹ 600

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** Gold prices slipped ₹ 80 to ₹ 62,270 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a fall in precious metal's prices in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had ended at ₹ 62,350 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

However, silver rallied ₹ 600 to ₹ 74,600 per kilogram, while it had closed at ₹ 74,000 per kg in the previous close.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 62,270 per 10 grams, down by ₹ 80, taking bearish cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 1,993 per ounce, down by USD 2 from the previous close.

However, silver was trading higher at USD 22.50 per ounce, while it had settled at USD 21.97 per ounce in the previous trade. (PTI)

## HONOR launches X9b smartphone series

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 15: HONOR has unveiled its latest addition to the market, the globally acclaimed X Series line-up, introducing the HONOR X9b on Thursday. With this release, HONOR aims to elevate the consumer experience across all segments by offering unparalleled display quality, extended battery life, and optimized software performance to cater to diverse user needs. In addition to the HONOR X9b 5G smartphone, the brand has also introduced the HONOR CHOICE X5, focusing on superior audio, and the HONOR CHOICE Smartwatch equipped with the HONOR Health app for fitness tracking, aiming to establish a connected ecosystem in India. The HONOR X9b boasts innovative features, including the HONOR Ultra-Bounce Anti-drop 360° Display, ensuring exceptional durability and stability. With airbag cushioning

technology and an innovative shock-absorbing structure, the phone offers impressive resistance to drops up to 1.5 meters, providing 360° protection to all six faces and four corners, even on hard surfaces like marble.

The device also houses a powerful 5800mAh battery in a sleek design, ensuring users can go through their day without constantly worrying about running out of power. Additionally, the HONOR X9b prioritizes user comfort with dynamic light and hardware-level low blue light technology to reduce eye fatigue. Featuring a 6.78-inch display with a 120Hz panel supporting an impressive 1.5K resolution (429 PPI), 1.07 billion colors, and 100% DCI-P3, the HONOR X9b delivers smooth, sharp visuals filled with intricate detail. As an introductory offer, HONOR is also providing a complimentary Charger worth ₹ 699 free of cost with the purchase of the HONOR X9b.

## Nxtra to procure 140,208 MWh renewable energy

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 15: Nxtra by Airtel, one of India's leading data centre companies recently announced a power-wheeling agreement with Ampln and Amplus Energy to procure an additional 140,208 MWh of renewable energy. With this, Nxtra has enhanced its existing commitment of reducing its carbon footprint through renewable energy sources annually by ~ 99,547 tCO2e.

As per the agreement, Ampln Energy and Amplus Energy will set up captive solar and wind power plants of 48 MWdc and 24.3 MW, respectively for Nxtra's data centres in Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. The 25-year agreements are in line with Nxtra's commitment to achieving its net-zero target of 2031 and further strengthen its credentials as India's largest chain of green data centres in the country.

## Trade gap shrinks to 9-month low Exports rise 3.12 pc in January despite Red Sea crisis

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** India's exports rose to a three-month high of 3.12 per cent to USD 36.92 billion in January despite global uncertainties including the Red Sea crisis, while the trade deficit narrowed to a nine-month low of USD 17.49 billion, the government data released on Thursday showed.



After recording negative growth for two months in a row, imports grew by about 3 per cent to USD 54.41 billion in January. The previous low in trade deficit -- the difference between imports and exports -- was recorded in April 2023 at USD 15.24 billion. In January 2023, it was USD 17.03 billion.

Crude oil imports rose by 4.33 per cent to about USD 16.56 billion during the month under review. Gold imports jumped by about 174 per cent in January to USD 1.9 billion.

Cumulatively, exports during April-January this fiscal dipped by 4.89 per cent to USD 353.92 billion. Imports contracted by 6.71 per cent to USD 561.12 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 207.2 billion in the ten-month period of this fiscal as against USD 229.37 billion in April-January 2022-23.

Crude oil imports declined by about 15.91 per cent to USD 146.75 billion in April-January 2023-24 while gold imports surged 301.7 per cent to about USD

38 billion. Briefing reporters on the data, commerce secretary Sunil Barthwal said that despite the Red Sea crisis, recession in economies of advanced countries, and falling commodity prices, India has recorded "positive growth in merchandise exports in January".

Barthwal said that he has held three meetings with exporters, concerned ministries and stake holders on the Red Sea crisis.

The objective was to help the exporters navigate the difficult situation created in the Red Sea.

"We also try to tell banks that whatever maximum credit can be given during this period to our exporters that should be extended. Exim bank and ECGC was told not to increase insurance premium rates.

This overall positive atmosphere which we create...has helped in (promoting) the export growth," he told reporters here.

"I assure you that we will be continuing our efforts by working with them, so that in the coming year also we are able to see a positive growth in our exports," he said.

The commerce ministry has also set up a task force on non-tariff barriers to help exporters get greater market access.

The task force will continue to work and "I am sure that it will help to push exports," Barthwal said, adding the ministry is also focusing on new products and new territories.

"We are happy to say there are huge number of products we have been able to push for the first time. We are trying to create much larger basket for ourselves in terms of our exports," he added. (PTI)

## SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDERS

Sealed tender affixing non refundable court fee of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and twenty five paisa) only are invited in plain papers from the Govt. registered contractors of Agriculture Department in class I, II & III category, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the work stated below. The tender will be accepted up to 3.00P.M. on 21-02-2024 and will be opened on the same date and place at 3.30 P.M. vide A/A No. BTC/Agri. (RKVY)-15/2023-24/77, dtd. 20/06/2023

Sl. No.	Name of works	Pin point	Qty.	Tender value (Approx.) (Rs.)	Time of completion of works	Earnest money	Remarks
1	"Promotion of Mushroom Farming" under RKVY-RAFTAAR for the year, 2023-24 in Baksa district	Ranjit Basumatary, S/O. Jatin Basumatary, Vill. Chanbarikhoti, VCDC- Chanbarikhoti, ADO- Mushalpur, Dist.- Baksa	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days	2% (1% in case of S.T./SC./O.B.C./O.B.C.)	
2		Dhanjit Basumatary, S/O-Naren Basumatary, Vill. Barkuchijar, VCDC Punansripur, ADO. Barama, Dist.- Baksa	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		
3		Asad Ali, S/O- Suleman Ali, Vill.- Kaljar, VCDC- Barama, ADO- Barama, Dist.- Baksa	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		
4		Sofiya Begum, S/O- Insuf Ali, Vill.- Kaljar, VCDC- Barama, ADO- Barama, Dist.- Baksa	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		
5		Lanke Barman, S/O- Dhaneswar Barman, Vill.- Allia, VCDC Chaibari, ADO- Mushalpur, Dist.- Baksa	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		
6		Nabajyoti Talukdar, S/O- Tankeswar Talukdar, Vill.- Subansiri, VCDC- Narayanpur, ADO- Subankhata, Dist.- Baksa	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		
7	"Promotion of Mushroom Farming" under RKVY-RAFTAAR for the year, 2023-24 in Tamulpur district	Sri Raju Rabha, S/O- Babul Rabha, Vill.- Mazgari, Block- Ghilajhar, ADO- Nagrijuji, Dist.- Tamulpur	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		
8		Smt. Basanti Daimary, W/O- Rabiram Boro, Vill.- Hastinagar (Goiban), Block- Ghilajhar, ADO- Nagrijuji, Dist.- Tamulpur	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		
9		Sri Kumud Kalita, S/O- Chandri Ram Kalita, Vill.- Gema, Block- Tamulpur, ADO- Tamulpur, Dist.- Tamulpur	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		
10		Sri Amil Mandal, S/O- Hiralal Mandal, Vill.- Khandikar, Block- Chiknibari, ADO- Tamulpur, Dist.- Tamulpur	1 No.	2,95,486.00	30 days		

## Terms & Conditions:-

- Rates are to be quoted on flat percentage basis on above/ below/ as per on schedule of rates of CPWD 2020-21, values of the work.
- Selected contractors will have to enter to an agreement in F-2 Form.
- Earnest money needs to be deposited in the form of Fixed deposit/ Bank draft etc.
- Rates are to be quoted both, in figure and in words, clearly and legibly.
- The undersigned does not bind him to accept the lowest quoted rate and reserves the right to reject any/all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.
- If there happens to be a holiday on the stipulated date, the tenders will be received and open on the next working day.
- Payment will be made to the contractors subject to availability of fund received from the Govt. of Assam/BTC authority under the specified head of account.
- Latest copies of Labour License/PAN Card/GST etc. and updated registration certificate must be enclosed with the sealed tender.
- Detail estimates and schedule of rates can be seen in the office during office hours.
- GST/incomeTax etc. as applicable will be deducted at source.
- Earnest money against the work in form of FDR/ Call Deposit from any Nationalized Bank duly pledge to the undersigned will have to be submitted along with Tenders as per criteria.
- Each Tenderer shall submit attested Xerox copy of the financial sound certificate along with the tender and other relevant documents.
- Tenders/Their authorised representatives may be present at the time of opening of Tender etc.

Sd/-  
Executive Engineer (Agriculture),  
Kokrajhar Division, BTC, Kokrajhar.  
IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1387

## Collaborative effort aims to reduce accidents and promote traffic ethics

# Road safety awareness program conducted in Hojai

**HT Correspondent**

**HOJAI, Feb 15:** As part of the ongoing Road Safety Month-2024, an awareness program was held at Arunoday Senior Secondary School and GCC Junior College, Rampur, Hojai on Tuesday to enhance road safety awareness among the masses with a resolute commitment to control accident-related injuries and mortality in Hojai district.

The program was jointly organised by Arunoday Senior Secondary School and GCC Junior College, Rampur, Hojai, in collaboration with the District Transport Office, Hojai district. The DTO and enforcement officers of the District Transport Office were government officials present at the program. Students from class five onwards up to eleven, teaching staff, drivers of the school vans, and the principal and chairman of the educational institution participated in the program.

The program began with the felicitation of the government officials by the school authority with tilak and phulam gamosa. Following this, Dr Prodig Kumar Sahoo, the principal of the institution, delivered a speech. Dr Sahoo emphasised the challenges faced by everyone in society regarding transportation in their day-to-day lives. He highlighted the importance of realising road safety to reduce the number of injuries occurring on the roads, emphasising that as part of society, schools



must incorporate road safety rules as an inseparable part of education. Referring to the quote 'Today's children are tomorrow's citizens', Dr Sahoo highlighted the expectation for a better future and requested government officials present at the program to deliver speeches on road safety for students and teachers, enriching them with valuable information on the topic.

Addressing the awareness program, the DTO, Gautom Barman, stated that road safety is among the top priorities of the administration, and concerted efforts are being made to ensure an efficient traffic management system for the

smooth and safe flow of traffic in Hojai district. Highlighting the alarming surge in road accidents and fatalities, the DTO called upon everyone to play a key role in road safety awareness by sensitising people, particularly the youth, about road safety ethics and strictly adhering to traffic rules to save precious lives.

The DTO also said that the objective of National Road Safety Month is to inculcate responsible road behaviour among citizens, making the district a model for traffic management with a commitment to reducing accident-related injuries in the entire locality. They presented statistics on road

accidents and the subsequent loss of precious lives, stressing the need for a comprehensive approach to tackle this vital concern by working together to change the narrative.

The principal and the district transport officer appealed to everyone present at the program to adhere to everything essential for road safety to minimise incidents in society. The program concluded with students and teachers committing to wear helmets while riding on two-wheelers and to motivate their near and dear ones to do the same, emphasising the value of individual life for each family and society.

## Left parties rally against alleged anti-farmer policies



**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Feb 15:** Extending support to the proposed 'Bharat Bandh' call by the Trade Union Federation, All India Karmachari Federation, and Sanjukta Krishan Morcha against the alleged anti-farmer policies of the Union government on Friday, the Communist Party of India organised a demonstration in front of the District Commissioner's Office in Sivasagar on Thursday, keeping in view the HSLC Examinations beginning on Friday.

The participants demanded the protection of the socialist and federal principles of the Constitution of India, honouring the commitments of the Union government to

the farmers after scrapping the three Farm Laws, scrapping the Hit & Run policy against motor drivers, withdrawing the permission fees imposed by the Assam government for meetings and other events, protecting the workers of the unorganised sector with welfare measures, and stopping the privatisation move of government-run organisations, etc.

The gathering was addressed by veteran CPI leader Dharma Baruah, CPI district president Moni Buragohain, AITUC leader Madan Baruah, CITUC leaders Niranjan Chetia and Akhil Borbaruah, INTUC leader Purnalanta Buragohain, and advocate Bonoshree Gogoi. The speakers

criticised the Union government's alleged anti-farmer policies and bid to suppress their democratic rights for demonstration in the national capital.

CPI state secretary Kanak Gogoi told this correspondent that the party resolved to organise a mass awareness campaign from February 25 to 29 demanding, among others, granting Assam the special category state status, opposing CAA and soaring price rise, and opposing any move to dismantle the federal structure of the Constitution.

CPI State Council in Guwahati recently adopted several resolutions, Kanak Gogoi said. Through a resolution, CPI termed the State Budget 2024 as a populist one aimed primarily at increasing beneficiaries and more, with no focus on a long-term strategy to counter unemployment and the soaring price rise of all essential commodities. The government neither has plans to set up industry nurseries in the agri sector to create more employment avenues, it said. The party said that the government failed to spend the money allotted in the previous two budgets to the tune of ₹ 2000 cr and ₹ 9000 cr.

## Physics Wallah celebrates success in JEE Main 2024 results

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 15:** Tanuj Kattel from Physics Wallah's Offline Vidyapeeth Centre in Guwahati has scored 99.19 percentile in the JEE Main 2024 session one results.

Physics Wallah (PW), India's leading ed-tech platform, announced its overall JEE Main 2024 results with over 2,900 of its students scoring above the 98th percentile, while over 507 of its students achieved an impressive 99.5 percentile, the highest in the platform's history. More than 1,194 students have scored in the 99th percentile. These results were facilitated through an integrated approach to learning, combining its offline and online platforms to provide a comprehensive educational experience.

Ankit Gupta, PW's Offline CEO, said, "Seeing students from our Vidyapeeth centres achieve such high percentiles fills us with immense pride and reassures us that we are on the right track. Special thanks to all the teachers for working tirelessly and pushing their limits. For the students who didn't qualify, remember that we are with you, and we will work harder."

## Oath taking ceremony held

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 15:** The oath-taking ceremony of the newly appointed 11 executive members of the 13th North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council was held at the District Library Auditorium on Thursday. The oath was administered by the district commissioner Simanta Kumar Das in the presence of chief executive member Debolal Gorlosa and principal secretary (N) Debanou Daulagupu on the dais.

NCHAC chairman Mohet Hojai, principal secretary TT Daulagupu, council secretaries, all officials, leading citizens, and APEX Bodies attended the ceremony. The list of the 11 executive members includes Donphainom Thaoson from Haflong constituency, Paudaming Nriame from Laisong constituency, Niranjan Hojai from Hatikali constituency, Probita Johori from Mahur constituency, Amendu Hojai from Harangjao constituency, Devojit Bathari from Hadimga constituency, Biswajit Daulagupu from Wajao constituency, Zosumthang Hmar from Jinam constituency, Monjit Naiding from Hamri constituency, Samuel Changsan from Diger constituency, and Samsing Engti from Garampani constituency.

## Tezpur University announces admission for academic year 2024-25

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Feb 15:** Tezpur University (TU) has initiated the admissions process for the academic year 2024-25 by launching the TU admission portal for registration for the Tezpur University Entrance Examination 2024/Common University Entrance Test (CUET), catering to both postgraduate and undergraduate programs.

As the only university in North East India accredited with an A+ grade by NAAC, Tezpur University currently offers 78 academic programs across various UG/PG/PhD/certificate and executive levels, spanning diverse disciplines such as Science, Engineering, Humanities & Social Sciences, and Management. Notably, the university has introduced four year UG programs in line with the integrated programs as per the National Education Policy 2020.

While the university will participate in CUET UG & PG - 2024 and adhere to the



guidelines of the National Testing Agency for some programs, TUEE (Tezpur University Entrance Examination) will con-

duct Computer Based Tests (CBT) in 28 designated centers across the country. These programs include lateral entry to

## Ashok Singhal attends consecration ceremony at Sri Sri Jagannath Temple in Dhekiajuli

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Feb 15:** Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs and Irrigation, Ashok Singhal, graced the 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony at the newly constructed Mahabrabhu Sri Sri Jagannath Temple in Tinkharia Tea Estate, Dhekiajuli. The temple, modeled after the Jagannath temple in Puri, stands as a symbol of collaborative efforts between minister Singhal and the local community.

The three-day festivities, starting from February 13, witnessed a significant turnout from the tea estate, surrounding areas, and various parts of Dhekiajuli. The celebration included cultural events such as Dhan Divas, Kalah Yatra, lantern lighting, Harinam Kirtan, Maha Snan, and Jaldhibas. The 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony and Maha Yajna marked the conclusion of the festivities. Local residents expressed their gratitude to minister Singhal for his pivotal role in the establishment of the Mahabrabhu Sri Sri Jagannath



Temple. Earlier on Thursday morning, minister Singhal visited the Sri Sri Gupteshwar Temple at the foothill of Shingri Hills to assess the progress of the Archaeological Department's expedition aimed at uncovering the temple's historical treasures.

Continuing his dedication to community welfare, minister

Singhal distributed cheques as part of financial assistance from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to 77 beneficiaries facing financial vulnerability in the Dhekiajuli constituency. The distribution took place at a function held at the Bidhayak Sewa Kendra of Dhekiajuli constituency, highlighting the government's support for those in need.

## UPPL surges as 2121 new members join in Chirang



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 15:** In a significant development, the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) witnessed a surge in its membership as 2121 individuals, hailing from diverse political backgrounds including the BPF, Congress, and various social organisations, for-

mally joined the party. This momentous occasion unfolded at a gathering held in Bamwngao within the Chirang block of Chirang district on Thursday.

The newly inducted members were warmly welcomed and honoured with traditional aronai adornments and the party flag in

the presence of UPPL president and chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, alongside other esteemed party leaders.

The UPPL's growing popularity reflects its increasing appeal across the region's populace. CEM Boro reiterated the party's unwavering commitment to fostering comprehensive societal development since its inception. He underscored the BTR Government's proactive stance in implementing a range of developmental and welfare measures aimed at the upliftment and progress of the region.

The influx of new members into the UPPL signifies a burgeoning endorsement of its vision and objectives, solidifying its position as a formidable force dedicated to steering the region towards prosperity and inclusive growth.

## Indigenous group voices discontent

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, Feb 15:** The Sadao Assam Garia-Maria-Deshi Jatiya Parishad (AAMP) staged a two-hour protest program at Bihutali in Morigaon town on Wednesday to protest against the deprivation of indigenous Garia-Maria-Deshi people from the benefits of the Basundhara scheme implemented by the government.

"Discrimination against Garia-Maria indigenous people in the Basundhara scheme will not be accepted," exclaimed the protesters, questioning why indigenous people were also victims of religious discrimination. They chanted slogans like 'Chief minister should answer', 'Give land pattas to landless indigenous people under the Basundhara scheme', and 'No conspiracy to deprive landless indigenous people of land rights'.

After the two-hour protest, they handed over a memorandum to chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, through the Morigaon district commissioner.

The union mentioned that the protesters were led by the Morigaon District Committee of the Garia Maria Deshi Jatiya Parishad, including Jayant Deka, former student leader Chimal Deuri, Rajiv Nath, Morigaon District Media Club president Ratul Deka, and Sadao Koch Rajbongshi Chhatra Sangha secretary Paresch Deka. Also present were Assam Jatiyatibadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad joint secretary Mukdar Alam, All Assam Garia Maria Deshi Jatiya Parishad vice president Ahsanul Haque, and more than 500 Garia Maria Deshi Jatiya Parishad workers from 20 regions of Morigaon district.

## Midnight blaze engulfs Dalgaon

**HT Correspondent**

**DALGAON, Feb 15:** A devastating blaze struck No 1/2 Barujhar in Dalgaon during the midnight hours of Wednesday, claiming the life of a 55-year-old woman in her courageous attempt to combat the inferno. The conflagration razed ten residences, resulting in property losses exceeding ₹ 10 crore. The incident unfolded around 12 am, engulfing the homes of Siraj Ali, Miraj Ali, and Bilal Ali Abdul Jalil in No 1/2 Barujhar within the Dalgaon constituency of Darang district.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the fire originated from a suspected electrical short circuit at Miraj Ali's residence before swiftly spreading to neighbouring houses, exacerbated by a gas cylinder explosion. Despite valiant efforts from locals to douse the flames, tragically, 55-year-old Maleka Khatun lost her life while attempting to salvage her dwelling. The intensity of the blaze resulted in the destruction of approximately 300 mons of paddy, ₹ 3 lakh in cash, land deeds, housing documents, citizenship registrations, and educational certificates, all reduced to ashes. Circle officer Sameer Chaudhury promptly arrived at the scene to assess the situation.

## OBITUARY

**S**arbeswar Buragohain, an educationist and renowned social worker from Nitaipukhuri Teleibam village, passed away due to old age ailments in Moran Lachit Nagar on February 12. Before his retirement from Nitaipukhuri HS School as an assistant teacher, he played an active role in establishing three schools in Sisiborgaon, Demow, and Kalyabam villages.

Buragohain is survived by four sons, a daughter, and his wife. The management and development committee of Nitaipukhuri HS School, Tai Ahom Sanskritik Vikas Kendra, and numerous other social organisations have expressed their condolences over his demise.

## Fatal accident at Oil well plinth

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 15:** An incident occurred at well plinth NHK 162 of Oil India Limited (OIL) at Western Asset Mine at around 3:05 pm on Wednesday, during the bleeding of hydrotest water through a 2" bleed line. While opening the 2" valve fitted in the artery line connection, the valve and the bleed line unexpectedly dislodged, causing a fatal injury to one contractor employee working in the vicinity. The employee was immediately rushed to the OIL hospital at Duliajan for medical treatment. Despite immediate medical attention, the employee succumbed to his injuries at 5:00 pm on Wednesday. Oil India deeply mourns the unfortunate death of the employee. An internal inquiry is being conducted for a thorough investigation, and OIL is committed to taking all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of such accidents in the future.

## AAP candidate Manoj Dhanowar launches campaign

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Feb 15:** Dibrugarh Lok Sabha Constituency's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate, Manoj Dhanowar, conducted a campaign and party meeting in Ledo, falling under the 83rd Margherita Constituency of Tinsukia district. He received a warm welcome from AAP workers and leaders during his visit.

Addressing the media in Margherita, Manoj Dhanowar stated that the AAP high command has selected three candidates to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Assam, and he has been chosen to contest from the 14th Dibrugarh Lok Sabha Constituency. He expressed confidence that the people would cast their valuable votes in favour of the Aam Aadmi Party.

Anindita Goswami, former senior BJP leader of Margherita and president of BJP Mahila Morcha Tinsukia district committee, announced her resignation from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). She criticised the BJP, stating that it has become a fascist, communal, and dictatorial party, with senior BJP leaders being sidelined and insulted. Goswami emphasised the need to bid farewell to the BJP from the country, likening it to the Indian National Congress as two sides of the same coin.

Anita Das Mahanta, former Asom Gana Parishad leader and current AAP leader, highlighted the increase in illegal activities in the 83rd Margherita Constituency, emphasising the importance of voting for the Aam Aadmi Party to address such issues.

The campaign event saw the presence of over a hundred AAP members, workers, and leaders, demonstrating the party's strong support in the region.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Too often we... enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought. -John F. Kennedy*

## Farmers' MSP Demands: Bridging the Gulf

In recent times, the fissure between the Modi government and the country's farmers has widened, marked by the failure of two rounds of talks since the inception of the Delhi Chalo agitation on February 12. At the crux of this discord lies the demand for legal guarantees on Minimum Support Price (MSP), an issue the farmers refuse to compromise on, contrary to the government's assurances. The farmers' scepticism towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promises, aptly termed as "Modi's Guarantees," is not unfounded. Time and again, the Prime Minister has made grand pledges, such as doubling farmers' income by 2022, only to see them fall short of fruition. This rhetorical trickery has left the agricultural community disillusioned and emboldened in their demand for concrete action rather than mere rhetoric. Central to the farmers' agitation is the distortion in the agricultural market, exacerbated by legislative amendments favouring corporate interests over the welfare of farmers. These changes have allowed for legal hoarding of agricultural yields by corporate entities, leading to artificially inflated prices in the market while farmers struggle to make ends meet. The Modi government's introduction of three contentious farm laws in 2020 further exacerbated tensions, aiming to introduce corporate interests into the agricultural sector without addressing the underlying issues faced by farmers. Despite prolonged protests and the eventual withdrawal of these laws, the scars remain, with the tragic loss of lives and families left uncompensated.

At the heart of the farmers' demands lies the issue of MSP, which the government sets at 1.5 times the Cost of Production (CoP). However, this formula fails to adequately address farmers' concerns, prompting calls for the adoption of the MS Swaminathan Commission's recommendation of C2+50 per cent formula. This formula accounts for a more comprehensive range of factors, including the interest on capital assets and rental values, ensuring remunerative prices for farmers. But the refusal of the Modi government to provide remunerative prices to farmers raises significant questions, particularly in light of the administration's previous assurances of prioritizing agricultural welfare. Despite pledges to double farmers' income by 2022, the government's actions have fallen short of this promise. Moreover, the recent formation of a committee to promote zero-budget-based farming, ostensibly aimed at enhancing transparency in MSP allocation, has faced criticism for its lack of representation from key farmer groups such as the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM). This omission further deepens the mistrust between the government and agitating farmers, setting the stage for a third round of talks amid heightened tensions.

As the third round of talks between the Modi government and agitating farmers approaches, it is imperative for the government to prioritize the interests of farmers over corporate agendas. Transparency and accountability must be upheld, and genuine dialogue must pave the way for meaningful reforms that safeguard the livelihoods of millions dependent on agriculture. The time for empty promises and half-measures has passed. It is now incumbent upon the Modi government to demonstrate true leadership and resolve the longstanding issues plaguing the agricultural sector. Only through genuine collaboration and mutual respect can a sustainable solution be achieved, one that ensures the prosperity and dignity of our farmers. It is in this backdrop of mistrust between the Modi government and agitating farmers under the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, a third round of talks is scheduled to take place soon. Let us hope that the Modi government takes care of the interest of the farmers, and does not insist on pushing corporate and business interests only, as it has been doing in the last 10 years with making false and unmet promises to farmers.

By: Asad Mirza

After decimating Gaza completely, it seems that Israel is hell-bent on laying siege to Rafah, the last border point for Palestinians, on its border with Egypt. Israeli strategy right from day one, after it claimed the Hamas attack on 7 October, as an attack on its sovereignty and against Israeli citizens, is to get the whole of Palestine cleared of Palestinians, so that in future it could reinforce its claim to the 'promised land' for Jews only.

On this point it also negates the history of the Abrahamic faiths, and instead of being inclusive, by assimilating Christians and Muslims communities in Israel, it lays claim to the whole of Israel, by displacing the original inhabitants of Palestine – the land of Canaanites.

However, the recent outrage expressed by international leaders, gives hope that the international comity is coming together to isolate Israel, on its aggressive policy towards Palestinians. The latest Israeli strategy is to decimate the city of Rafah after more or less completely destroying the Gaza city and parts of West Bank.

The Vice-President and EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles sharply criticised the Biden administration for ignoring the growing death toll in Gaza while, at the same time, providing Israel with weapons to prop up its military campaign.

Speaking in Brussels on Monday, hours after Israeli forces bombarded the southern Gazan town of Rafah, the EU's foreign policy chief called on Washington to stop pleading with Israel to cease the killing of civilians and to start "doing something" instead.

Borrell further said that if you

believe that too many people are being killed, maybe you should provide fewer arms in order to prevent so many people being killed. Responding to Netanyahu's statement that refugees in Rafah would be evacuated from the area before a major military offensive, Borrell said: "Where? To the moon? Where are they going to evacuate these people to?"

**International outrage**  
The EU reproach came hours after an appeals court in the Netherlands ordered the government to halt deliveries of parts of F-35 fighter jets to Israel for fears that Dutch exports could be contributing to violations of international law in light of the ICJ ruling.

In addition, outpourings by international leaders and various countries suggest that more and more countries are now coming out against Israel and its policy of apartheid against Palestinians.

Meanwhile, the US administration has in recent months by-passed Congress to continue sending weapons to Israel, whilst also calling for restraint in its war in Gaza, which has claimed the lives of some 28,000 Palestinians, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. Senate Democrats have in recent days pushed on the White House to consult Congress before any future arms sales to Tel Aviv, fearing American complicity in the devastation and humanitarian crisis wrecked on Gaza.

President Biden responded to those calls last Thursday with an executive order authorising the cut-off of military aid to foreign governments that do not abide by international law. The memorandum claims to "strengthen" US national security by "reinforcing respect for human rights, international humanitarian law, democratic governance, and the rule of

law," and hopes to "reduce the risk of civilian harm."

It is estimated that Israel has received more military aid from the US than any other nation since the 1950s owing to a long-standing, bipartisan policy of support. Data shows that many other EU countries – including Italy and Germany – have also provided Israel with some of the military equipment and components used in its offensives.

Barcelona-based Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau (Centre of Studies for Peace J.M. Delàs) in one of its reports said that Europeans are together "one of Israel's main suppliers of military systems and equipment" behind the US, and that member states have licensed military contracts worth over €2 billion to Israel.

Organisations like Amnesty International and the European Network Against Arms Trade (ENAAAT) have long called for a comprehensive arms embargo on both Israel and Hamas.

**Rafah's siege**  
Meanwhile, in a somewhat encouraging development, US President Joe Biden has added his voice to growing international calls for Israel to drop plans for an all-out military assault on the city of Rafah, in southern Gaza, after a ferocious hostage rescue operation that killed dozens of Palestinians.

Speaking after talks with Jordan's King Abdullah at the White House on Monday, the US president said that a major military operation in Rafah should not proceed without a credible plan for ensuring the safety and support of more than one million people sheltering there.

King Abdullah echoed Biden's appeal for a broad ceasefire, saying, "We cannot stand by and let this continue. We need a lasting ceasefire now. This war must end."

Borrell's sentiments were

## A Comprehensive Analysis of the 2024-25 Budget and Green Initiatives

# Assam's vision for sustainable growth

The Assam Budget for 2024-25 outlines key priorities aimed at fostering self-reliance in the state. The government places a strong emphasis on Mahila Sabalakaran, aiming to empower women and enhance their participation in various spheres. Additionally, the focus on Cultural Renaissance seeks to preserve and promote the rich cultural heritage of Assam. The budget also underscores the importance of promoting investment to stimulate economic growth and development. A significant push is directed towards building a greener economy, aligning with global sustainability goals. Infrastructure development in key sectors such as education, tourism, connectivity, and healthcare receives substantial attention, highlighting the government's commitment to enhancing the overall well-being of the populace. The overarching goal is sustained growth and the creation of jobs, reflecting a comprehensive approach to address the diverse needs of the people of Assam.

The financial trends over the years reflect a notable evolution in overall expenditure and capital expenditure in the state. In 2016-17, the overall expenditure stood at 57,407 crore, which gradually increased over subsequent years, reaching 1,27,283 crore in 2022-23. This substantial growth underscores the government's commitment to enhancing various sectors and services. Similarly, the trends in capital expenditure depict a strategic allocation of funds towards long-term developmental projects. The capital expenditure witnessed a steady rise from 6001 crore in 2016-17 to 16,338 crore in 2022-23, indicating a focus on infrastructural development and investments in key areas. These financial figures demonstrate a concerted effort by the state to ensure sustained economic growth and improve the overall well-being of its residents.

The financial dynamics of the state highlight a significant portion of grants received from the central government over the years. In 2016-17, the state received 32,787 crore in grants, a figure that steadily increased to 59,479 crore in 2022-23. This consistent growth in central grants signifies the collaborative efforts between the state and the center to bolster economic development and address regional needs. Concurrently, the revenue receipts for Assam also witnessed a positive trajectory, starting at 49,220 crore in 2016-17 and reaching 89,742 crore in 2022-23. This rise in revenue further reflects the state's expanding economic activities and its ability to generate funds internally. The combination of central grants and robust revenue receipts positions the state on a solid financial footing, enabling it to undertake various developmental initiatives for the benefit of its residents.

The budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 provides a comprehensive snapshot of the financial allocations and expenditures for Assam. The revenue sources indicate a diverse inflow, with State Tax Revenue contributing 34,149 crore, Non-Tax Revenue adding 8,871 crore, and a substantial share of 40,000 crore coming from the Share of Central Taxes. Centrally Sponsored Schemes receive a noteworthy allocation of 23,197 crore, emphasizing the collaborative efforts between the state and the center. Other significant revenue streams include Finance Commission funds at 4,806 crore and various transfers/grants to states with legislature totaling 921 crore. Public Debt and the recovery of Loans & Advances also play a role in the state's finances, amounting to 29,441 crore and 2,221 crore, respectively. In terms of expenditure, the allocation of rupees is directed towards General Services (49,555 crore), Social Services (55,088 crore), and Economic Services (31,153 crore). Public Debt servicing accounts for 7,192 crore, with additional provisions for Loans & Advances (11 crore) and Grants-in-aid & Contributions (891 crore). This meticulous budgetary breakdown underscores the government's strategic financial planning to address diverse sectors and prioritize the well-being and development of the state.

The budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 unveils a detailed distribution of revenue sources, showcasing the financial landscape of Assam. Tax revenues play a pivotal role, with Goods & Services Tax contributing 29,407 crore, Taxes on Income & Expenditure totaling 26,181 crore, Taxes on Property & Capital Transactions amounting to 1,454 crore, and Taxes on Commodities & Services accounting for 17,106 crore, resulting in a comprehensive Total Tax Revenue of 74,148 crore. Additionally, non-tax revenues are integral to the state's financial structure, with Interest Receipts, Dividends & Profits generating 1,111 crore, Other Non-Tax Revenue (General Services) contributing 438 crore, Other Revenue (Social Services) providing 83 crore, and Other Non-Tax Revenue (Economic

Services) contributing significantly at 7,239 crore. The combined Total Non-Tax Revenue stands at 8,871 crore, showcasing the diversified revenue streams that support the state's financial commitments across various sectors and services.

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 highlights the major revenue-earning departments in Assam, each contributing significantly to the state's fiscal health. The Commissioner of Taxes emerges as a pivotal department, generating 26,415 crore in revenue. The Geology & Mining sector follows closely, contributing 5,907 crore, showcasing the economic importance of natural resource extraction. The Excise department plays a significant role, contributing 4,101 crore, reflecting the state's revenue from the sale of alcoholic beverages and other excisable goods. Transport, Land Revenue & Registration, and Forest departments also make substantial contributions, with figures of 2,210 crore, 1,434 crore, and 1,250 crore, respectively. The combined revenue from these major departments totals 41,316 crore, underlining the diverse sources of income and the strategic focus on key sectors to support the state's financial goals and developmental initiatives.

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 provides a clear demarcation between revenue and capital aspects of the financial framework. In terms of receipts, the state anticipates robust revenue and capital inflows, with revenue receipts reaching 1,11,944 crore and capital receipts amounting to 31,662 crore, resulting in a comprehensive total of 1,43,606 crore. On the expenditure side, the government outlines a strategic allocation of funds, with revenue expenditure projected at 1,10,092 crore and capital expenditure at 33,799 crore. The total expenditure is estimated at 1,43,891 crore, indicating a meticulous balancing act between revenue and capital components. This financial approach underscores the government's commitment to effective financial management, ensuring a judicious utilization of resources for both current operational needs and long-term developmental projects, contributing to the overall growth and well-being of the state.

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 unveils a comprehensive breakdown of ex-

penditures, highlighting the allocation between salary and non-salary components. Salary expenditures are projected at 36,399 crore, representing the funds dedicated to the remuneration of government employees. In contrast, non-salary expenditures dominate the budget, reaching a substantial 1,07,492 crore, encompassing various operational and developmental expenses. The total expenditure for the fiscal year stands at 1,43,891 crore, showcasing the intricate balance between these crucial elements. Furthermore, the budget distinguishes between voted and charged expenditures, with voted expenditures amounting to 1,24,515 crore, covering expenses sanctioned by the legislative body, and charged expenditures at 19,376 crore, representing expenses that do not require parliamentary approval. This detailed allocation strategy reflects the government's meticulous planning to address both human resource needs and broader operational and developmental requirements while maintaining transparency and accountability in financial governance.

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 delineates a clear distinction in financial allocations between General Areas and Sixth Schedule Areas. General Areas receive a substantial budgetary allocation of 1,35,519 crore, reflecting the government's commitment to addressing the diverse needs of regions falling outside the Sixth Schedule. Simultaneously, the Sixth Schedule Areas, which often include tribal and autonomous regions, are allocated 8,372 crore, indicating a focused approach to meet the unique developmental and socio-economic requirements of these specific regions. The total budget for the fiscal year stands at 1,43,891 crore, emphasizing the government's comprehensive strategy to ensure inclusive growth and equitable distribution of resources across both general and special administrative areas. This targeted financial planning underscores the administration's commitment to addressing the specific challenges and promoting development in regions with distinct governance structures and cultural landscapes.

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 presents a comprehensive overview of the scheme plan, outlining various allocations for the state's devel-

opment initiatives. The State's own Priority Development takes a prominent position with an allocation of 33,428 crore, reflecting the government's commitment to addressing specific regional priorities and developmental needs. Additionally, Centrally Sponsored Schemes receive a noteworthy allocation of 20,032 crore, emphasizing collaborative efforts with the central government to boost various sectors. The budget also allocates 78,642 crore for Establishment Expenditure, covering essential operational costs. Externally Aided Projects, NABARD Infrastructure Development Assistance, Rural Infrastructure Development Fund, Central Finance Commission Grants, Urban Infrastructure Development Fund, and Warehouse Infrastructure Fund collectively receive 11,789 crore, showcasing the state's diverse approach to funding projects through various channels. This strategic distribution of resources underscores the government's dedication to fostering comprehensive development across different sectors, ensuring a balanced and inclusive growth trajectory for the state.

The sectoral analysis of expenditure in the budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 reflects a strategic allocation of resources to address diverse facets of the state's development. Notably, the Education, Sports, Art & Culture sector receives a significant share of 23,227 crore, underscoring the government's commitment to fostering intellectual and cultural growth. Health & Family Welfare is allocated 8,399 crore, reflecting a substantial investment in the well-being of the populace. Water Supply, Sanitation, Housing & Urban Development and Social Welfare and Nutrition sectors receive 8,382 crore and 11,088 crore, respectively, emphasizing the importance of infrastructure and social welfare.

Agriculture and Allied Activities, Irrigation and Flood Control, Energy, Industry and Minerals, Transport, and Rural Development sectors also receive dedicated funds, showcasing a holistic approach to economic and rural development. The allocation of 62,620 crore to the "Others" category further highlights the budget's inclusivity, addressing various miscellaneous expenditures crucial for overall progress. This sectoral distribution demonstrates a comprehensive strategy to ensure balanced and sustainable development across key areas, promoting the well-being and prosperity of the state. *(..to be continued)*

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 presents a comprehensive overview of the scheme plan, outlining various allocations for the state's devel-

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

government's meticulous planning to address both human resource needs and broader operational and developmental requirements while maintaining transparency and accountability in financial governance.

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 delineates a clear distinction in financial allocations between General Areas and Sixth Schedule Areas. General Areas receive a substantial budgetary allocation of 1,35,519 crore, reflecting the government's commitment to addressing the diverse needs of regions falling outside the Sixth Schedule. Simultaneously, the Sixth Schedule Areas, which often include tribal and autonomous regions, are allocated 8,372 crore, indicating a focused approach to meet the unique developmental and socio-economic requirements of these specific regions. The total budget for the fiscal year stands at 1,43,891 crore, emphasizing the government's comprehensive strategy to ensure inclusive growth and equitable distribution of resources across both general and special administrative areas. This targeted financial planning underscores the administration's commitment to addressing the specific challenges and promoting development in regions with distinct governance structures and cultural landscapes.

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 presents a comprehensive overview of the scheme plan, outlining various allocations for the state's devel-

## Rafah under siege

## Trade route agreement linking Europe to India is a win for modi

By: Girish Linganna

On Tuesday, February 13, India and the United Arab Emirates inked a deal to establish a trade route designed to link Europe and India via certain regions of the Middle East by both sea and rail. This grand project has received support from both the United States and the European Union. India is highly interested in this project as it sees it as the one competing with China sponsored Belt and Road Initiative (BTI) which is already in operation as a global project covering a large number of nations.

The agreement was disclosed following a visit to the Gulf nation by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as per a statement from the Indian foreign ministry, although specific details of the agreement were not extensively shared.

The ministry's statement highlighted that this initiative would enhance existing collaborations and mutual understanding between India and the UAE, promoting greater cooperation and regional connectivity.

Announced in September during the G20 summit held in New Delhi, the corridor is planned to stretch from India, across the Arabian Sea to the United Arab Emirates, then onwards through Saudi Arabia, and link up through Jordan and Israel to Europe.

In its statement, the ministry did not reference any nations other than India and the UAE, a key Gulf Arab nation, with which India shares a history of trade relations spanning over a hundred years.

The pact concerning the India-Middle East Economic Corridor emerges during an ongoing conflict in Gaza exceeding four months, which has disrupted efforts supported by the U.S. to enhance Israel's integration with

surrounding Arab countries. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has put its plans for normalization on hold.

During his visit, Modi had a meeting with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, whom Modi frequently calls his brother.

"In these challenging times for our region, our strong ties with you bring us much optimism and pave the way for a future with India that aligns with our aspirations," Sheikh Mohamed expressed in a meeting with Modi on Tuesday, as shown in a video posted on Modi's YouTube channel.

In 2020, the UAE established diplomatic ties with Israel as part of the Abraham Accords, a move supported by the U.S. that also saw Bahrain and other Arab nations forming connections with Israel.

Throughout the conflict, while maintaining relations with Israel, the UAE has also consistently criticized the airstrikes in Gaza and advocated for a ceasefire.

The agreement between India and the UAE indicates both countries are keen on proceeding with the corridor project, potentially challenging China's Belt and Road Initiative that aims to expand global trade and infrastructure links.

Furthermore, the agreement was reached amid assaults by Yemen's Houthi faction on ships navigating the Red Sea, actions claimed by the Iran-supported group as a protest against Israel's actions in Gaza. These attacks have posed risks to maritime trade in the region.

Additionally, the UAE and India finalized a treaty on bilateral investment and exchanged agreements to collaborate in areas including electrical connectivity, commerce, and digital infrastructure.

This marks Modi's seventh journey to the Gulf country since his tenure as Prime Minister began almost ten years ago, reinforcing the relationship with one of India's leading trade allies.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his two-day trip to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), opened Abu Dhabi's inaugural Hindu temple on Wednesday. Located near Al Rahba in Abu Mureikah, the temple, developed by the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), spans approximately 27 acres. Construction has been underway since 2019, with the UAE government providing the land for the temple. In anticipation of PM Modi's speech at the World Government Summit, the Burj Khalifa displayed the message – "Guest of Honour - the Republic of India."

Speaking to the Indian community at the 'Ahlam Modi' (Welcome Modi in Arabic) gathering at Zayed Sports Stadium in Abu Dhabi, Prime Minister Modi lauded India and the UAE as "allies in development." He mentioned that the relationship between these two strategic allies sets a global benchmark and that they are forging a new narrative in the third decade of the 21st century.

"The accomplishments of India and the UAE, in both communal and cultural aspects, stand as an exemplary model for global emulation," he stated.

The two nations also agreed on a deal to connect their domestic payment systems — India's RuPay with the UAE's JAYWAN. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) described this as "a significant move towards fostering cooperation in the financial sector... (and) will broaden RuPay's acceptability throughout the UAE." *(IPA Service)*

# Deft Diplomacy and a gas deal? How Modi anchored India-Qatar ties to a success



By: Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty

The release of eight highly decorated ex-Indian Navy officers from a prison in Qatar is, doubtlessly, a piece of welcome news for the whole country.

All eight officers have been released and seven have returned home safely. One officer remains in Doha as he is unwell.

They were first sentenced to death and upon appeal to a higher court, the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for different terms.

Their acquittal and release required sustained effort by the Indian government over 18 months of their incarceration.

**Purported link of Indian Ex-Navy officers to Israel**

The case was shrouded in secrecy and became murky when media leaks suggested "espionage" and "treason" for charges of passing on defence secrets to Israel.

The officers worked for a Qatari company, now defunct, which provided training services for the defence of the Qatari Armed Forces officers.

Unverified media leaks suggested that these officers may have provided some information to Israel on Qatar's acquisition of submarines. However, it is quite unlikely that these experienced officers would knowingly involve themselves in espionage on Israel's behalf.

The officers have confirmed that their work was limited to training and they had no access to any defence deals.

**Pakistan has been a foil to India-Qatar ties**

Qatar's legal system is opaque and legal proceedings are held secretly unlike in democracies where legal cases are debated and decided in courts open to the public. Qatar is a family-ruled sheikhdom which has sought to punch above its weight, using its vast financial resources that accrue from selling gas.

Global demand for gas has gone up substantially because of climate change concerns, spurring adaptation to cleaner fuels and renewables.

Pakistan is extremely worried about India's outreach by PM Narendra Modi's government to the Gulf countries which it has always considered its exclusive preserve.

Hence, there is a strong belief that it was misinformation planted by Pakistan which is worried about Indian defence personnel gradually replacing their personnel in providing services in the defence sector.

With India's burgeoning economic ties with the Gulf countries, Pakistan can no longer leverage religion as a bonding factor, as opposed to economic interests. Remittances are an important source of foreign exchange for Pakistan, particularly in its parlous

economic situation.

Around 8 lakh Indians work in Qatar and Pakistani workers are around 1.5 lakhs. By poisoning ties with India, Pakistan hoped to influence Qatar to recruit more workers from its country and bolster its remittance income.

**How Modi's personal influence created diplomatic impact**

India's quiet efforts and crucial personal diplomacy by PM Modi have restored the level playing field between the two countries. Modi's defining role in this exercise was instrumental in the final denouement.

Background diplomatic efforts by EAM, NSA, and India's Ambassador and diplomats laid the basis for this favourable outcome. PM Modi has led from the front and his ability to establish personal ties with leaders of various countries is well-known.

His meeting with the Emir of Qatar on the sidelines of the COP28 meeting in Doha gave the final push to the Qatari decision to release the Indian ex-servicemen.

PM Modi has decided to visit Doha after his current visit to the UAE where he is set to inaugurate the first Hindu temple with President Muhammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan. When Modi undertook his first visit to the UAE in 2015, it marked the visit of an Indian PM after almost three decades.

This itself underlines the neglect of India's previous leadership towards this important relationship. Thus, Opposition barbs directed at PM Modi for failing to release the ex-service personnel have now been reduced to grudging approval for his success.

**Qatar's complex foreign policy with the Middle East**

Qatar has been somewhat of a maverick in its foreign policy. It fell out with its Arab neighbours and was the target of a collective embargo by Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt all of whom snapped diplomatic ties in March 2014 – the most drastic step since the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was formed in 1981.

This situation lasted till 2021 when tensions eased and ties were normalised.

The Saudis were angered by Qatar's close ties with Iran, support to Islamist groups like the Islamic Brotherhood, and the slanted media coverage by the Qatari-owned Al Jazeera news channel which is known to put out news and reports aligned with Qatar's ideological predilection.

Qatar admitted to providing funding support to the Islamic Brotherhood and other Islamist groups but denied extending support to terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The developments during the 2011 "Arab Spring" uprising in various Arab states had sent alarm bells ringing and the ruling regimes were on

edge, fearful of being overthrown by the masses.

These undemocratic regimes banded together to protect themselves but Qatar developed ties with Opposition groups in affected Arab countries and Al-Jazeera gave positive coverage to the Opposition groups.

In 2013, the Mubarak government was overthrown in Egypt, following mass protests. Later, the military overthrew the elected Islamic Brotherhood government which succeeded the Mubarak dictatorship.

Qatar condemned the coup and ties with Egypt nosedived. The Al Jazeera office in Cairo was shut down. Donald Trump gave vocal support to the Saudi-led boycott of Qatar. Turkey emerged as its strongest supporter and provided food shipments and thousands of troops to help overcome the embargo. Iran also sent food shipments to Qatar.

Ultimately, pressure from the US and appeals by other Arab countries led to the rapprochement and normalisation of ties.

**Qatar's mediator role in Israel-Hamas war and ties with US**

Qatar developed close ties with the US and as a non-NATO ally, hosts the AL-Udeid American air base, the largest in the region.

Over 10,000 American troops are stationed there. During the current Israel-Hamas conflict – Qatar and the US agreed to extend the agreement for the air base till 2034.

Qatar asserts that this is to help the war on terrorism. Qatar also helped in mediating between the US and Taliban which led to the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan and the return of Taliban rule. It has hosted Hamas leaders in Doha and helped in providing a communications conduit between Israel and the Palestinian militant group.

Qatari mediation has helped in the release of around 110 Israeli hostages by the Hamas.

Qatar's role has made the US conveniently set aside any public admonition of the Qatari regime on democracy and human rights because of its own interests and that of Israel. But cynically, the US uses democracy and human rights tools to berate others, where its strategic interests have lower priority.

Qatar, flush with funds from gas sales is also a profitable destination for the American arms industry.

**Did the gas deal contribute to the release of Navy men?**

It may be tempting to speculate about the negotiations that led to the release of the Indian ex-service personnel. However, it is facile to assume that it is linked to the USD 78 billion deal of supply of gas by Qatar to India over the next decade which preceded the release of the ex-servicemen.

While there is no direct connection between the release of detainees and this deal, speculation about incentives and unmentioned disincentives cannot be wished away.

Did Qatar manufacture charges of espionage and take legal action to develop leverage against India to ensure that the gas deal fructifies? This question is in the realm of speculation.

As the saying goes "All's well that ends well" and India-Qatar ties have achieved its friendly and mutually beneficial status.

The Qatari leadership's vision and perspicacity and PM Modi's determination and leadership have played seminal roles in restoring balance to bilateral ties. (Courtesy: *The Quint*)

# Biden's dilemma: Navigating political support amidst global conflict

By: Vivek Mishra

The United States (US) Congress is currently facing an unprecedented strain, primarily due to the ongoing tug-of-war between Republicans and Democrats on a range of issues, spanning from domestic politics to international and geopolitical matters. Importantly, domestic issues now seem inseparably hyphenated with US national security and international politics. In a recent development, President Biden's proposal aimed at securing US\$105 billion aid to Ukraine and Israel and for border security, primarily aimed at consolidating the US' alliance commitments and bolstering America's international standing, was thwarted by Republicans in the Senate. This obstruction stemmed from an unprecedented linkage between national security concerns, such as border security at the southern borders of the US, the influx of immigration, and international aid for Ukraine and Israel.

The two ongoing wars, one in Europe and the other in the Middle East have driven a wedge in the US Congress. The Democrats have also blocked an Israel-only bill in the US House of Representatives that sought to de-hyphenate Israel from Ukraine and provide the former with US\$17.6 billion in assistance. The Senate Republicans paid back by blocking a bipartisan border deal which sought to tighten border restrictions. President Biden agreed to a rather restrictive border deal to salvage aid for a war-time Ukraine and save the democratic plank linking his party's fundamental principles and his administration's support to Ukraine.

While Democrats in the US Congress have tied the Biden administration's decision to provide aid to Ukraine and Israel to the issue of border security in the South, there is also a desire among some Democrats to separate the aid to Israel and Ukraine, as the latter may garner more bipartisan support. The issue of aid to Israel is particularly complex for the administration, as some members of the Democratic Party are at odds with the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the civilian casualties it has caused.

President Biden is also under considerable pressure from certain Congressional factions who believe his policies regarding Gaza and Israel may be misguided, particularly in light of the significant civilian casualties in Gaza, which are approaching 30,000. Furthermore, US intelligence's hint that only a third of the Hamas' fighters may have been neutralised has set the clock ticking for Biden's aid to Israel even as he approached a fierce campaign against Trump. Initially, Biden's stance on the ongoing conflict in Israel was rooted in the long-standing alliance between the two nations, with the US historically standing by Israel regardless of the domestic circumstances. This stance has been reinforced since the war began by substantial Congressional support and a robust Israel-leaning lobby in Washington. However, as Israel's operations continue in Gaza, there is mounting pressure on the Biden administration to coerce Netanyahu to scale back. Yet, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has marched on, with operations now planned for Rafah, near the Egyptian border as the last frontier.

There is a definitive shift in Biden's approach towards the Hamas-Israel conflict, reflected through Secretary of State Antony Blinken's multiple trips to the region over the past four months. While there remains a strong rhetoric of unwavering support for Israel, there has been a subtle softening in the narrative, indicating a more nuanced stance. The apparent pressure on President Biden is unmissable in his recent remarks suggesting that Israel's military response in Gaza may have been "over the top" and his Executive Order against Israeli settler violence in West Bank indicate mounting pressure that Biden faces, especially given the pivotal point in his presidency. This pressure underscores the complex dynamics at play, with Biden navigating both domestic political pressures and international conflicts as he seeks to uphold America's interests and commitments on the global stage.



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Internal debates in the US often contrast the country's immigration situation with that of Europe, with some perceiving the US as being in a comparatively better position. Unlike Europe, where immigration has been key factor in altering the socio-political balance, the US has guarded off so far. Factors for the same range from its advantageous geographic position being surrounded by sea on both sides, to the need for a more headline immigration policy. In contrast, Europe faces greater immigration pressures due to its proximity and land connectivity to regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, where conflicts often drive migration.

**Biden's dilemma**

President Biden finds himself on the horns of a dilemma, as his administration is expected to uphold its historical support for Israel, both due to past donations and the prevailing political sentiment that views any action perceived as insufficiently supportive of Israel's security as potentially tantamount to exonerating terrorism. However, Biden also faces pressure from within his own party to delink aid to Israel and Ukraine.

On one hand, Biden is perceived as aligning more closely with Republicans regarding aid to Israel and the border deal, given its widespread support among GOP members in both the House and Congress. On the other, there is internal pressure from Democratic candidates to distinguish between aid to Israel and Ukraine, reflecting differing viewpoints within the party on how to approach international relations and

immigration. The Biden administration has frequently been portrayed as weak on immigration and border security by Republicans. As the US approaches the presi-

dential election in November, national security has emerged as a pivotal issue shaping the campaign strategies of both Republican and Democratic candidates. Republicans often cite statistics indicating a significantly high increase in incidents of migrant encounters along the border under the Biden administration, suggesting that their policy of fortifying the border with a wall would offer a more effective solution to the immigration problem.

These pressures have deeply divided the US Congress for months, and a resolution seems elusive, especially amidst the fervent political campaigns of both Democratic and Republican candidates. As the Republican primary approaches on 24 February in South Carolina, all eyes are on Trump and Haley as contenders, with Trump widely expected to secure the nomination, bolstered by his strong support and the accumulation of over 60 delegates, solidifying his position as the frontrunner for the Republican presidential candidacy.

Meanwhile, President Biden faces a different set of challenges. While he doesn't contend with intra-party competition within the Democratic Party and only faces a distant candidate like Dean Phillips to be defeated, other concerns are looming over his candidacy as the Democratic presidential nominee. The recent blow to Biden's polls, which have already hit record lows for a sitting president, comes in the form of a special counsel report released by the Department of Justice on 8 February. The report casts doubt on Biden's mental acuity and fitness for office, raising questions about his age and ability to effectively serve as president. While the report may not directly impact his candidacy, it is certain to influence public perception of Biden and his ability to lead.

On the line are numerous accomplishments of the Biden administration over the past four years, including economic gains, the establishment of regulatory frameworks for cyberspace and AI, and significant infrastructure spending. Additionally, executive actions on sanctions, high-tech exports to China, and inflation reduction have marked highlights of his tenure. However, the fact that Trump consistently leads in the polls against Biden suggests that these achievements may not have resonated as strongly with the American public as hoped.

These two major conflicts have placed the Biden administration in a delicate position, torn between maintaining a strong political mandate domestically and standing by key allies like Israel in the region, as well as supporting Ukraine, which holds considerable importance for President Biden's Democratic Party's credentials and his administration's principles. (Courtesy: *ORF*)

# Was there anything truly historic about Pakistan's 2024 elections?

By: Yaqoob Khan Bangash

Pakistanis get excited easily: almost all our elections are called 'historic,' 'game changers,' and 'significant.' Of course, every election is important, as it gives an opportunity for the political landscape to change. But it is the unchanging part of the elections which has caused and continues to create problems for the country.

The February 8, 2024 elections were, as all elections go, important. Nearly 50% of the electorate exercised their democratic right and the candidates backed by the incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) leader Imran Khan bagged the largest number of seats in the national assembly despite months of repression. People are already singing praises for the 'youth' – especially those who have come of age since the last election of 2018, of voting in large numbers for Imran Khan's nominees. Savvy analysts have lauded that this is a big slap on the face of the (military) establishment, and claimed that people have showed their mettle against all

adversity. So far so good.

But the 2024 election results are almost same as the 2018 elections.

In 2018, the establishment-supported PTI won the largest number of seats followed by the then disqualified and later imprisoned Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), and the Bhutto-Zardari Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). In 2018, the establishment cobbled together a coalition for the PTI, and then in 2022, after Imran's fall from grace, that coalition broke and a PMLN-PPP led combine came to power for 2022-2023. Today, it seems that the same combine might come back to power, albeit with a few more seats than last time. The vote shares of PTI, PMLN and PP are also largely the same as 2018. The people who ultimately decided the government in 2018, 2022 and 2024 are also the same. So nothing's changed.

Pakistan's constant has been the role of the civil-military establishment since its inception in 1947. The first time a government was unceremoniously dismissed was on August 22, 1947, barely a week after inde-

pendence when the elected Congress government in the erstwhile North West Frontier Province was removed by executive order and replaced by a Muslim League ministry. At that time, the Congress had 30 seats in an assembly of 50, with 19 Muslim seats, while the Muslim League only had 17 Muslim seats.

The assembly wasn't dissolved to get a fresh mandate and no session was even called for seven months for the new government to prove its majority. Thereafter, as my work on the integration of the Pakistan princely states has shown, the establishment's control steadily increased and, by the end of 1948, the bureaucracy and the military directly controlled over half the landmass of the then western Pakistan. The executive dismissal of the first constituent assembly of Pakistan and the resultant Maulvi Tamizuddin case in 1955 then sealed the deal against politicians. Thus, within the first decade, Pakistan set in a certain mould where despite various attempts over the years, the basic equation hasn't changed.

Pakistan has never had more than a decade or so of even

quasi-democratic government in its history. Thus, after two full parliamentary tenures between 2008-13, and 2013-18, the time was nigh for the establishment to wrest some control back.

The restoration of full parliamentary government and the (almost) restoration of full provincial autonomy through the 18th Amendment in 2010 had created structural problems for the establishment which they wanted fixed. Hence, an experiment was launched in the political arena by the establishment – Imran Khan, just like they had done multiple times in the past, from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the 1950s, to Nawaz Sharif in the 1980s. With Sharif forced out of the political arena through dubious cases and his party under extreme pressure – not unlike the PTI this time, Imran Khan was installed as the prime minister in 2018, heading a shaky and a bare majority coalition, where the only glue came from the establishment – a hybrid regime, if you will. With Imran Khan's fall from favour in 2022 came the now infamous 'Vote of No Confidence' in April, and a new approved coalition with

PMLN-PPP in the lead which then completed the parliamentary term.

Despite the fact that Pakistan has now completed three parliamentary terms of five years each, democracy has not progressed in the country. All the gains of 2008-2018 have been systematically lost between 2018-2024, and it seems that things might get worse. The reason persists, and its only solution – the emergence of actual anti-establishment politics, still evades the political landscape.

Simply put, unless major political parties agree and persist in the exclusion of all non-political forces from the governance of Pakistan, conditions will never improve. Some analysts have argued that PTI's votes and seats have shown that the country has reached a tipping point: but has it? Pakistan has had several anti-establishment moments in the past but none have been lasting.

From Benazir Bhutto's historic win in 1988 to become the world's first Muslim woman prime minister, to Nawaz and Benazir signing the 'Charter to Democracy' in 2006, to Nawaz's daring slogan in 2018,

'Vote ko Izzat doh' (Give Respect to the Vote). We have been there, and then come back. But will 2024 buck the trend? I fear not.

My fears rest on three premises. First, the anti-establishment narrative carved out by the PMLN and PPP under the Charter of Democracy lasted just over a decade. Once out of power in the centre in 2018, both could not withstand the onslaught of the Imran years and were more than happy to return to the establishments' loving arms in 2022.

This flip, by parties which have suffered in the past at the hands of the establishment, should not be taken lightly and needs deeper analysis as it exhibits the limitations of being anti-establishment in Pakistan.

Secondly, the PTI is only anti-establishment because the establishment is against Imran Khan. If the tables turn, the PTI will be more than happy to return to the fold. Thirdly, politics is fast changing in the country, where populism and neo-fascism are gaining strength.

The PTI has now developed into a party which Pakistan has never seen before. While the party is no doubt popular, its narrative is deeply populist, divisive, and has strong fascist tendencies. Unlike other major parties, it has a deep sense of self-righteousness, and a complete rejection of the legitimacy of anyone else. These twin factors make it impossible to work with any other major political party and prevent its current anti-establishment tilt from being anything more than self-serving. Thus, unless there is a broad, cooperative and lasting anti-establishment political consensus, things will not change.

Over the past year, a former prime minister and finance minister of Pakistan, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Miftah Ismail respectively, have been conducting seminars across the country called 'Reimagining Pakistan.' Speaking at the Lahore ThinkFest a few weeks ago, they discussed the contour of a new 'social contract' which Pakistan needs to emerge out of this quagmire. But this is easier said than done. New social contracts are usually the results of either revolutions or great social upheavals, both of which seem unlikely in Pakistan in the near future. (Courtesy: *The Wire*)

# Who is Prabowo Subianto, the former general who's Indonesia's next president?

**JAKARTA, Feb 15:** A wealthy ex-general with ties to both Indonesia's popular outgoing president and its dictatorial past looks set to be its next president, after unofficial tallies showed him taking a clear majority in the first round of voting.

Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto presented himself as heir to the immensely popular sitting President Joko Widodo, vowing to continue the modernization agenda that's brought rapid growth and vaulted Indonesia into the ranks of middle-income countries.

"We should not be arrogant. We should not be proud. We should not be euphoric. We still have to be humble. This victory must be a victory for all Indonesian people," Subianto said in a speech broadcast on national television from a sports stadium on the night of the election.

But Subianto will enter office with unresolved questions about the costs of extraction-driven growth for the environment and traditional communities, as well as his own links to torture, disappearances and other human rights abuses in the final years of the brutal Suharto dictatorship, which he served as a lieutenant general.

A former rival of Widodo who lost two presidential races to him, Subianto embraced the popular leader to run as his heir, even choosing Widodo's son as his running mate, a choice that ran up against constitutional age limits and has activists worried about an emerging political dynasty in the 25-year-old democracy.

Subianto's win is not yet official. His two rivals have not yet conceded and the official results could take up to a month



to be tabulated, but election night "quick counts" showed him taking over 55% of the vote in a three-way race. Those counts, conducted by polling agencies and based on millions of ballots sampled from the across the country, have proved accurate in past elections.

Subianto was born in 1951 to one of Indonesia's most powerful families, the

third of four children. His father, Sumitro Djojohadikusumo, was an influential politician, and a minister under Presidents Sukarno and Suharto.

Subianto's father first worked for Sukarno, but later turned against him and was forced into exile. Subianto spent most of his childhood overseas and speaks French, German, English and Dutch. The family returned to Indonesia after General Suharto came to power in 1967 following a failed left-wing coup. Suharto brutally dealt with dissenters and was accused of stealing billions of dollars of state funds for himself, family and close associates. Suharto dismissed the allegations even after leaving office in 1998. Subianto enrolled in Indonesia's Military Academy in 1970, graduating in 1974 and serving in the military for nearly

three decades. In 1976, Subianto joined the Indonesian National Army Special Force, called Kopassus, and was commander of a group that operated in what is now East Timor.

Human rights groups have claimed that Subianto was involved in a series of human rights violations in Timor-Leste in the 1980s and 90s, when Indonesia occupied the now-independent nation. Subianto has denied those allegations.

Subianto and other members of Kopassus were banned from traveling to the U.S. for years over the alleged human rights abuses they committed against the people of Timor-Leste. This ban lasted until 2020, when it was effectively lifted so he could visit the U.S. as Indonesia's defense minister. In 1983, he married Suharto's daughter Siti Hediati Hariyadi.

More allegations of human rights abuses led to Subianto being forced out of the military. He was dishonorably discharged in 1998, after Kopassus soldiers kidnapped and tortured political opponents of Suharto, his then-father-in-law. Of 22 activists kidnapped that year, 13 remain missing. Several of his men were tried and convicted, but Subianto never faced trial. He never commented on these accusations, but went into self-imposed exile in Jordan in 1998.

A number of former democracy activists have joined his campaign. Budiman Sudjatmiko, a politician who was a democracy activist in 1998, said that reconciliation is necessary to move forward. Sudjatmiko left the governing Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle to join Subianto's campaign team. (AP)

## Gunfire at Chiefs' Super Bowl celebration kills 1 and wounds nearly two-dozen, including children

**KANSAS CITY, Feb 15:** A historic railway station on the edge of downtown Kansas City became the latest backdrop for a mass shooting as gunfire near the end of the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl celebration sent terrified fans scrambling for cover and left 21 people wounded — including at least eight children — and a mother of two dead.

Wednesday's shooting outside Union Station happened despite the presence of more than 800 police officers who were in the building and nearby, including on top of nearby structures, said Mayor Quinton Lucas, who attended with his wife and mother and ran for safety when the shots rang out.

"Parades, rallies, schools, movies. It seems like almost nothing is safe," Lucas said.

Three people were detained and firearms were recovered, Police Chief Stacey Graves said at an evening news conference. She said police were still piecing together what happened and did not release details about those who were detained or a possible motive.

Chiefs say all players, coaches and staffers are safe and accounted for after parade shooting.

"I'm angry at what happened today. The people who came to this celebration should expect a safe environment," Graves said.

It is the latest sports celebration in the U.S. to be marred by gun violence, following a shooting that wounded several people last year in Denver after the Nuggets' NBA championship, and gunfire last year at a parking lot near the Texas Rangers' World Series championship parade.

Social media users posted shocking video of police running through Wednesday's crowded scene as people scrambled for cover and fled. One video showed someone

apparently performing chest compressions on a victim as another person, seemingly writhing in pain, lay on the ground nearby. People screamed in the background.

Another video showed two people chase and tackle a person, holding them down until two police officers arrived.

Radio station KKFI said via Facebook that Lisa Lopez-Galvan, host of "Taste of Tejano," was killed.

"This senseless act has taken a beautiful person from her family and this KC Community," KKFI said in a statement. (AP)



## 'But we will work with any US leader whom the American people trust' Putin says Russia prefers Biden to Trump because he's 'more experienced and predictable'

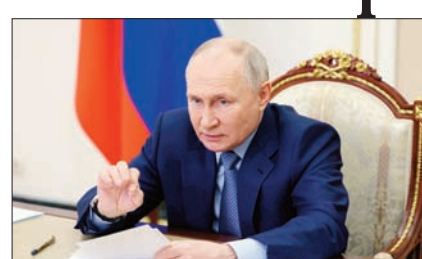
**MOSCOW, Feb 15:** President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Russia would prefer to see U.S. President Joe Biden win a second term, describing him as more experienced than Donald Trump.

Speaking in an interview with a correspondent of Russian state television, Putin declared that he will work with any U.S. leader who is elected, but noted unequivocally that he would prefer Biden's victory when asked who would be a better choice from the point of view of Russia.

"Biden, he's more experienced, more predictable, he's a politician of the old formation," Putin said. "But we will work with any U.S. leader whom the American people trust." Asked about speculation on Biden's health issues, Putin responded that "I'm not a doctor and I don't consider it proper to comment on that."

Biden's age and memory. They came in a report determining that Biden would not be charged with any criminal activity for possessing classified documents after he left office. Putin noted that the talk about Biden's health comes as "the election campaign is gaining speed in the U.S., and it's taking an increasingly sharp course."

He added that allegations of Biden's health problems were also circulating at the time



when they met in Switzerland in June 2021, adding that he witnessed the contrary and saw the U.S. leader in a good shape.

"They talked about him being incapacitated, but I saw nothing of the kind," Putin said. "Yes, he was peeking at his papers, to be honest, I was peeking at mine, not a big deal." At the same time, Putin noted that he sees the Biden administration policy as wrong.

Russia-West ties have plunged to their lowest levels since the Cold War era after Putin sent his troops into Ukraine in February 2022. "I believe that the position of the current administration is badly flawed and wrong, and I have told President Biden about that," Putin said. Putin has claimed that he has sent troops into Ukraine to protect Russian speakers there and to prevent a threat to Russia's security posed by Ukraine's bid to

join NATO. Ukraine and its Western allies have denounced Moscow's action as an unprovoked act of aggression.

Putin argued that Moscow was forced to act after Ukraine and its allies refused to fulfill a 2015 agreement to grant more powers to separatist territories in eastern Ukraine, where Moscow-backed separatists launched a rebellion in 2014. "We only can regret that we didn't act earlier, thinking that we are dealing with decent people," Putin said.

Asked about Trump's statement on Saturday, in which he said he once warned he would allow Russia to do whatever it wants to NATO member nations that are "delinquent" in devoting 2% of their gross domestic product to defense, Putin responded that it's up to the U.S. to determine its role in the alliance.

Trump's statement sharply contrasted with Biden's pledge "to defend every inch of NATO territory," as the alliance commits all members to do in case of attack. It shocked many in Europe, drawing a pledge from Poland, France and Germany to bolster Europe's security and defense power.

Putin noted that Trump's statement followed his policy during his first term when he prodded NATO allies in Europe to increase their defense spending.

"He has his own view on how relations with allies should develop," Putin said about Trump. "From his point of view, there is some logic in this, while from the point of view of the Europeans, there is no logic at all, and they would like the U.S. to keep carrying out some functions they have fulfilled since the formation of NATO free of charge."

He described NATO as a "U.S. foreign policy tool," adding that "if the U.S. thinks that it no longer needs this tool it's up to it to decide." Asked about his impressions from his last week's interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, Putin said he expected Carlson to be more aggressive. Putin used the interview to push his narrative on the fighting in Ukraine, urge Washington to recognize Moscow's interests and press Kyiv to sit down for talks.

"I expected him to be aggressive and ask the so-called tough questions, and I wasn't only ready for it but wanted it because it would have given me a chance to respond sharply," Putin said.

Carlson didn't ask Putin about war crimes Russian troops have been accused of in Ukraine, or about his relentless crackdown on dissent. "He didn't allow me to do what I was ready for," Putin said, describing Carlson as a "dangerous man." (AP)

## Zardari tipped to become Pak president as PPP, PML-N enter into alliance: Media

**ISLAMABAD, Feb 15:** Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) top leader Asif Ali Zardari is likely to be Pakistan's next president, a second term for him after his party agreed to ally with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to form a government at the Centre, according to media reports here.

"If the situation remains unchanged, the country will see the PML-N's prime minister and the PPP's president," The News International reported on Wednesday, quoting sources amid talks of a quiet pro quo arrangement between the PML-N and PPP.

After the February 8 polls produced a split mandate, there has been no government in place in the country for almost a week now. With none of the major parties gaining a clear majority, Pakistan was staring at a coalition government.

As part of the PML-N and PPP alliance, Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of former premier Nawaz Sharif, is expected to become Pakistan's next prime minister. The coming together of these two parties meant that the jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) would not be able to assume power despite the independent candidates it backed won the maximum number of seats in the National Assembly.

PPP president Zardari, 68, served as the President of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013. The current Pakistan President Dr Arif Alvi is scheduled to relinquish his post later this month.

The PML-N on Tuesday night nominated 72-year-old Shehbaz as the prime ministerial candidate instead of the party supremo and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif. The 74-year-old veteran politician, who was seeking a record fourth term as prime minister, returned to Pakistan in October last year after ending a self-imposed exile in the UK.

The PML-N and PPP have been joined by the MQM-P, PML-Q, IPP, and BAP to form a coalition government in the Centre on the pattern of the last government of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

A press conference was held by all top leaders where they fielded various questions related to the government formation. To a question on the constitutional posts of National Assembly speaker, Senate chairman and president, the PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said the party would decide its nominees for these posts but he wanted Asif Ali Zardari to become president "because the country is burning and if anyone can help put the fire out, it is Asif Ali Zardari." (PTI)

## Kim watches missile tests and warns that NKorea will take an aggressive stance in disputed seas

**SEOUL, Feb 15:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a test of new surface-to-sea missiles and warned that the country would take a more aggressive military posture in disputed seas, the North's state media said Thursday.

The report by the Korean Central News Agency came a day after South Korea's military detected the North firing multiple cruise missiles into waters off its eastern port of Wonsan. The launches were the sixth such event this year and added to a provocative run in weapons demonstrations since 2022.

Some experts say Kim may seek to further dial up pressure in an election year in South Korea and the United States. There are growing concerns in South Korea about a direct military provocation, and a possible area of conflict could be the Korean's poorly drawn western sea boundary, where several bloody skirmishes have occurred in past years.



Kim supervised the test launches of the new weapon, named Padasuri-6, and said the North would strengthen its deployment of surface-to-sea missiles to fend off any "adventurous" attempts by the South Korean navy. He accused South Korea of frequently violating what he decried as North Korean territorial waters with its maritime patrols and interdiction of third-party ships.

He ordered his navy to strengthen its defense posture in waters near the South Korean border islands of Baekryeong and Yeonpyeong, where a North Korean artillery bombardment killed four people in 2010.

UN experts investigating 58

suspected North Korean cyberattacks valued at about \$3 billion

"It is not important how many lines exist in the (western sea) and there is no need to thrash out the rights and wrongs.

What is clear is that when the enemy intrudes into the maritime border recognized by us, we will regard it as an encroachment upon the sovereignty of (North Korea) and an armed provocation against it," KCNA paraphrased Kim as saying. The report did not specify precisely what North Korea considers its maritime border. In a speech at Pyongyang's parliament on Jan. 15, Kim reiterated that his country does not recognize the Northern Limit Line, which was drawn by the U.S.-led U.N. Command at the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

North Korea has traditionally insisted upon a boundary that encroaches deeply into waters currently controlled by South Korea. (AP)

## Israeli airstrikes killed 10 Lebanese civilians in a single day. Hezbollah has vowed to retaliate

**BEIRUT, Feb 15:** The civilian death toll from two Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon has risen to 10, Lebanese media reported on Thursday, making the previous day the deadliest one in more than four months of cross-border exchanges. The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah has vowed to retaliate for the strikes, which hit in the city of Nabatiyeh and a village in southern Lebanon, just hours after projectiles from Lebanon killed an Israeli soldier. In Nabatiyeh, the strike knocked down part of a building, killing seven members of the same family, including a child, the state-run National News Agency said. A boy initially reported missing was found alive under the rubble. Initial reports had said four people were killed.

In the village of Souaneh, a woman and her two young children were killed. The Lebanese civilian death toll included six women and three children. Three Hezbollah fighters were also killed on Wednesday. The fire from Lebanon earlier Wednesday struck the northern Israeli town of Safed, killing a female Israeli soldier and wounding eight people.

The fatalities marked a significant escalation in more than four months of daily cross-border exchanges triggered by the Oct 7 outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The war began with the surprise attack in southern Israel by the Palestinian militant group Hamas, an ally of Hezbollah. Government institutions, schools and the Lebanese University were to close on Thursday in protest of the airstrikes. (AP)

## Australian parliament wants WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange back home, not sent to US



**MELBOURNE, Feb 15:** Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Thursday he hoped for an amicable end to the prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange after lawmakers ramped up pressure on the United States and Britain by passing a motion calling for the Australian citizen to be allowed to return to his home country.

Albanese told Parliament the days before Britain's High Court of Justice hears Assange's appeal next week against extradition to the United States on espionage charges were a "critical period."

"I hope this can be resolved. I hope it can be resolved amicably. It's not up to Australia to interfere in the legal processes of other countries, but it is appropriate for us to put our very strong view that those countries need to take into account the need for this to be concluded," Albanese said.

"Regardless of where people stand, this thing cannot just go on and on and on indefinitely," Albanese added.

Albanese congratulated independent lawmaker Andrew Wilkie for moving a motion in support of Assange in the House of Representatives on Wednesday ahead of the appeal.

Albanese was among the 86 lawmakers who voted for the motion that called on the United States and Britain to bring the "matter to a close so that Mr. Assange can return home to his family in Australia."

The motion was opposed by 42 lawmakers including most of the main opposition party that unsuccessfully proposed amendments.

Leaders of both the government and the opposition have publicly stated that the United States' pursuit of the 52-year-old had dragged on for too long.

Assange has been in London's high-security Belmarsh Prison since he was arrested in 2019 for skipping bail during a separate legal battle.

Before that, he spent seven years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault. Sweden dropped the rape investigation in 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

Assange's brother Gabriel Shipton on Thursday welcomed the lawmakers'

vote, adding that his notorious sibling could potentially be extradited to the United States next week.

"That means all the ties to his family, his lifeline that are keeping him alive inside that prison will be cut off and he'll be lost into a horrific prison system in the United States," Shipton told reporters at Parliament House.

"This show of support from the Parliament is at a crucial time and now gives the government a real mandate to advocate very, very strongly for a political solution to bring Julian Assange home," Shipton added.

Wilkie, who authored the motion, argues the extradition should be dropped.

But the Albanese government's language has been more circumspect. Australia's repeated calls for the charges to be "brought to a conclusion" leave open the possibility of a plea deal that could require Assange spend no more time in custody.

Assange's plight is seen as a test of Albanese's leverage with the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden.

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken pushed back against Albanese's position during a visit to Australia last year, saying Assange was accused of "very serious criminal conduct" in publishing a trove of classified U.S. documents more than a decade ago. (AP)

## 3 officers shot in Washington, leading to daylong standoff before suspect's arrest

**WASHINGTON, Feb 15:** Three police officers were shot trying to make an animal cruelty arrest that touched off an hours-long standoff in the nation's capitol on Wednesday, which ended late at night with a man's arrest.

The officers were hospitalized and expected to recover from gunshot wounds, authorities said. A fourth officer was hurt at the scene, but not shot.

The standoff started Wednesday morning as officers attempted to make an arrest on an animal cruelty warrant, but the suspect refused to leave the home, Metropolitan Police Department Chief Pamela Smith said. As officers tried to get inside, a person opened fire.

The shooter barricaded himself inside his home in the southeast part of Washington and continued sporadically firing shots hours after opening fire, police said.

Hours after the standoff began, 46-year-old Julius James was arrested on suspicion of cruelty to animals. He is expected to face additional charges related to the shooting. No attorney or phone number was listed for him in public records Wednesday night.

One officer was struck by gunfire twice, but the rounds were stopped by a bulletproof vest, said Gregg Pemberton, chairman of the Washington, D.C., police union. Two more officers were struck in their lower legs. The fourth officer suffered hand injuries at the scene, he said.

"We expect some may have a lengthy recovery, but hopefully they'll be back on the streets again soon," Pemberton said. (AP)

## US company's lunar lander rockets toward the moon for a touchdown attempt next week

**CAPE CANAVERAL, Feb 15:** Another private U.S. company took a shot at the moon on Thursday, launching a month after a rival's lunar lander missed its mark and came crashing back.

NASA, the main sponsor with experiments on board, is hoping for a successful moon landing next week as it seeks to jumpstart the lunar economy ahead of astronaut missions.

SpaceX's Falcon rocket blasted off in the middle of the night from NASA's Kennedy Space Center, dispatching Intuitive Machines' lunar lander on its way to the moon, 230,000 miles (370,000 kilometers) away. The lander resembled a stunning six-pointed star jewel — each point a leg — as it successfully separated from the upper stage and drifted off into the black void with the blue Earth far below.

If all goes well, a touchdown attempt would occur Feb. 22, after a day in lunar orbit. Only five countries — the U.S., Russia, China, India and Japan — have scored a lunar landing and no private business has yet done so. The U.S. has not returned to the moon's surface since the Apollo program ended more than five decades ago.

"There have been a lot of sleepless nights getting ready for this," Intuitive

Machines' co-founder and chief executive Steve Altemus said before the flight.

The Houston-based company aims to put its 14-foot (4.3-meter) tall, six-legged lander down just 186 miles (300 kilometers) shy of the moon's south pole, equivalent to landing within Antarctica on Earth. This region — full of treacherous craters and cliffs, yet potentially rich with frozen water — is where NASA plans to land astronauts later this decade. The space agency said its six navigation and

tech experiments on the lander can help smooth the way. NASA's first entry in its commercial lunar delivery service — Astrobotic Technology's Peregrine lander — stumbled shortly after liftoff in early January. A ruptured fuel tank and massive leak caused the

spacecraft to bypass the moon and come tearing back through the atmosphere 10 days after launching, breaking apart and burning up over the Pacific.

Others made it to the moon before wrecking. An Israeli nonprofit's lander crashed in 2019. Last year, a Tokyo company saw its lunar smash into the moon followed by Russia's crash landing.

Only the U.S. has sent astronauts to the moon with Apollo 17's Gene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt closing out the program in December 1972. (AP)



# Tripura CM launches ₹ 5 lakh health insurance scheme for 4.15 lakh families

₹ 69 crore earmarked for implementation of health insurance scheme, 'Chief Minister's Jan Arogya Yojana'

AGARTALA, Feb 15: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Thursday launched a universal health insurance scheme under which 4.15 lakh families in the northeastern state will get an insurance coverage of ₹ 5 lakh.

Under the Chief Minister's Jan Arogya Yojana (CM-JAY), 4.15 lakh families including government employees who are not covered under PM-JAY will get the benefit of health insurance coverage of ₹ 5 lakh each.

"People become helpless when medical emergency emerges. Many people who are not covered under PM-JAY visit me with a plea for financial assistance to meet exorbitant medical expenditure. It has become a constraint for me to help all these people. This has led me to think of an alternative arrangement for those people who need help for treatment", Saha said while launching the CM-JAY.

"It is indeed a historic moment for the state that we are rolling out



CM-JAY to help the people with a healing touch to those who need assistance from the government.

Under the scheme, each enrolled family will get health insurance of Rs 5 lakh annually", he said.

Saha said the scheme is designed in such a way that the patient's family will get free medicine for 15 days even after discharge from government or pri-

private hospitals and the entire process will be cashless.

"Initially there may be problems in implementing the universal health insurance scheme as it happened with the PM-JAY, but these issues will be addressed to ensure the benefits reach the targeted people. We promised to offer medical insurance to the people in last year's budget speech and the gov-

ernment delivered it", he said.

Additional chief executive officer of the national health authority Basant Garg claimed that Tripura is the first northeastern state to have introduced universal health insurance coverage for all.

Chief secretary J K Sinha termed the government's decision to roll out the universal health insurance as a historic and brave move for the welfare of the people.

"Under PM-JAY around 5.12 lakh families of the state are covered, but there is no health insurance provision for around 4.15 lakh families of the state. This scheme- CM-JAY will ensure all the families of the state get health insurance benefits. This is a historic and brave decision keeping in mind the state's limited resources", he said.

A sum of ₹ 69 crore has been provisioned in the budget for implementation of the universal health insurance scheme. (PTI)

## 6 arrested for looting arms from IRB camp in Manipur

IMPHAL, Feb 15: Manipur Police have arrested six people for looting arms from the India Reserve Battalion camp at Chingarel in Manipur's Imphal East district.

Four Insas rifles, one AK Ghatak, two magazines of SLR and 16 small boxes of 9mm ammunition looted from the IRB camp have also been recovered, police said.

Taking to X, police said, "In connection with the incident of arms looting case of 5th IRB, Chingarel, Imphal East by an unruly mob on the night of 13.02.2024, Manipur Police have arrested six persons on Wednesday and they have been remanded to police custody by a judicial magistrate."

Police, however, did not mention from where the arms were recovered or from where the persons were arrested.

An unruly mob broke into the camp of the 5th IRB at Chingarel and fled with arms and ammunition. Following the incident, a large number of village volunteers also attempted to charge in at the Manipur Police Training College at Pangei in Imphal East district, located around 5 km from Chingarel.

A police statement said "On Tuesday, in order to repel violent mobs including armed miscreants trying to storm into MPTC, Pangei, security forces resorted to the use of legal force. During the incident, one person succumbed to injuries and three others sustained injuries." (PTI)

## Clean River Save Water campaign launched in Senapati

SENAPATI, Feb 15: The Clean River-Save Water campaign has been launched in Senapati district in Manipur to advocate the preservation of rivers and water bodies of the state.

The campaign, which was launched on Wednesday, has been sponsored by social activist and recipient of the Best Social Reformer of the Year Award, 2024, Alyson Abonmai.

The campaign is being carried out by Abonmai in collaboration with the Zeliangrong Student Union Senapati and CRPF 109 Battalion.

The slogan of the campaign, Clean River-Save Water delivers a resounding message urging individuals to cherish and protect the invaluable natural resources.

Alyson Abonmai, in his address, passionately called upon participants to embrace their responsibility towards safeguarding our rivers and water, which serve as the lifeblood of our planet.

The turnout for the cleanliness drives was remarkable,

with students and personnel from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) numbering in hundreds, demonstrating their commitment to environmental stewardship.

The timing of the event, coinciding with Valentine's Day, provided a poignant reminder to express love not only to "our loved ones but also to Mother Nature".

In addition to the campaign activities, a Valentine's Day special event was organized at the Jamning Valley Resort with free entry for all to partake in the celebrations. Football enthusiasts enjoyed friendly matches, while the evening culminated in a gospel concert featuring local artists sharing the stage with the renowned 'Gospel Cowboy'. The crowd was enthralled by the rendition of country hit songs, creating a perfect ambience for Valentine's Day festivities.

The Clean River-Save Water campaign represents a collective effort to foster environmental consciousness and responsibility within the community. (NNN)

## KSU serves ultimatum over illegal settlement in Maxwellton Estate

SHILLONG, Feb 15: The Khasi Students Union (KSU) has served a 15-day ultimatum to the Meghalaya government to evict all illegal settlers and cattle breeders from Maxwellton Estate, a nine acres of land at Laban.

In a memorandum to the deputy commissioner of East Khasi Hills, president of the KSU Laban circle Reuben Najjar on Wednesday said that there are a huge number of illegal settlers settling in the area without the consent or approval of the Dorbar Shong Kenches Trace Oxford Riblong or any appropriate authority for that matter.

He said these illegal settlers are migrating into the area unchecked leading to influx and security concerns for the society and community as a whole. Over the years they have build sheds and huts. In absence of proper sanitation, all the wastes are being dis-



posed into the streams and open pit, which pose various health hazards to neighbouring residents.

"Some of these illegal settlers even breed cattle and other livestock in Maxwellton Estate even though it falls under the municipal area and is under the jurisdiction of the Shillong Municipal Board, which violates the provisions and rules of Meghalaya Municipal Act, 1973. Their action is being condoned without any effective measures," Najjar said.

The KSU leader said that various complaints had been lodged by the union in this regard with Shillong Municipal Board to evict the illegal cattle breeders, but to no effect.

It stated that although the SMB has served notices in regards to cow sheds and direct discharges of wastes under various provisions of the Meghalaya Municipal Act, 1973 to these settlers and cattle breeders, but till date there has been no eviction and the cattle

breeders are thriving in the area and also the illegal settlers renting their houses without approval and consent from the respective authorities.

The Union claimed that this area is gradually being converted into an area of criminal transaction and misconduct, which in a manner is being sponsored and supported by these illegal settlers.

Meanwhile, the KSU has threatened to take action against such illegal activities if no concrete or solid action is taken by the appropriate authorities within 15 days. (NNN)

## Arms recovered in Kangpokpi, Bishnupur districts

GUWAHATI, Feb 15: Security forces have recovered a large quantity of arms and ammunition from Kangpokpi and Bishnupur districts of Manipur.

Based on specific inputs, the security forces launched two separate operations on Wednesday and recovered a huge cache of arms and explosives from the two districts of Manipur.

A joint team of the Indian Army and Manipur police conducted a synergized search operation at the Khoken village in Kangpokpi district on Friday and recovered one country made mortar, one country made carbine machine gun, two country made Pompi guns, one grenade and a large quantity of ammunition.

On the other hand, another joint team of Indian Army, Border Security Force and Manipur police conducted a search operation along the foothills of Dampi ridge at Lailampat in Kumbi in Bishnupur district and recovered two 6 inch countrymade mortars with 11 rounds, one 7.62mm SLR rifle, one 9mm pistol, two 12 bore single barrel gun, ammunition, four grenades and other war like stores.

The recovered items have been handed over to the police. The successful operations have delivered a major blow to the inimical activities of the miscreants in the area.

## Tawang celebrates Major Bob Khating Day

TEZPUR, Feb 15: Indian armed forces, Tawang Administration and the locals of Tawang have come together to commemorate the 74th Maj Bob Khating Day at Tawang War memorial complex in the border town in Arunachal Pradesh.

The celebrations, attended by military officers from Tawang Brigade, senior officials from state administration, students, community leaders, Army veterans and monks on Wednesday, were marked by patriotic fervour and enthusiasm.

The celebrations that commenced with the customary laying of the wreath also included unfurling of the tricolour and performances by students and local artists.

It is worth mentioning that in the aftermath of India's independence, Major Bob Khating was entrusted with the monumental task of establishing Indian administration in the remote Tawang region. It was on February 14, 1951 that the tricolour was hoisted for the first time at Tawang by Major Bob Khating, the appointed assistant political officer, heralding establishment of the Indian administration at Tawang.

The same materialized after the valiant Major un-

dertook a treacherous march from the plains of Assam to Tawang, negotiating Sela and Bomdila passes during the peak winters, leading a contingent of 200 Assam Rifles troops and 600 porters for a difficult maiden mission. This materialized the formal establishment of Indian civil administration at Tawang. Armed with unwavering resolve and diplomatic finesse, he navigated the treacherous terrain of the Himalayas, bridging divides and fostering trust among the local populace.

Through tireless negotiations and genuine empathy, Major Khating seamlessly integrated Tawang into the Indian Union, laying the foundations for governance and development. His strategic leadership and commitment to unity ensured a smooth transition, earning him the respect and admiration of all and awang at present stands as a shining testament to Major Bob Khating's indomitable spirit and visionary leadership.

The day is celebrated annually with great fervour and enthusiasm by Indian Armed forces, Tawang administration and the locals. Major Bob Khating is revered not just for his remarkable achievements, but also for his enduring legacy of peace, unity, and nation-building.

## Advocate Peter Challam to contest Lok Sabha polls

SHILLONG, Feb 15: Advocate Peter Challam on Thursday announced his decision to contest as an independent candidate from the Shillong parliamentary seat in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing the media Challam, who is a resident of Laikor, said he has taken the decision to join the fray in order to take up the various issues confronting the state at present. He said the demand for implementation of the inner line permit (ILP) and inclusion of the Khasi language in the eighth schedule of the Consti-

tution of India besides inter-state border dispute are some of the issues which have been long pending. Apart from these, issues concerning health, education, unemployment, connectivity, safety and security of every citizen of the state will also be highlighted during his campaign, Challam said.

The advocate said that he is not against the sitting Congress MP and candidates of other political parties because he is concerned only about the welfare of the state and its people. (NNN)

## Rainfall decreases in Manipur, water scarcity possible: CM

IMPHAL, Feb 15: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Thursday said there is a possibility of water scarcity in the state, particularly in Imphal valley, due to a decline in forest cover in the hill areas and less rainfall.

Speaking at the inauguration of a housing complex for government employees, Singh urged people not to encroach on forest land.

"The possibility of water scarcity exists in the state, particularly valley areas, as forest covers have declined in the hill areas. Rainfall has also dropped," the chief minister said without elaborating.

"In the previous term, a project was taken up to dig ground for water. Work started at 280 places for digging well," he said.

Manipur being a landlocked state, it is important to preserve agricultural land, water bodies and rivers, the chief minister said.

Speaking on the effect of environmental degradation due to deforestation, Singh said, "Do not encroach on forest land and reserved forest areas."

The function took place at the 'Alternate Housing Complex' at National Games Village in Langol area in Imphal.

The complex will accommodate the residents of government quarters located at New Checkon in Imphal East, which was dismantled for construction of multi-storied buildings.

It is easy to change Manipur if there is unity and cooperation, Singh said. (PTI)

## Tripura cabinet ministers to offer prayers at Ayodhya Ram Temple



AGARTALA, Feb 15: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha said all the state cabinet ministers will visit the Ram Temple in Ayodhya soon to offer puja to Ram Lalla.

The CM on Wednesday night flagged off a special train to Ay-

odhya from here. He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for arranging the special train to Ayodhya.

"It feels good to flag off a special train carrying over 400 pilgrims from Tripura to offer prayer to Ram Lalla in Ayodhya", he said after flagging off the Ayodhya-bound special train at Agartala railway station.

The CM said, "The Tripura cabinet was scheduled to visit the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on February 5, but it was cancelled due to heavy rush. The entire Tripura cabinet will visit Ayodhya soon and offer puja to Ram Lalla". (PTI)

### KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

#### DEPARTMENT OF WORKS

#### BRANCH SECRETARIAT

HAMREN :7824586

#### TENDER NOTICE

Dated 12/02/2024

No.KAAC/HRNW-05/2023-24/24

Sealed tender affixing Nonrefundable KAAC court fee stamp (Receipt) Rs10.00 (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 receive by the undersigned up to 4 P.M on 15/02/2024 and will opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the tenderers or their authorized agent if any.

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

Sl.No.	Name of works	Tender Amount	A/AAmount	Earnest Money	Time Allowed for Completion
1	Construction of Khasi Cultural Hall at Umlapher Chinthong Constituency	Rs. 28,80,000.00	Rs 28,80,000.00	ST/OBC/SC-1% GENERAL-2%	30 Days

Detail N.I./T/ document and name of works amounts may be obtained from Office of the E.E (Work) KAAC, Branch Secretariat, Hamren during working hours.

#### Terms & Conditions

#### N.B

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

Sd-

Executive Engineer (Work)

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council

Branch Secretariat

HAMREN

Memo No. KAAC/HRNW-05/2023-24/24(A)

Dated 12/02/2024

# Electoral bonds brought for transparency in poll funding, we respect SC verdict: BJP

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** The BJP on Thursday defended the electoral bonds scheme, struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, saying it had a laudable objective of bringing transparency in poll funding.

BJP leader and former law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, however, added that his party respects the Supreme Court verdict.

Noting that the verdict has been delivered by a constitution bench of the apex court, he said the judgment runs into hundreds of pages and requires a comprehensive study before a structured reply is given by the party.

He told reporters that the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made efforts to reform election funding and the introduction of electoral bonds was a part of such measures.

Taking a swipe at the Congress which had alleged that the bonds could also work as a bribe to the ruling BJP from corporate groups, he said the parties whose "DNA is based on corruption and bribery" should not level such charges against the BJP.

Amid claims that electoral bonds denied opposition parties a level-playing field in elections, he said it is for people to decide who are in the field and who are out of it. People have thrown some parties out of the field and they could not now win even one seat in regions which used to be their strongholds, he said in a clear swipe at the Congress.

BJP spokesperson Nalin Kohli accused the opposition parties of politicising the issue as they do not have any alternative to Modi's leadership and the positive work done by his government.

The BJP's reaction came after the Supreme Court in a landmark judgment annulled the electoral bonds scheme ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, due in April-May.

"We practise in courts and on a daily basis, cases are won and lost," Kohli told PTI when asked for his comment.

Any order of the Supreme Court or its judgment has to be accepted and respected, he added.

"But those political parties who are trying to politicise it are doing it primarily on the grounds that they have no answer or alternative to Modi ji's

leadership and the positive work done by his government where crores of people have benefited," he charged.

Kohli said India has now become the fifth largest economy in the world from the 10th largest economy and it is on its way to become the third largest economy under Prime Minister Modi's leadership. "These political parties find themselves in a position that an alliance they were trying to craft is almost dying itself or it's dying out or collapsing even before it could stand on its legs," the BJP spokesperson said.

"So, their reason for politicising it is very clear," he added.

Kohli said the government had brought the electoral bond scheme to address the issue of use of black money in elections.

"The largest perspective is that this has been a journey for several decades and a concern has been how to prevent black money or slush money getting into the electoral process," the BJP leader said.

"Keeping concerns regarding the identities of the contributors in the mind, a (electoral bond) scheme came. The Supreme Court has held that this scheme in this format could not have been there. Therefore, it passed a set of directions," he said. The apex court has "basically" said today that in electoral bonds the information should come out, Kohli said, adding, "any order of the Supreme Court or its judgment has to be accepted".

The apex court has "basically" said today that in electoral bonds the information should come out, Kohli said, adding, "any order of the Supreme Court or its judgment has to be accepted".

The top court said the government's electoral bond scheme violates the constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression as well as the right to information.

The opposition parties welcomed the Supreme Court's verdict and attacked the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the court has struck down a "black money conversion" scheme of the Modi government and hoped it would stop resorting to "such mischievous ideas" in future as well. (PTI)



# Panel of 3 Union ministers to hold talks with farmer leaders in Chandigarh



**CHANDIGARH, Feb 15:** A panel of three Union ministers will hold a meeting with protesting farmer leaders in Chandigarh Thursday for another round of talks amid the ongoing standoff between the agitators and security personnel at the Punjab-Haryana border. Meanwhile, there was no report of any clash between farmers and the Haryana security personnel at the two Punjab and Haryana border points -- Shambhu and Khanauri -- on Thursday.

Agriculture and Farmer Welfare Minister Arjun Munda, Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai will meet the farmer leaders at 5 pm here over their various demands, including a law guaranteeing Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops. This will be the third round of talks between the two sides: the previous two rounds of dialogue on February 8 and 12 remained inconclusive. Ahead of the meeting with a panel of the Centre, farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher on Thursday said the prime minister should speak

to the three union ministers, visiting Chandigarh for talks, for the resolution of the farmers' issues. Addressing the media at the Shambhu border point, Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Pandher said protesting farmers' demands should be accepted.

"We want that the prime minister should himself speak to the deputation (of Union ministers) which is coming (for the meeting) and resolve the demands of farmers," he said. "We want our demands to be accepted," Pandher said. Either accept our demands or allow us to hold a peaceful protest, he further said. Referring to an action against farmers by the security personnel deployed by the Haryana authorities at the Punjab-Haryana border, Pandher slammed the paramilitary personnel for using "force" against farmers, leaving many injured. Farmers from Punjab are camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points seeking to march towards Delhi to press the Centre to accept their demands.

The farmer leaders have said they will not make any fresh attempt to move towards the national capital till the meeting is held, asserting that the next course of action will be decided on the basis of the Centre's proposals.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) and BKU Dakaunda (Dhaner) have announced 'rail roko' in the state on Thursday. Farmers also began their four-hour 'rail roko' stir squatting on rail tracks at some locations.

The decision was taken in protest against the hurling of tear gas shells and water cannons used against the protesting farmers by the Haryana security personnel at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points. (PTI)

# Sandeshkhali: BJP trying to foment trouble; all necessary actions taken, says Mamata in assembly

**KOLKATA, Feb 15:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday accused the BJP of fomenting trouble in restive Sandeshkhali and asserted that all necessary action has been taken to restore peace in the area. While speaking in the assembly, Banerjee said that 17 people have been arrested in Sandeshkhali and no one involved in any wrongdoing will be spared.

Referring to the area which has been witnessing protests over alleged atrocities on locals by ruling TMC leaders, Banerjee said that she has never allowed and will never allow any injustice to anyone. "We are looking into the Sandeshkhali situation; no one involved in any wrongdoing will be spared. I have sent the state women's commission there and formed a police team for Sandeshkhali," she said.

A "sinister design is at play" to foment trouble in the area and the state government has taken all necessary actions to control the situation, Banerjee said.

Protests persisted in Sandeshkhali for the seventh consecutive day on Wednesday, with a significant number of women taking to the streets, demanding the arrest of TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh and his followers. (PTI)

# Sonia not to contest LS polls, sends emotional message to Rae Bareilly voters

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday informed voters of her Rae Bareilly constituency in Uttar Pradesh that she will not contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls due to health and age issues. In an emotional message to the constituents of the segment she has represented since 2004, the 77-year-old also threw subtle hints of a possible entry of a member of her family from the Rae Bareilly segment.

"I am proud to say that whatever I am today, I am because of you and I have always done my best to honour your trust. Now on account of health and age issues, I will not contest the next Lok Sabha election," she said in the message.

"After this decision, I will not have the opportunity to serve you directly but my heart and soul will always remain with you. I know that you will stand by me and my family in future, just as you have in the past," she said in the message written in Hindi.

The message to the voters comes a day after the

former Congress president filed her nomination for the Rajya Sabha seat from Rajasthan.

Speculation is rife that Sonia Gandhi's daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra could contest from the Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituency this time.

This is the first time that Sonia Gandhi would be entering the Rajya Sabha.

She will also be the second member of the Gandhi family to do so, after Indira Gandhi who was a member of the upper house from 1964 to 1967. In the message to voters, Sonia Gandhi further said, "My family in Delhi is incomplete without you. It completes when I come to Rae Bareilly and meet all of you. My ties with you are very old. I have inherited these ties as a good fortune from my in-laws."

Noting that ties of her family with Rae Bareilly are "very deep rooted", she said Rae Bareilly sent her father-in-law Feroze Gandhi to Lok Sabha in the first general election held after Independence.

After that, you accepted my mother-in-law Indira Gandhi, she noted. (PTI)

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT UNIT  
**NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION**  
**DISTRICT HEALTH SOCIETY, KARBI ANGLONG**  
Karbi Anglong, Diphu. Tele- 03671-273038 Email: nhm.karbianglong@gmail.com

No.NHM/K-Ang/E-Hospital/375/2022-23/

Dated: - 13/02/2024

## SHORT NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

Sealed quotation affixing court fee of Rs.8.25 (Rupees Eight and Twenty five paisa) only or Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council cash receipt of Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only are invited for supply of Computer Articles for district DPMU, NHM, Karbi Anglong respectively. The quotation will be received in the office of the undersigned up to 2.00 PM on 22nd February 2024 and if the office is closed on this day due to Govt. Holiday or any other bandh, the next working day of the office will be the date of receiving and opening of quotation. The undersigned reserve the right to reject any of the quotation.

### Particulars/Items to be supply:

Sl No	Items	Description	Unit Rate	GST @18 %	Unit Rate (Incl. GST @18%)
1	UPS	ZEBRONICS 600VA			
2	UPS	Microtek 600VA			
3	UPS	ZEBRONICS 1 KVA			
4	UPS	Microtek 1 KVA			
5	Toner	Lexmark B2236dw Laser Printer			
6	Dongle with all SIM Network Support	4G LTE wireless plug & play Data Card up to 150 Mbps with in build rechargeable battery			
7	UPS BATTERY	EXIDE 12v 7.2Ah with installation			
8	UPS BATTERY	Frontech 12v 7.2Ah with installation			
9	Laser Jet Printer (with Wi-Fi)	HP MFP136W All-in-One Monochrome Laser Printer with Wi-Fi			
10	Laser Jet Printer	HP LaserJet Pro M128fn Printer			
11	Laser Jet Printer	HP LaserJet Pro P1108 Printer			
12	Laser Jet Printer	Laser Jet P1108 Single Function Monochrome Laser Printer			
13	Laser Jet Printer	LaserJet 108w Single Function Monochrome Laser Wi-Fi Printer			
14	Ink Jet Printer (with Wi-Fi)	Epson Eco Tank L3260 A4 Wi-Fi All-in-One Colour Ink Tank Printer with LCD Display			
15	Ink Jet Printer (with Wi-Fi)	Epson Eco Tank L3250 A4 Wi-Fi All-in-One Ink Tank Printer Ink			
16	Ink Jet Printer (without Wi-Fi)	Eco Tank L3211 All-in-One Ink Tank Printer (Black)			
17	Laptop (i5)	HP Laptop, 12th Gen Intel Core i5-1235U, 15.6-inch (39.6 cm), FHD, 8GB DDR4, 512GB SSD, Intel Iris Xe Graphics, Backlit KB, Thin & Light			
18	Laptop (i3)	HP Laptop, 12th Gen Intel Core i3-1215U, 15.6-inch (39.6 cm), FHD, 8GB DDR4, 512GB SSD, Intel UHD Graphics, Backlit KB, Thin & Light, Dual Speakers			
19	Laptop (i5)	Lenovo Laptop, 12th Gen Intel Core i5-1235U, 15.6-inch (39.6 cm), FHD, 8GB DDR4, 512GB SSD, Intel Iris Xe Graphics, Backlit KB, Thin & Light			
20	Laptop (i3)	Lenovo Laptop, 12th Gen Intel Core i3-1215U, 15.6-inch (39.6 cm), FHD, 8GB DDR4, 512GB SSD, Intel UHD Graphics, Backlit KB, Thin & Light, Dual Speakers			
21	Monitor	Samsung 24-inch (60.46cm) FHD Flat 1,920 x 1,080 Monitor, IPS			
22	Monitor	Acer 24-inch (60.46cm) FHD Flat 1,920 x 1,080 Monitor, IPS			
23	Monitor	Lenovo 21.5-inch (60.46cm) FHD Flat 1,920 x 1,080 Monitor, IPS			
24	Monitor	Samsung 21.5-inch (60.46cm) FHD Flat 1,920 x 1,080 Monitor, IPS			
25	Monitor	Acer 21.5-inch (60.46cm) FHD Flat 1,920 x 1,080 Monitor, IPS			
26	Monitor	Lenovo 21.5-inch (60.46cm) FHD Flat 1,920 x 1,080 Monitor, IPS			
27	External HDD 2 TB	Seagate Expansion			
28	External HDD 2TB	Western Digital			
29	External HDD 1 TB	Seagate Expansion			
30	External HDD 1 TB	Western Digital			
31	Mouse & Keyboard	Logitech MK270r Wireless Keyboard and Mouse Combo			
32	Mouse	M221 Wireless Mouse, Silent Buttons, 2.4 GHz with USB Mini Receiver			
33	SSD	1 TB SSD with installation			
34	SSD	512 TB SSD with installation			

• Quotation with any deviation in specification will be straight away rejected.  
\*Incomplete and late Quotations are liable to be rejected summarily.

### Terms and Conditions:

- Each supplier shall submit only ONE quotation.
- Evaluation of Quotations
- The Purchaser will evaluate and compare the quotations determined to be substantially responsive i.e. which
  - Are properly signed
  - Confirm to the terms and conditions, and specifications.
  - The Quotations would be evaluated for all the items together, on the basis of rates, delivery terms
- Location of Delivery will be in Office of the DPMU, National Health Mission, Karbi Anglong Diphu.
- The Purchaser will award the contract to the bidder whose quotation has been determined to be substantially responsive and who has offered the lowest evaluated quotation price.
- Notwithstanding the above, the Purchaser reserves the right to accept or reject any quotations and to cancel the bidding process and reject all quotations at any time prior to the award of contract.
- Payment shall be made as per availability of fund of delivery of goods and successful installation at destination as per the contract.
- The Bidder shall indicate the name of the Bank, address and account number  
Bank's Information: Name of the Bank: Account number:
- All legal disputes shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the Courts of Law of Karbi Anglong district.
- GST/ PAN, Trading license etc to be submitted.

Sd/-  
Joint Direct of Health Services  
Cum Member Secretary  
Dist. Health Society, Karbi Anglong  
Dated: - 13/02/2024

No.NHM/K-Ang/E-Hospital/375/2022-23/64595-603

# PM Modi to launch multiple development in Rajasthan, Haryana

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 26,750 crore in Rajasthan and Haryana on Friday.

An official statement said Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of development projects costing more than ₹ 17,000 crore in Rajasthan via video conference and will also address the 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Rajasthan' programme.

He will later visit Rewari in Haryana and inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 9,750 crore concerning urban transport, health, rail and tourism sectors, it said.

The Rajasthan projects cater to a number of important sectors including roads, railways, solar energy, power transmission, drinking water and petroleum & natural gas.

The statement said he will inaugurate various national highway projects worth more than ₹ 5,000 crore in Rajasthan besides three stretches of eight-lane Delhi - Mumbai Green field Alignment (NE-4). These sections will provide faster and improved connectivity in the region. These sections are also equipped with animal underpass and animal overpass with camouflaging to facilitate unhindered movement of wildlife, it said, adding that noise barriers have been provided as well to minimise the impact on wildlife.



Besides other highway projects, Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of eight railway projects of Rajasthan worth around ₹ 2,300 crore.

In a step to boost production of renewable energy in the region, the prime minister will lay the foundation stone and inaugurate important solar projects worth around ₹ 5,300 crore in the state.

He will lay the foundation stone of multiple projects worth around ₹ 2,400 crore including projects under the Jal Jeevan Mission, which is aimed at strengthening the infrastructure to provide clean drinking water in Rajasthan, the statement said.

"The launch of these development projects in Rajasthan underscores the Prime Minister's relentless efforts to transform Ra-

jasthan's infrastructure landscape and create opportunities for growth and development," it said.

The event will be organised at about 200 places across all districts of the state, with the centrepiece programme being held in Jaipur.

In Rewari, he will lay the foundation stone of Gurugram metro rail project which will be developed at a cost of about ₹ 5,450 crore. The project, with a total length of 28.5 km, will connect Millennium City Centre to Udyog Vihar Phase-5 and merge in the existing metro network of Rapid Metro Rail Gurugram at Mousari Avenue station near Cyber City, it said.

The project is an important step towards realising Modi's vision to provide citizens with world class environment-friendly mass rapid urban transport systems, the state-

ment said.

Seeking to strengthen public health infrastructure across the country, Modi will lay the foundation stone of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Rewari. It will be built at a cost of about ₹ 1,650 crore.

The institute will be developed on 203 acres of land at Majra Mustil Bhalkhi village in Rewari and will have facilities including a hospital complex with 720 beds, medical college with 100 seats, nursing college with 60 seats, AYUSH block with 30 beds, residential accommodation for faculty and staff, hostel accommodation for UG and PG students and a night shelter among other facilities.

The facilities include patient care services in 18 specialities and 17 super specialities including cardiology, gastro-enterology, nephrology, urology, neurology, neurosurgery, medical oncology, surgical oncology, endocrinology and burns & plastic surgery.

The statement said he will also inaugurate a newly built 'Anubhav Kendra Jyotisari', which is based in Kurukshetra. This experiential museum has been built at a cost of around ₹ 240 crore, spans over 17 acres, encompassing more than 100,000 square feet of indoor space.

It will vividly bring the epic narrative of the Mahabharata and the teachings of the Gita, the statement added. (PTI)

## Curfew relaxed after 7 days in epicentre Banbhoolpura

### HALDWANI VIOLENCE

**HALDWANI, Feb 15:** Authorities on Thursday relaxed curfew in Banbhoolpura area of the town for varied durations, seven days after it was imposed following the violence over the demolition of an "illegal" madrasa.

Banbhoolpura was the epicentre of the mob violence which included stone pelting and arson.

According to an order issued by Nainital District Magistrate Vandana Singh, curfew will be relaxed from 9 am to 4 pm in Gaujajali, Railway Bazar and FCI godown area.

However, in the rest of Banbhoolpura, it was relaxed for two hours from 9 am to 11 am.

During the curfew relaxation

shops dealing in essentials will remain open and the residents will be allowed to out to buy essentials, the order said.

However, unnecessary movement of people even during relaxation in curfew will remain prohibited, it said.

Movement of Banbhoolpura residents will continue to be restricted to the area under curfew during the relaxation period not outside it.

Essential supply vehicles can ply in the area if they have a pass issued by the magistrate concerned.

Students in area under curfew will be permitted to go to their centres for the boards, university or other competitive examinations if they produce their admit

cards, the DM's order said.

Any violation of the order will be punishable under section 188 of the CrPC, it said.

Violence broke out on February 8 over the demolition of an illegally built madrasa in the Banbhoolpura area, with locals hurling stones and petrol bombs at municipal workers and police, forcing many police personnel to seek refuge at a police station, which the mob then set on fire.

In the violence, six rioters were killed and more than a hundred, including police personnel and mediapersons, were injured, according to the police.

The curfew imposed in Banbhoolpura after the violence was earlier lifted from the outer areas of the town. (PTI)

## SC verdict on electoral bonds: Cong hopes govt will stop resorting to 'such mischievous ideas'

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** The Congress on Thursday welcomed the Supreme Court verdict striking down the electoral bonds scheme, and said that it will reinforce the power of votes over notes.

The opposition party also said that it hopes that the Modi Government will stop resorting to such "mischievous ideas" in the future and listen to the Supreme Court so that democracy, transparency and level-playing field persist.

The Supreme Court in a landmark judgement delivered a big blow to the government and annulled the electoral bonds scheme for political funding, saying it violates the Constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression as well as the right to information.

In a post on X, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge welcomed the Supreme Court decision and hoped the government will stop resorting to "such mischievous ideas" in the future.

He said the Congress had called the scheme "opaque and undemocratic" when it was launched. Subsequently, in the 2019 manifesto, the Congress promised to scrap the Modi government's "dubious scheme".

"We welcome the decision of the Supreme Court today, which has struck down this 'Black Money Conversion' scheme of the Modi Government, calling it 'Unconstitutional'."

"We remember how the Modi Govt, PMO and FM bulldozed every institution - RBI, Election Commission, Parliament and Opposition to fill BJP's coffers. No wonder, 95% of the funding under this scheme was received by BJP," Kharge said.

"We hope that Modi Government will stop resorting to such mischievous ideas in future and listens to the Supreme Court, so that democracy, transparency and level-playing field persists," the Congress chief said.

Reacting to the verdict, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said, "Another proof of Narendra Modi's corrupt policies is in front of you. The BJP had made electoral bonds a medium for taking bribe and commission. Today a stamp has been put on this."

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "The Supreme Court has held the much-touted Electoral Bonds scheme of the Modi Sarkar as violative of both laws passed by Parliament as well as the Constitution of India."

The long-awaited verdict is hugely welcome and will reinforce the power of votes over notes, he said on X.

"The Modi Sarkar has been inflicting ANYAY upon ANYAY on the Annadatas while privileging the Chandadatas," Ramesh said.

"We also hope that the Supreme Court will take note that Election Commission has been consistently refusing to even meet political parties on the issue of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). If everything is transparent in the voting process then why this opacity?" he said.

Party spokesperson Pawan Khera said at a press conference here that the Congress has been fighting

this battle for the last seven years both within Parliament and outside and its stand has been vindicated.

"We welcome the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court," he told reporters.

"We are grateful to the Supreme Court of India. We, as a nation, stand strengthened and encouraged," Khera said and added that, "Today, we stand vindicated".

Khera charged that the electoral bonds were "a wilful tool of concealment, of absolute exonerated from political accountability".

"That was their only purpose and all the intellectualisations offered at the time have failed to withstand judicial scrutiny, he noted.

"For a party which made the purging of 'Black Money' a key juma of its electoral campaigns, it created a system that removed all accountability from the system, allowed black money a cloak to conceal itself with, while at the same time charging the citizens of this country to run it," he said.

Khera said the party looks forward to the SBI disclosing all the details of funding received by all political parties.

"With over 95 percent of all funding having flowed to just one single party through this route since it was introduced, the question that arises is: will the Modi Government comply or will it issue another ordinance to try and circumvent the directions of the Supreme Court," Khera asked.

Khera alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been "exposed" with "his corruption" coming to the fore in light of the verdict.

"This is a case of corruption by the prime minister which was attempted to be covered-up legally by bringing a money bill," the Congress leader claimed.

However, the BJP alleged that the opposition parties are politicising the issue as they do not have any alternative to Prime Minister Modi's leadership

"Any order of the Supreme Court or its judgement has to be accepted and respected. But those political parties who are trying to politicise it, they are doing it primarily on the grounds that they have no answer or alternative to Modi ji's leadership and the positive work done by his government where crores of people have benefited," BJP national spokesperson Nalin Kohli told PTI.

Khera also claimed that the government has a habit of taking recourse to ordinance for having its way and said that after the verdict no attempt should be made to bring back the electoral bonds through the back door.

Asked if the party would demand a probe into donations received by the BJP through the bonds, Khera said, "I think this is something so serious that heads should roll. Who is behind this scheme which covers all tracks, which ensures a totally opaque system of political funding. The accountability must be fixed. The country should know who is behind this corruption and we all know who is behind this corruption." (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## India-Qatar ties growing

"The two leaders exchanged views on expanding bilateral cooperation in sectors such as trade, investment, energy, finance, and technology," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "They also discussed recent regional developments in West Asia and emphasized the importance of upholding peace and stability in the region and beyond," it said. Following the meeting, the Qatari prime minister hosted a dinner for Modi.

The Indian prime minister's second visit to Qatar came days after Qatar released the Indians. The Navy veterans were on October 26 given death sentences by Qatar's Court of First Instance. The Court of Appeal in the Gulf nation on December 28 commuted the capital punishment and sentenced them to jail terms for varying durations.

In December, PM Modi had met the Qatari Amir on the sidelines of the COP28 Summit in Dubai and discussed the "well-being of the Indian community" in Qatar. The former Indian Navy personnel apparently faced charges of espionage, but neither the Qatari authorities nor New Delhi made the charges against them public.

The trade and energy ties between India and Qatar are on an upswing. Qatar is the largest supplier of LNG to India, accounting for over 48 per cent of India's global LNG imports. India's Petronet has renewed a contract to buy 7.5 million tonnes of LNG from Qatar annually from 2029 for 20 years and it is being billed as the largest-ever extension of super-chilled fuel in the world.

The original 25-year deal was signed in 1999 and supplies started in 2004. India-Qatar cooperation has been steadily growing in diverse sectors over the last few years.

Prime Minister Modi paid his first visit to Doha in June, 2016.

The visit provided an opportunity to both sides to engage at the highest level, and impart fresh momentum to the bilateral ties. It was the highest level visit from India to Qatar since the visit of then prime minister Manmohan Singh in November 2008. (PTI)

## 'PM to unveil 125 feet

He had a look at the approach roads for entry and exit into and from the meeting venue and asked the concerned functionaries to ensure that the movement of the public becomes seamless and they do not face any inconvenience during their participation in the meeting.

While taking stock of the security issues for the meeting, Sarma asked the concerned functionaries for making arrangements for adequate drinking water and transportation of the people who will be coming to attend the meeting. Speaking on the occasion, Sarma informed that steps will be taken to ensure that the meeting of the Prime Minister for noble purpose of unveiling the statue of Bir Lachit Borpuhan, laying foundation for Medical College at Sivasagar and presentation of dwelling houses to the beneficiaries becomes successful.

Minister Water Resources, I&PR etc. Pijush Hazarika, minister PHE etc Jayanta Mallabarua, minister finance etc Ajanta Neog, minister agriculture etc Atul Bora, MPs Tapon Kumar Gogoi, Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, MLAs Rupjoyi Kurmi, Susanta Borgohain, Taranga Gogoi, Chakra Gogoi, Biswajit Phukan, Dharmeswar Konwar and several others were present during chief minister's visit to Jorhat.

## No need for Oppn

Tuesday, and Das will continue to remain MLAs of the opposition party, but have lent "unconditional support" to the Government of Assam for working towards the people.

"We will support the government for all developmental works for our constituencies and Assam. However, I will remain a Congress MLA and work as a dedicated Congress worker," the PTI had quoted Purkayastha as saying on Wednesday. With Das by his side, he claimed that there is no other "intention or meaning" to this move other than welfare of the people. Purkayastha, who has been in the Congress for several decades since his NSUI days, was elected from the Karimganj North constituency in Karimganj district during Assembly polls in 2021. Das won the Assembly polls from the Mangaldoi seat. (With inputs from PTI)

### Kulik Express between Radhikapur and Howrah flagged

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 15:** In a step towards providing convenience to rail travellers, additional stoppage for two minutes has been provided on train no. 13053/13054 (Howrah - Radhikapur - Howrah) Kulik Express at Bhaluka Road station under Katihar Division of NFR. MP Lok Sabha of Malda North, Khagen Murmu flagged off the Kulik Express with a new stoppage at Bhaluka Road station with effect from 15th February, 2024, on an experimental basis. Senior railway officials from the division and other dignitaries were also present on the occasion.

Train no. 13053 (Howrah-Radhikapur) Kulik Express will henceforth arrive at Bhaluka Road from Howrah at 16:25 hours and depart at 16:27 hours. Similarly, train no. 13054 (Radhikapur-Howrah) Kulik Express commencing journey from Radhikapur will arrive at Bhaluka Road at 07:29 hours and will depart at 07:31 hours from the station. This new stoppage is expected to fulfil a long standing demand of the local people.

The details of stoppages and timings of this train are available at IRCTC website and through NTES and are also being notified in social media platforms of N.F. Railway. Passengers are requested to verify the details before undertaking their journey.

## SC allows withdrawal of pleas challenging validity of UAPA provisions



**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** In a sudden turn of events, individuals and groups who had challenged the constitutional validity of the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in the Supreme Court withdrew their pleas on Thursday, saying they have decided to move appropriate forums.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal, which had on Wednesday said it will not allow "proxy litigation" to challenge the vires of the anti-terror law UAPA, allowed as many as eight petitions to be withdrawn, after the petitioners' counsels said they would like to approach the jurisdictional high courts for relief.

The bench had asked the counsel for petitioners to seek instruction by Thursday whether they want to approach the high court to quash the FIR in UAPA cases or they want to challenge the vires of the law in the top court.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for three civil society members, including a journalist, who were booked under the anti-terror law by Tripura Police in 2021 over their social media posts on riots in the state, said he has received instructions from his clients to withdraw the petitions.

Bhushan said that the interim order dated November 17, 2021 granting protection from arrest by extended by two weeks.

Justice Trivedi said the court is not going to pass any such order but orally asked the Tripura police to not take any coercive action.

"Normally, we would have not entertained such petitions under Article 32 of the Constitution. We are not going to pass any such order. We are not saying anything in the order but you (Tripura police) don't do anything," she said.

Bhushan urged the bench to allow the petitioners to appear before the

high court through video conferencing.

Justice Trivedi said the Supreme Court cannot micromanage everything and they should approach the high court for appearance through video conferencing or any other relief.

Similar request was made by the NGO Foundation for Media Professionals for withdrawal of a petition challenging the constitutional validity of provisions of the UAPA with liberty to approach the appropriate forum.

The bench allowed the NGO's request to withdraw its petition.

On Wednesday, the top court had said it would hear challenge to the vires of the UAPA provisions by only those who are personally aggrieved by it and had refused to hear senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, who appeared for some writ petitioners challenging the anti-terror law.

"The petitioner must be an aggrieved party and there must be a violation of their rights. Only then can the question of challenging the vires of a legislative provision arise," it had said.

The bench had said that in PIL matters, the doctrine of locus standi may not apply in a strict sense but where vires of a law has been challenged, there should be some semblance of involvement.

"Otherwise, it will be a proxy litigation on behalf of other persons, who do not want to come to the forefront. That would not be permissible. We have to be careful about allowing such proxy litigation," Justice Mithal had observed. (PTI)

## Andaman police arrests three men for smuggling ganja

**PORT BLAIR, Feb 15:** Andaman and Nicobar Police has arrested three persons in connection with an organised contraband racket in the island.

The trio, identified as Malsar Paul (33), A. Naganathan (40), and Akash Dubey (23), have been remanded to police custody for three days, an officer said, adding they were involved in smuggling ganja (cannabis) to Port Blair via private courier services.

Malsar and Naganathan were arrested on February 13 from Gurudwara Lane in Port Blair, while Akash was apprehended from the same location a day later, police said.

Rajeev Ranjan (IPS), Superintendent of Police, CID, told PTI, "Based on specific intelligence inputs regarding the transportation of contraband through courier services, the Central Crime Station conducted a raid at Gurudwara Lane and arrested Malsar Paul (a resident of Lilipur in Haddo) with two kilograms of ganja which was transported from the mainland through private courier services."

A case under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985 has been registered at the Anti-Narcotics Police Station in Port Blair. (PTI)

## Air pollution worries foreigners considering setting up base in India: German official

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** Air pollution is the primary concern for foreigners considering establishing a permanent base in India, with the issue entangled in the political blame game, a German Embassy official said on Thursday.

Addressing a symposium on air pollution here, Hendrik Selle, the head of the Department for Economic and Global Affairs at the German Embassy, said that air pollution affects not only people's health but also the economy.

"Air pollution, in India for example, is one of the primary factors for those abroad who consider establishing a permanent representation in the country... (They) say this is something we cannot run the risk of doing," he said.

"So, it is indeed a very important concern and a multifactor problem, one that is far too often caught up in political blame game. The brick kiln worker attributes it to vehicular pollution, the stubble-burning farmer blames it on farmers in another state... which is not what we need. We need political action both nationally and internationally," he said.

Selle added that political action alone cannot reduce air pollution and the support of the private sector is crucial.



The German official said his country welcomes India's National Clean Air Programme which aims to reduce air pollution in 131 cities across the country.

He said Germany worked with India to ensure effective implementation of the NCAP in Surat, Pune and Nagpur as part of a project which started in 2019.

Selle said the countries are now embarking on a new bilateral project on reducing urban air pollution in India.

Addressing the event, Justice (retired) Swatanter Kumar, former chairperson of the National Green Tribunal, said the present generation has terribly failed in providing clean air to the next generation.

He said some cities in India need

to make serious efforts to reduce air pollution.

The National Clean Air Programme, initiated in 2019, aims for a 20-30 per cent reduction in PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by 2024 in 131 cities that hadn't met prescribed air quality standards from 2011 to 2015.

The government has now set a new target of achieving a 40 per cent reduction in particulate matter concentration in these cities by 2026.

A report by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) in August last year said fine particulate air pollution (PM2.5) shortens an average Indian's life expectancy by 5.3 years. (PTI)

## Music of mountains echoed in Delhi's Sunder Nursery with Red FM's Himalayan Indie Fest

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 15:** 93.5 RED FM, India's leading private radio and entertainment network presented its latest on-ground initiative - the Himalayan Indie Fest. Set against the backdrop of Sunder Nursery in the heart of Delhi, the fest celebrated the music, art, and beauty of the Himalayas on the 4th of February 2024.

Red FM has been consistent in its narratives of nurturing India's diverse musical heritage. Therefore, in the spirit of being cultural evangelists Red FM's Himalayan Indie Fest became another meaningful step in a similar direction by creating a conscious retreat

for music lovers. The evening was adorned by hand-picked artists who embody the essence of the Himalayan musical landscape like RigMona, Bahun, Unb (MC Panda), Trance Effect, Aabha Hanjura, Raman Negi, Rhem (Smoulder), and Faisal Ashoor. Along with music, Himalayan Indie Fest extended into a culinary adventure that the audience wholeheartedly enjoyed.

The artists at the Himalayan Indie Fest displayed a blend of musical talent and social consciousness. Their songs wove a narrative of themes of racism, recognition, and the profound beauty of the Himalayas and the im-



mense need to preserve it. The artist's voices were instruments of change and enlightenment. Apart from entertainment, each song served as a reminder of the struggles faced by communities, advocating for equality and understanding. Yet there was also a celebration of the inspiring landscapes and cultural richness of the Himalayan region. The artist's impassioned performances left an indelible mark on the audience, sparking

conversations far beyond the festival grounds. The event witnessed a massive turnout of audience that were seen vibing and dancing their hearts out to some of their favourite artists. The audience also treated their senses to the authentic taste of Himalayan cuisine from Yeti, Pema's, Ahad Sons, and Home Chef Swati. Himalayan Indie Fest was a riveting success owing to the outpour of love by the audience.

## Richa Chadha, Ali Fazal's production 'Girls Will Be Girls' heading to South by Southwest Festival

**MUMBAI, Feb 15:** "Girls Will Be Girls", the debut production of actor-couple Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal, is set to be screened at the 2024 South by Southwest (SXSW) festival in the U.S.

The film, directed by Shuchi Talati, will be screened in the 'Festival Favourites' section of the film gala, held annually in Austin, Texas. The 2024 edition will run from March 8 to 16. According to the makers, "Girls Will Be Girls" is set in a boarding school in a small Himalayan hill town in northern India. It follows the journey of Mira, a 16-year-old girl, whose rebellious awakening is intertwined with her mother's unfulfilled coming-of-age experiences. The movie features Preeti Panagrahi, Kani Kusruti, Jitin Gulati, Preeti Panigrahi, and Kesav Binoy Kiron. "Girls Will Be Girls" is an Indo-French co-production, a collaboration between Chadha and Fazal's joint venture Pushing Buttons Studios,



and Blink Digital. Crawling Angel Films and Dolce Vita Films.

The movie had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival last month

where it picked up two awards -- the Audience Award: World Cinema Dramatic, and the World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award for Acting for Panagrahi. "We are elated and honoured to have our debut production, 'Girls Will Be Girls,' selected for the prestigious SXSW Film Festival. This journey from concept to screen has been immensely rewarding, and the film's recognition at Sundance only fuelled our excitement," Fazal and Chadha said in a joint statement.

"Collaborating with an exceptional team led by director Shuchi Talati, we aimed to deliver a coming-of-age story that resonates universally. The selection in the Festival Favourites section at SXSW validates our collective efforts and affirms the film's impact. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the audience, critics, and the festivals for embracing 'Girls Will Be Girls' with such warmth," they added. (PTI)

## 'LOVE, SEX AUR DHOKHA 2' TO HIT THEATRES IN APRIL

**MUMBAI, Feb 15:** Filmmaker Dibaker Banerjee's "Love, Sex Aur Dhokha 2" will be released in theatres on April 19, the makers announced on Wednesday.

Banerjee, who helmed the first part in 2010, is returning to the director's chair for the follow-up. His last directorial was 2021's "Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar".

Producer Ektaa R Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms Limited shared the news of the film's release date on its official social media pages along with a poster.

"Yeh Valentine's Day nahin aasan, bas itna samajh lijiye, 'Love Sex Aur Dhokha' ka dariya hai aur doob ke jaana hai! #LoveSexAurDhokha2 in cinemas 19th April," the studio wrote on Instagram.

According to the makers, "Love, Sex aur Dhokha 2" explores the complexities of relationships and unveils the hidden facets of modern-day love in the era of the Internet Through a gripping narrative and compelling performances, the film promises to delve deeper into the themes of love, betrayal, and the consequences of our technologically driven world, as per the official description.

"Love Sex aur Dhokha 2" is produced by Ektaa R Kapoor and Shobha Kapoor. (PTI)



Shetty's cinematic cop universe. Kapoor will be essaying the

**MUMBAI, Feb 15:** Film-maker Rohit Shetty's upcoming film "Singham Again" has found its villain in Bollywood star Arjun Kapoor.

"Singham Again" is the third film in the Ajay Devgn-led "Singham" series, which started with 2011's "Singham" and was followed by "Singham Returns" IN 2014.

The two movies along with Ranveer Singh's "Simmba" (2018) and "Sooryavanshi" (2021), starring Akshay Kumar, are part of

role of the antagonist in "Singham Again", which will also see Singh returning as Sangram "Simmba" Bhalerao and

Kumar as Veer

"Surya" Sooryavanshi.

Singh welcomed Kapoor

to the cast in a post on Instagram

where he shared the first

look of the actor's villainous character.

"MY BABA BADDEST!!! #Singham-Again @arjunkapoor," Singh posted.

Kapoor shared the movie stills on his Instagram page and

wrote, "Singham ka villain! Feeling on top of the world being a part of hit-machine Rohit Shetty sir's cop universe! I promise you there will be mayhem. #SinghamAgain."

"Singham Again" will also introduce Tiger Shroff as ACP Satya and Deepika Padukone as police officer Shakti Shetty, described as the "most brutal and violent officer of our cop universe".

Actor Kareena Kapoor Khan, who played Avni Kamat, is returning for the threequel as well. (PTI)



## No point in justifying film to people with preconceived notions: Yami Gautam on 'Article 370'



**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** Actor Yami Gautam says there is no point in justifying the intent of her film "Article 370" to people who already have a preconceived notion about it being a propaganda film.

Gautam headlines the upcoming political drama, which marks her husband, filmmaker Aditya Dhar's production debut via B62 Studios. Dhar is the director of 2019 film "Uri: The Surgical Strike". The release of "Article 370" comes ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Directed by Aditya Suhas Jambhale, the film will hit the screens on February 23.

"If someone is calling it names... like 'propaganda', 'jingoism', and 'chest-thumping'... Any section that goes into theatres already thinking or carrying a preconceived notion that this is what it's about, you'll never be able to feel or enjoy the film.

There is no point justifying the film to them. I don't think the audience thinks about these things. This film is for the majority of the audience and we make films for the audience," Gautam told PTI in an interview.

Also backed by Jio Studios, the makers said "Article 370" presents a "powerful narrative inspired by true events that shaped the fate of Kashmir".

The Central government on August 5, 2019, had revoked Article 370, which gave special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, and bifurcated it into union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Gautam, who plays an NIA agent named Zooni Haksar in the film, described "Article 370" as one of the most compelling stories she read.

"And, I felt that it must be brought alive

in cinema. I'm someone who goes a lot by my first instinct. If I don't connect with the story or script, I don't try and convince myself to do it. Whenever I have felt good right after reading a script, I don't think my audience has ever failed me," she said.

The 35-year-old actor said playing a character based on the life of a real-life intelligence agent was an "honour" for her. "As I read the script, all thoughts about her character graph, demeanour, intensity and action stunts kept spinning in my head but it's about gathering them and writing them down. I thought this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I definitely tried to do justice to this character," she added.

For Gautam, there are a lot of firsts associated with "Article 370". Besides the film being the first home production, she is set to welcome her first child with Dhar.

The actor said the team was through shooting for the rigorous training and action portions by the time she found out she was expecting.

"By the time, we were left with the walking, exterior portions and some talkie portions. So, I was fortunate. It was better for me to be able to balance both sides. This (pregnancy) is something very personal. Aditya and I are anyway very private people.

"We had to be conscious, but I didn't want to be conscious. I'm responsible for the life that's growing within me and I'll go to any lengths to take care. But there is a commitment that I have made as a professional (which I had to keep)," she said.

Gautam will next be seen in "Dhoom Dhaam", a caper comedy from B62 Studios which also stars Pratik Gandhi. (PTI)

# New kid on the Block: Anmol promises to be next big thing in Indian badminton

**NEW DELHI, Feb 15:** Precious by name and ferocious by nature, Indian badminton seems to have welcomed a promising new star in 17-year-old Anmol Kharb who has no hesitation in declaring that she sees herself as the next big thing after dismantling a Chinese opponent in her first major international outing. The youngster from Faridabad is an average teenager off the court, vivacious, chatty, and carefree. But the moment she steps inside her

field of play, Anmol is as fierce a competitor as any seasoned pro on the circuit, something that China's Lou Yu found out the hard way in their Badminton Asia Team Championship match on Wednesday. "I want to win medals and titles for India and if I can practice more and work harder, I can fill that gap. I see myself as that player (next big thing in women's singles)," asserted Anmol in an interview to PTI from Shah Alam, Malaysia.

Her confidence does not seem misplaced. On Wednesday, Anmol walked in with the tie against China poised at 2-2, a massive pressure situation for a teenager, one would say, but she showed that she was up for it. "It was a good match. The first set was tough but in the second I made too many mistakes. I couldn't control the shuttle. I was down but I focussed on just keeping the shuttle inside and attack and I am happy I could pull off the

match," said the reigning national champion.

She was quite critical of her performance but for former national coach Vimal Kumar, Anmol was the star of the tie, in which two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu had returned from injury. "This girl reminds me of young Saina Nehwal — fearless, gritty, determined," he declared on Wednesday. The comparisons with Saina are not new. Anmol's no-holds-barred ap-

proach does bring back memories of a young Saina, who shattered the Chinese hegemony in world badminton. Coincidentally, both hail from Haryana, although Saina made Hyderabad her base. Anmol is flattered by the comparisons but she is also clear about wanting to carve her own niche.

"I have been following her for the last 5-6 years. I have learnt from her strokes and variation. My game is similar in some ways to Saina didi. But

she has a very distinct style and I have my own way of playing," she said.

"I also have an attacking style and I have learnt everything from what coaches taught me. I feel really good when people compare me with her. I don't feel any pressure. It is good that people are talking about me like that." Anmol came into the limelight after winning the senior national championships last year but comparisons with Saina began

much earlier.

As she hopped from one event to another, coaches would speak about the resemblance her game bore with the London Olympics bronze medallist. "She always had an attacking game and the areas that she would attack or her strokes and court coverage and body language always brought comparisons with Saina," her father Devender Singh, who is a lawyer and a former national Kabaddi player, said. (PTI)

## UK club cricketer Rizwan gets lengthy ban for match-fixing attempts in Abu Dhabi T10 League

**DUBAI, Feb 15:** UK-based club cricketer Rizwan Javed was on Thursday banned for 17-and-a-half years from all cricket for making various attempts to fix matches during the Abu Dhabi T10 League in 2021. "Rizwan Javed has received a lengthy ban from cricket for his repeated and serious attempts to corrupt professional cricketers," ICC General Manager Integrity, Alex Marshall said in an ICC statement. "The sanction imposed should send a strong message to other corrupters trying to target cricket at any level and demonstrates that any attempt to corrupt cricket will be strongly dealt with."

Abu Dhabi T10, approved by Emirates Cricket Board (ECB), was launched in 2017.

Rizwan is among eight players and officials charged by the ICC on behalf of the ECB in September last year.

Bangladesh all-rounder Nasir Hossain was also named among those charged and is currently serving a two-year ban.

The ban, which backdates to September 19, 2023, was imposed after Rizwan failed to respond to charges related to his involvement in the 2021 Abu Dhabi T10 Cricket League.

He faced charges under various articles of the Anti-Corruption Code, including attempting to fix matches in the Abu Dhabi T10 2021 on three separate occasions (Article 2.1.1).

He was also charged offering rewards to induce corrupt conduct (Article 2.1.3), and failing to disclose full details of approaches received to engage in corrupt conduct (Article 2.4.4). (PTI)

## PCB terminates Haris Rauf's central contract for pulling out of recent Australia Test tour

**LAHORE, Feb 15:** The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday terminated the central contract of fast bowler Haris Rauf in a disciplinary action for pulling out of the recent Test series in Australia.

The PCB also announced that Haris will not be granted No Objection Certificate (NOC) to play in any foreign league up to June 30, 2024. "Fast bowler Haris Rauf has been penalised by Pakistan Cricket Board, following a probe into his refusal to join Pakistan's Test squad for the tour of Australia 2023-24," the PCB said in a statement.

"After a thorough hearing process conducted by a PCB committee and taking into consideration the views of all stakeholders involved in the matter, Haris' central contract has been terminated from December 1, 2023 and no NOC (No objection certificate) to play any foreign league will be granted up to June 30, 2024." The PCB said its management provided Haris a chance for a personal hearing in compliance with the principles of natural justice on January 30 and his response was found unsatisfactory.

"Refusal to be part of Pakistan's Test squad in the absence of any medical report or justifiable reason is a material violation of the central contract," the Board said.

Players with central contracts in category B like Haris get paid a monthly salary of around 4.6 million, besides match fees, allowances and other eligible bonuses.

Pakistan's three-match Test tour of Australia happened between December 18, 2023 and January 7, 2024. Pakistan lost all three Tests. (PTI)



## How 'Guru Gary' is using cricket to keep slum kids away from drugs

**CAPE TOWN, Feb 15:** Notorious for drugs and crime and afflicted by large-scale poverty, the Khayelitsha township here is better known for being one of the biggest slums on the planet. But World Cup-winning coach Gary Kirsten is attempting to change the image for good through cricket. The idea struck him when he returned to his home here after guiding India to a World Cup title in 2011. "When I came back from India, I wanted to have a look at cricket in our poorest neighbourhoods in Cape Town," Kirsten recalled in an interview with PTI.

He ended up touring Khayelitsha, situated 30km south-east of Cape Town and considered one of

the most unsafe areas where a majority of the inhabitants still live in shacks.

"I took a tour of the area with local school authorities and found that no cricket was happening which disappointed me a lot. I thought of this centre and we started with two concrete nets in two schools and then included three more schools," Kirsten said. What ultimately shaped up was the Catch Trust Foundation, originally called the Gary Kirsten Foundation, in 2014 and its plan was to ensure that kids don't take the path of drugs and violence.

Much like his cricketing career, which was built on discipline and was defined by a voracious ap-

petite for runs, Kirsten's foundation has also been gradually making a positive difference in the lives of hundreds of kids.

"It is helping me to avoid street things like smoking weed and helping me keep my body and lungs fit. I see myself as a future South African player," said 15-year-old Lukholo Malong, a trainee spinner whose parents work as domestic helps.

"Talent is universal, opportunity is not," reads the guiding principle of the foundation with the stated goal being to create sporting ecosystems in low-income areas.

The foundation has been operating at five schools in Khayelitsha and claims to have worked with

over 1000 kids in 5-19 age bracket. A strong women's team has also emerged and some girls of them have managed to reach the provincial representation level. "I take motivation from Virat Kohli as he inspires me to work hard and keep going. I want to play for South Africa one day," said Malong, spelling out his dreams for a better life on the back of a sporting career. "Kohli is my favourite player as he keeps motivating us and we learn not to give up, push hard and keep going, we will be something one day. I have seen him on the field in Cape Town but will meet him one day," he added.

Khayelitsha was established in 1983 when the Apartheid regime

forcefully relocated people from the growing black population around the city. Currently, it has a population of over 2.4 million and most of the inhabitants are Black Africans. Many residents have to struggle for access to potable water. "The intention was to create sports opportunities for these young kids. If a couple of them come through and show potential, that means we are making a new contribution to South Africa cricket which is what it is all about," said Kirsten.

Malong and his friend Tylan, like hundreds of other kids at the centre run by the Foundation, are trying to find a new life for themselves and their families. (PTI)

## Sarfaraz Khan proved his worth with a half century

# 'All I wanted was to play int'l cricket in front of my father'



**RAJKOT, Feb 15:** All that Sarfaraz Khan wanted since the beginning of his cricket journey as a six-year-old was to become an international player in front of his father. Two decades later, that dream came true on Thursday for the Mumbaier when he was handed his Test cap ahead of the third match against England by no less than former captain Anil Kumble with his father Naushad watching tearfully. As was expected, he proved his worth with a half century which could have been a bigger knock if not for the run out at non-striker's end following a mix up with unbeaten centurion Ravindra Jadeja.

The 26-year-old was, however, too happy to have any complaints. "Coming to the ground for the first time and getting the cap in front of my father. I was six-years-old when he started my cricket (training). It was my dream to play for the Indian team in front of him," Sarfaraz told the media here after the end of day's play in which India were 326/5.

India's Test cap No 311, Sarfaraz gave a fine account of himself with a rapid 62. Naushad was overwhelmed on Thursday. He had not even planned to visit Rajkot to watch his son but landed in the city on the eve of the game. Tears, hugs and joy swept through the Khan family with Sarfaraz's wife present beside his father. "I was padded up for almost four hours (in the dressing room). I kept thinking that I have kept so much patience in life and there is no harm in keeping some more.

"After I went in, I was nervous

for the first few balls but I have practiced and worked so hard that everything went well," Sarfaraz said detailing his Test experience. Sarfaraz said runs and performances did not matter to him as much as playing for India with his father there to watch him. "It was my father's dream to play for India but unfortunately it couldn't happen due to some reasons, there wasn't much support from home then. He worked very hard on me and is now doing the same with my brother. It was the proudest moment of my life," he said. "Runs and performances were not on my mind as much as I was happy playing for India in front of my father," he added. "He was not ready to come (to Rajkot) but some people insisted that he goes. Obviously he had to come over since he worked so hard only for this day." "He was very emotional as I took the cap in front of him and so was my wife. I felt as if some pressure was off my shoulders given the hard work he had put in on me and I did not waste it," he stated emotions still raw after a whirlwind day. Sarfaraz banished initial nervousness with powerful sweeps and lofted hits down the ground but termed his dismissal -- the run out at the non-striker's end -- a case of "miscommunication".

"It is a part of the game. Miscommunication happens in cricket. Sometimes run-out happens, sometimes you get the runs," he said. "I spoke to Jadeja at lunch time and requested him to talk to me while playing. I like talking while playing. It was my first time. (PTI)

## East Bengal FC rope in Aleksander Pantic to replace injured Jose Pardo



HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 15:** East Bengal FC have roped in Serbian defender Aleksandar Pantic for the remainder of the current Indian Super League (ISL) season to replace Jose Antonio Pardo, who has been ruled out of the season due to an injury. Pantic has plied his trade across several top European clubs like Villarreal CF, Red Star Belgrade and Dynamo Kyiv and the centre-back has also represented Serbia's U-19 and U-21 teams in the past.

Welcoming Pantic to the East Bengal FC, Mr Vibhash Vardhan Agarwal of Emami Group said, "Pantic has good experience of playing in top-flight European leagues. We believe he'll add more solidity to our defence and help us in our quest for the playoffs. It's really unfortunate to miss Pardo for the remainder of the season due to an injury. We wish him a speedy recovery and will continue to support him through this difficult phase."

Commenting on Pantic's inclusion, East Bengal FC Head Coach Carles Cuadrat said, "In Pantic we have a player with huge experience of playing for top European clubs like Villarreal, Dynamo Kyiv and Red Star Belgrade. I know him from my stint in Cypriot football, and it's very good for us that he was playing for Doxa just until the last

transfer window."

Cuadrat also acknowledged Emami Group's swiftness in finding able replacements, saying, "It's challenging to find quality free players once the transfer market closes, but the management has worked tirelessly and supported me whenever we've had to find good replacements. First finding Hijazi as Eelsey's replacement in September and now signing Pantic for the spot left vacant by Pardo - I really appreciate the fact that the management understands the situation and is working in the right direction. We are waiting to meet Pantic as soon as his visa is issued."

Excited to join East Bengal FC, Pantic, who has played in the top divisions of Serbia, Spain, Ukraine, Poland and Cyprus, said, "It gives me immense pleasure to join a legendary club like East Bengal. The club has had many wonderful moments this season and I want to do my best to make our fans happier. I am grateful to Coach Carles and the East Bengal management for giving me this opportunity. Joy East Bengal!"

"Unfortunately, we have to bid farewell to a very loved player from our Super Cup-winning squad. A bad foot injury during our match against NorthEast United FC means an early end to the season for Pardo," said Cuadrat.

## Rahil Gangjee takes two-shot lead in round three of PGTI Players Championship

**KOLKATA, Feb 15:** Bengaluru-based Rahil Gangjee struck the day's joint lowest score of six-under 64 in the third round to storm into a two-shot lead at the Rs 1 crore TATA Steel PGTI Players Championship here on Thursday. Gangjee (65-65-64) produced a second straight bogey-free round to move up one spot from his overnight tied second spot with a total of 16-under 194.

Manu Gandas (65-67-64), the 2022 PGTI Ranking champion, overnight leader Arjun Prasad (62-65-69) and Saptak Talwar (66-65-65) were tied for second place at 14-under 196.

Gangjee hit a couple of extraordinary tee shots on the second and eighth, both par-3s, to set up short birdie putts.

Gangjee, a three-time international winner, also sank a two-putt from 45 feet for birdie on the seventh. The 45-year-old Gangjee, who grew up playing a lot of his golf at the Tollygunge Club here, played some good wedge shots on the back-nine to pocket three more birdies and move ahead of the rest in search of his seventh career title and first win in six years. "The last three days have been

solid and I've been trying to play the same every day, just carrying forward the momentum from each day. It's important for the body to feel the same every day. If I can do that in the last round, I know I will have the least amount of stress," Gangjee said.

"The disadvantage of playing at home is the added pressure of the crowd's expectations as everyone wants to see you win. Of course, there are several advantages as well that I will look to capitalise on. I know this golf course at the back of my hand as I grew up here. I've hit thousands of shots here. I know where to miss it and where not to miss it."

Gandas also fired a 64 to gain seven spots and move into tied second place.

Prasad, the leader for the first two days, mixed five birdies and four bogeys in his 69 to drop one position on the leaderboard.

Talwar's 65, featuring a stretch of four consecutive birdies, helped him climb three places to join Gandas and Prasad in tied second position.

Defending champion Sachin Baisoya (71) was tied 15th at nine-under 201. (PTI)



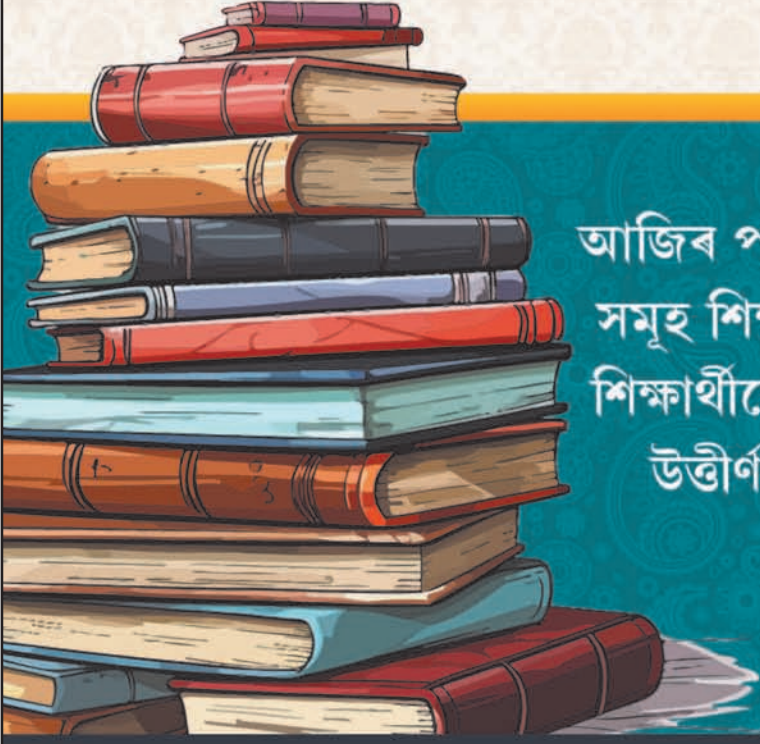
सत्यमेव जयते  
असम चरकार

## ২০২৪ বৰ্ষৰ হাইস্কুল শিক্ষান্ত পৰীক্ষাৰ সমূহ পৰীক্ষার্থীলৈ

# ত্ৰিভাষা শুভেচ্ছা



ড° হিমন্ত বিশ্ব শৰ্মা  
মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, অসম



আজিৰ পৰা অনুষ্ঠিত হাইস্কুল শিক্ষান্ত পৰীক্ষাত অৱতীৰ্ণ হোৱা  
সমূহ শিক্ষার্থীলৈ আন্তৰিক শুভকামনা জনালোঁ। প্রতিগৰাকী  
শিক্ষার্থীয়ে শিক্ষা জীৱনৰ এই গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ পৰীক্ষাত সফলতাৰে  
উত্তীৰ্ণ হৈ নিজৰ লগতে দেশৰ নাম উজলাওক, সেয়াই  
আন্তৰিকতাৰে কামনা কৰিলোঁ।



বিদ্যালয় শিক্ষা বিভাগ

তথ্য আৰু জনসংযোগ সঞ্চালকালয়, অসমৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত। আমাক অনুসৰণ কৰক [f](#) [i](#) [x](#) [v](#) /@diprassam <https://dipr.assam.gov.in/>

অসম বাৰ্তা ছাবস্ক্ৰাইব কৰিবলৈ ৮২৮৭৯১২১৫৮ত Assam লিখি ৱাটছএপ কৰক

Janasanyog /D/17832/23/16-Feb-24



সত্যমেব জয়তে  
অসম চৰকাৰ

অসমৰ মুখ্যমন্ত্রী

ড° হিমন্ত বিশ্ব শৰ্মাৰ বলিষ্ঠ নেতৃত্বত

শিক্ষা বিভাগত আকৌ

## নিযুক্তি সমাৰোহ

উচ্চ শিক্ষা বিভাগৰ সঞ্চালকালয়ৰ অধীনত

২৭৩ গৰাকী প্ৰাৰ্থীলৈ

## নিযুক্তি পত্ৰ প্ৰদান অনুষ্ঠান



ড° হিমন্ত বিশ্ব শৰ্মা  
মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, অসম

১লাখ

নিযুক্তি সম্পূৰ্ণ হোৱাৰ দিশেৰে  
অসম চৰকাৰ

নিযুক্তিৰ কপৰেখা

১৫ ফেব্ৰুৱাৰী ২০২৪ পৰ্যন্ত	৯৪,৩৯৭ গৰাকী
১৬ ফেব্ৰুৱাৰী ২০২৪ ত	২৭৩ গৰাকী
সৰ্বমুঠ নিযুক্তি	৯৪,৬৭০ গৰাকী

মুখ্য অতিথি

ডাঃ বণোজ পেগু

মন্ত্রী, শিক্ষা বিভাগ, অসম চৰকাৰ

তাৰিখ

১৬ ফেব্ৰুৱাৰী ২০২৪

সময়

দিনৰ ১২:০০ বজা

স্থান

সন্মিলন আৰু প্ৰশিক্ষণ কেন্দ্ৰ  
দিশপুৰ, গুৱাহাটী

তথ্য আৰু জনসংযোগ সঞ্চালকালয়, অসমৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত

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