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'Mission Basundhara 3.0' gets going in state

Rules for providing land rights to indigenous communities made less complicated : CM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: The state government on Friday launched 'Mission Basundhara 3.0' to simplify land rights, extend ownership to indigenous communities, and facilitate settlement of land from religious institutions, among others.

While launching the third phase at a programme here which also marked the conclusion of 'Mission Basundhara 2.0', the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, said the initiatives under it are to ensure reforms in the revenue department and make its services available to the public easily.

He said while the first phase of the Mission was limited to introducing online services for a few works related to the revenue department, the second phase included more 'substantial services' like providing land ownership.

Mission Basundhara 3.0 seeks to take it forward and help eligible people and organisations enjoy land ownership rights, he added.

Under Basundhara 1.0, about 8 lakh applications were received and most of them were settled, while nearly 13 lakh applications were received in the second phase, nearly 2.3 lakh of which were approved.

The chief minister said the number of approvals is lower in the second phase as meticulous scrutiny of all claims was done and it is being ensured that no ineligible person got land rights.

Sharing key components of the third phase, Sarma said the need for submitting inheritance certificates for up to three previous generations will be relaxed for tea tribes, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Gorkha communities.

"This will ensure that about 1.52 lakh applications rejected under Basundhara 2.0 will get approved upon review. If there are more such eligible communities who need some leniency for availing their land rights, it should be brought to our notice and we will look into it," he said.

Organisations which have been functioning from government land for years will also be provided ownership rights if found to meet all requirements, he said. Settlement of 'bhoodan/ gramdan' land in favour *(CONTD. ON PAGE-9)*

Karbi Anglong comes to standstill after assault on KSA members

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 16: The Karbi Anglong was enveloped in silence on Friday in response to the attack on the members of the Karbi Students Association (KSA), led by Jemson Timung during a protest on February 15 at Kheroni Chariali in West Karbi Anglong.

In the wake of the attack, transport services were disrupted as buses, private vehicles, and autorickshaws were not allowed ply on road.

The anguished protesters brought normal life to a halt in several parts of the district. However, exemptions were made for autorickshaws and private vehicles transporting school students and individuals on exam duty.

The streets of Diphu wore a deserted look, with shuttered shops and businesses.

In various areas such as Rongnihang Chariali and the main market in Diphu, groups of incensed protesters demanded shopkeepers to close their shutters and urged vehicles to refrain from moving.

However, both the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and KSA denied any involvement in calling for a bandh.

It is worth mentioning that on February 15, the KSA–Jemson Timung and the ASDC Youth Front organised a protest opposing the Rachnatmak Nonia Sangyukta Sangh's (RNSS) demand to legalise settlement in Village Grazing Reserve or Professional Grazing Reserve (VGR/PGR) land in West Karbi Anglong. Upon returning to Diphu after their protest dharna, KSA *(CONTD. ON PAGE-9)*

HT BRIEFS

Walking Plaza

GUWAHATI: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria and First Lady of Assam Anita Kataria inaugurated a walking zone, childrens' park and parking area in Raj Bhavan campus on Friday. Inaugurating the facilities, the Governor said that building a walking plaza within the Raj Bhavan premises is a necessity, underscoring the paramount importance of prioritising health. "This plaza resonates with the collective aspirations of the Raj Bhavan family, considering that the physical well-being is foundational to a healthy and fulfilling life", the Governor added. Kataria also said that Health has perennially been primal in Indian culture, ingrained in the ethos of its people through centuries. Prime Minister Modi's global advocacy for Indian wellness traditions, notably through yoga, exemplifies government's commitment to health and happiness.

Heroin recovered

GUWAHATI: Based on an input a raid was conducted at Lalmati, opposite state BJP office under Basistha PS Jurisdiction by STF, Assam on Friday and apprehended two alleged habitual drugs peddlers. The police also recovered items such as 1. 29 nos of vials containing suspected heroin weighing 54.5 grams. Besides this, the police also recovered some cash.

Act East Policy spurs new era of cooperation: Minister

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Environment minister Chandra Mohan Patowary on Friday said the Act East Policy has reinvigorated the country's engagement with its eastern neighbours, leading to a new era of cooperation in various economic and cultural sectors.

The Northeastern region has particularly benefited from this thrust, witnessing rapid development of communication networks, he added.

Patowary, the Act East Policy Affairs Minister of Assam, was speaking at the inaugural session of 'Act East through Northeast 2.0 - The Round Table Conference on Inter Country Economic Corridor through North East of India for Inclusive Growth' here, an official statement said.

The minister said because of the Act East Policy, the country's relationship with Bangladesh and Bhutan have seen a new era of cooperation in areas of trade, transit and water resources management.

He said the Northeastern states are witnessing rapid development in road infrastructure, regional airways connectivity, railways, waterways and shipping, and internet connectivity.

"The central government has taken the region to a high growth trajectory with the implementation of Act East Policy and the NE is acting as India's bridge with ASEAN and SE countries," he said.

Patowary also highlighted how Northeastern states have reaped economic benefits due to closer ties with neighbouring countries. He added *(CONTD. ON PAGE-9)*

EXAM READY!

Students appear in HSLC Examination, 2024 at Kamrup Academy H.S. School in Guwahati on Friday. UB Photos

Scientific mining of coal to begin soon in M'laya

Governor underscores M'laya's vision for 10 bn US dollar economy

HT Bureau

SHILLONG, Feb 16: Meghalaya Governor Phagu Chauhan Friday said the State government has set an ambitious target of making Meghalaya a 10 billion US dollars economy by 2028, thereby doubling the State's GDP.

"Sectors like infrastructure, power, water supply, investment promotion, IT, tourism and agriculture will drive the economic growth necessary for achieving that target," Chauhan said while delivering his address in Hindi during the first day of the Assembly's budget session. Highlighting the policies of the MDA government, the governor said the State envisions doubling the farmers' income by leveraging Meghalaya's unique agro-climate conditions and by strengthening and innovating value chains. The governor announced that the state government is taking steps to ensure scientific mining of coal.

"The Ministry of Coal, Government of India has approved 17 applications for grant of prospecting license. Out of 17 applications, 6 applicants have submitted their geological report to the Central Government and have obtained approval," he said. The Mining Plan in respect of 4 applicants has been approved by the Ministry of Coal and is awaiting Environment Clearance, he said adding with these developments, it is expected that scientific mining of coal will begin soon.

Situation tense, internet suspended after violence in Churachandpur

IMPHAL, Feb 16: The Manipur government on Friday suspended internet services in Churachandpur district for five days after violence broke out there over an action taken against a policeman.

The situation in the district remained tense this morning after the offices of the superintendent of police and the deputy commissioner were vandalised, vehicles used by CAPF were torched by a mob and the national flag at the SP office complex was pulled down, an official told PTI.

"There is apprehension that some anti-social elements might use social media extensively for transmission of images, posts and video messages inciting the public, which might have serious repercussions for the law and order situation..there is imminent danger for loss of lives/ damage to public or private property and widespread disturbances to public tranquillity and communal harmony as a result of inflammatory material and false rumours," the notification said.

The violence broke out in the district on Thursday night as the mob barged into the government complex and torched vehicles hours after *(CONTD. ON PAGE-9)*

'Expedite Mission Basundhara 2.0 Patta distribution'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday instructed the concerned officials to ensure that the beneficiaries of Mission Basundhara 2.0 are able to receive their respective patta certificates on the very day of ceremonial patta distribution in their respective legislative assembly constituencies, said an official statement.

Sarma said this while chairing a meeting at Lok Sewa Bhawan in Dispur that was attended by several ministers of state's cabinet, senior-most officials of various departments and the district commissioners (DCs) of all the districts, including those of the 6th schedule areas who joined through the videoconferencing mode. As per the statement, the two main agendas of the meeting were the preparations for the upcoming ceremonial distribution of patta certificates between 23rd *(CONTD. ON PAGE-9)*

'We are ready to walk the extra mile to preserve the legacy of our great social reformers'

Assam govt to renovate Vaishnavite seat of learning in Bengal: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said that the state government will take up renovation of Sri Sri Madhupur Satra, a seat of Vaishnavite learning, in Cooch Behar district of neighbouring West Bengal.

A plan of ₹ 30 crore for the project has been prepared to develop the 16th-century Satra, he added.

"The teachings of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhavdev have guided the people of Assam for centuries. In West Bengal's Sri Sri Madhupur Satra, we are undertaking several measures to honour their legacies for the generations to come," Sarma posted on X.

Vasihnavite saints Srimanta Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhavdev had spent their last days at the Madhupur Satra.

Srimanta Sankardeva is an Assamese saint-scholar, social-religious reformer, poet, playwright and a towering figure in the cultural and religious history of Assam from the 15th-16th century. Sri Sri Madhavdev is considered his key disciple.

"We are ready to walk the extra mile to preserve the legacy of our great social reformers," he added.

The Madhupur Satra was built in the 16th century in Cooch Behar in the northern part of West Bengal and is a treasure trove of historical documents and manuscripts.

The CM said the renovation plan includes construction of a guest house, 'bhog ghar', museum, auditorium, etc.

"A plan of Rs 30 cr has been prepared in this regard," Sarma added. *(PTI)*

Jaishankar, Blinken hold talks in Munich

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: External affairs minister S Jaishankar on Friday held talks with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken with a focus on key bilateral issues as well as the situation in West Asia, Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific.

The meeting took place in Munich on the sidelines of a security conference.

"Great to meet my friend US @SecBlinken this afternoon on #MSC2024 sidelines. Our talk centered on the situation in West Asia, Ukraine and Indo-Pacific. Reviewed the continuing progress in our bilateral ties," Jaishankar said on X.

Jaishankar and Blinken are learnt to have deliberated on various aspects of India-US strategic ties.

There has been a major upswing in India-US ties in the last few years, especially in the spheres of defence and high-technology.

Over two weeks ago, the Biden administration notified the US Congress on its proposed supply of 31 MQ-9B Predator long endurance drones to India.

The move was seen as significant forward movement to firming up the mega deal that was announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington in June last year.

The Defence Security Cooperation Agency of the US government delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale.

The Jaishankar-Blinken talks also came amid some unease between the *(CONTD. ON PAGE-9)*

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Paytm Payments Bank removed from list of banks authorised to issue FASTag

Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL) has around 30 per cent market share

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Indian Highways Management Company Ltd (IHMCL), toll collecting arm of state-owned NHAI, has advised highway users to buy FASTags from 32 authorised banks sans Paytm Payments Bank for hassle-free travel.

In a post on X, IHMCL said for hassle-free travel, buy your FASTag from 32 authorised banks.

The 32 authorised banks include Airtel Payments Bank, Allahabad Bank, Bank of Baroda, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, IDBI Bank, Punjab National Bank, State Bank of India, and Yes Bank, among others. A senior NHAI official told PTI that India has over 8 crore FASTag users and Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL) has around 30 per cent market share.

Earlier, IHMCL in a letter dated January 19, 2024 had barred Paytm Payments Bank from issuing fresh FASTags.

On January 31, the Reserve Bank directed Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL) to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTTags and other instruments after February 29.

However, any interest, cashbacks, or refunds may be credited back to customers anytime.

"No further deposits or credit transactions or top-ups shall be allowed in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, NCMC cards, etc. after February 29, 2024, other than any interest, cashbacks, or refunds which may be credited anytime," the RBI said.

Further, withdrawal or utilisation of balances by its customers from their accounts, including savings bank accounts, current accounts, prepaid instruments, FASTags, and National Common Mobility Cards are to be permitted without any restrictions, up to their available balance.

"No other banking services, other than those ...like fund transfers (irrespective of name and nature of services like AEPS, IMPS, etc), BBPOU and UPI facility should be provided by the bank after February 29, 2024," it had added.

The direction followed persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns, the central bank had said in a statement.

IHMCL has said it is encouraging FASTag users to complete the 'Know Your Customer' (KYC) process of their latest FASTag as per RBI guidelines.

The banks authorised for issuing FASTags also include Union Bank of India, Thrissur District Cooperative Bank, South Indian Bank, Saraswat Bank, Nagpur Nagrik Sahkari Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Karur Vyasya Bank, J&K Bank, IndusInd Bank, Indian Bank, IDFC First Bank, FINO Bank, Equitable Small Finance Bank, Cosmos Bank, City Union Bank Ltd, Central Bank of India, Canara Bank, Bank of Maharashtra, AU Small Finance Bank, and Axis Bank.

FASTag is an electronic toll collection system in India operated by the NHAI. It employs Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology for allowing toll payments directly from the linked bank accounts. *(PTI)*

IDBI Bank introduces special rates on fds

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: IDBI Bank has introduced its latest offering of "Special Limited Period Callable FD Offer of 300 Days" with peak rates of 7.55% p.a. This initiative is introduced under the Utsav FD scheme, and caters to customers seeking attractive rates in shorter tenures. Besides this, the existing Utsav FDs for 375 and 444 days continue to offer competitive rates of up to 7.60% p.a. and 7.75% p.a. respectively.

Gold rises ₹ 180; silver rallies ₹ 900

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Gold prices rose ₹ 180 to ₹ 62,450 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid strong cues in international markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at ₹ 62,270 per 10 grams.

Silver also rallied ₹ 900 to ₹ 75,500 per kilogram, while it had ended at ₹ 74,600 per kg in the previous close.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 62,450 per 10 grams, up by ₹ 180, taking a positive trend from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,003 per ounce, up by USD 10 from the previous close.

Silver was also trading higher at USD 22.97 per ounce, while it had finished at USD 22.50 per ounce in the previous trade.

Gold prices gained after softer US economic data pushed the dollar and Treasury yields lower.

Traders shifted their focus on the US Producer Price Index (PPI) data and commentary from Federal Reserve officials for more cues on the timeline for monetary policy interest rate cut, Navneet Damani, Senior vice-president of commodity research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said. *(PTI)*

Sitharaman meets 16th Fin Comm chairman Panagariya

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday met 16th Finance Commission Chairman Arvind Panagariya.

The meeting came within two days of the first meeting of the commission in which the members and the chairman discussed the terms of reference.

Full-time members of the commission are former expenditure secretary Ajay Narayan Jha, retired bureaucrat Annie George Mathew, and Artha global executive director Niranjan Rajadhyaksha, while SBI Group chief economic advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh is a part-time member.

"Shri @APanagariya, Chairman - 16th Finance Commission, calls on Smt @nsitharaman," Sitharaman's office said in a post on X.

The commission, chaired by former vice chairman of Niti Aayog Panagariya, will be assisted by Secretary Ritvik Ranjanam Pandey, two joint secretaries and one economic advisor, in its functioning.

The government constituted the commission under the chairmanship of Panagariya on December 31, 2023. The panel would submit its report to the President by October 31, 2025. The report would be for a five-year period commencing April 1, 2026.

Besides suggesting tax devolution between the Centre and states and revenue augmentation measures, the commission would review the present arrangements for financing disaster management initiatives with reference to the funds constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Finance Commission is a constitutional body that gives suggestions on centre-state financial relations.

The erstwhile 15th Finance Commission under NK Singh had recommended that states be given 41 per cent of the divisible tax pool of the Centre during the five-year period from 2021-22 to 2025-26, which is at the same level as was recommended by 14th Finance Commission under Y V Reddy. *(PTI)*

IT shares advance

Markets extend winning run to 4th day

MUMBAI, Feb 16: Equity benchmark indices marched higher for the fourth straight session on Friday, with Nifty closing above the 22,000 level, tracking gains in index majors L&T, Infosys and M&M, amid a firm trend in the global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 376.26 points or 0.52 per cent to close at 72,426.64. The index touched a high of 72,545.33 and a low of 72,218.10 during intraday trade.

The broader NSE Nifty also climbed 129.95 points or 0.59 per cent to end at points 22,040.70.

Wipro was the biggest gainer in the Sensex chart, rising 4.79 per cent, followed by M&M, L&T, Tata Motors, Maruti, Infosys, Nestle India and IndusInd Bank.

Shares of M&M shot up 3.96 per cent to finish at ₹ 1,835.55 apiece after it announced its supply agreement with German automotive major Volkswagen Group for electric vehicle components under their joint vision for electric mobility collaboration.

In contrast, PowerGrid, SBI, Reliance, NTPC and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

In Asia, Japan's Nikkei, Hong Kong's Hang Seng and South Korea's Kospi settled with significant gains.

China's financial markets are closed for the Lunar New Year holidays.

The US market closed higher in the overnight trade on Thursday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude slipped 0.83 per cent to USD 82.17 a barrel.

In the previous session, the 30-share index climbed 227.55 points or 0.32 per cent to close at 72,050.38 points, while NSE Nifty gained 70.70 points or 0.32 per cent to end at 21,910.75. *(PTI)*

Govt starts centralised processing of filings under companies law

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: The government has operationalised the central processing centre for processing filings under the companies law and LLP Act in a "time-bound and faceless manner" as part of efforts to further improve the ease of doing business.

Initially, 12 forms and applications under the companies law will be processed at the Central Processing Centre (CPC). From April 1 onwards, other forms and applications will be processed through the centre.

"As of now, 4,910 forms have been received by CPC after commencing operations. The forms shall be processed a time-bound and faceless manner," the corporate affairs ministry said in a release on Friday.

Later, forms/applications filed under Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act are also proposed to be centralised.

Based on filing trends, the ministry said it is expected that about 2.50 lakh forms will be processed through CPC annually, once it is fully operational.

With the establishment of CPC, the ministry noted that jurisdictional Registrar of Companies (RoC) will have to focus more on their core functions of inquiries, inspection and investigation for ensuring robust corporate governance.

The ministry, which implements the companies and LLP laws, has already operationalised the Central Registration Centre (CRC) and Centralised Processing for Accelerated Corporate Exit (C-PACE).

CRC, C-PACE and CPC will ensure speedy processing of applications and forms filed for incorporation, closure and for meeting regulatory requirements so that the companies are incorporated, closed, can alter and raise capital, and are able to complete their various compliances under the corporate laws with ease, it said. A total of 1,02,063 companies and LLPs were incorporated in FY 2013-14 and the count rose 92 per cent to 1,95,586 in FY 2022-23.

The ministry said that incorporation of companies and LLPs till February 14 of the current financial year has been the highest as compared to any of the previous financial years.

Under C-PACE, applications filed for voluntary closure of companies are getting processed in non-STP (Straight Through Processing) within an average time of less than 4 months (about 100 days) compared to an average time of more than 18 months earlier. "C-PACE has processed and closed 12,441 companies so far. Only 3,368 applications are pending with C-PACE, the lowest as compared to any previous year," the release said. *(PTI)*

Rupee rises 4 paise to settle at 83.01 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Feb 16: The rupee rose 4 paise to settle at 83.01 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, amid positive sentiment in the domestic equity markets and softening crude oil prices.

Forex traders said a strong American currency and outflow of foreign funds, however, capped a sharp gain in the domestic currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.03 and touched the intraday high of 83.00 against the greenback.

The local unit finally settled at 83.01 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 4 paise from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee settled 3 paise lower at 83.05 against the US dollar.

According to Anuj Choudhary, research analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the Indian rupee appreciated on positive domestic markets.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.07 per cent higher at 104.36.

"US dollar index recovered on declining expectations of a rate cut by the US Fed in March and May 2024. Economic data from the US was slightly disappointing for the greenback," Choudhary said.

He further said that the positive tone in the US dollar and concerns over foreign fund outflows may cap a sharp upside in the Indian currency. "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 82.80 to ₹ 83.20." Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 1 per cent to USD 82.03 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 376.26 points, or 0.52 per cent, to settle at 72,426.64 points. The Nifty climbed 129.95 points, or 0.59 per cent, to 22,040.70 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday as they sold shares worth ₹ 3,064.15 crore, according to exchange data. *(PTI)*

Odisha CM lays foundation stone for JSW Group's steel facility

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Friday laid the foundation stone for a steel project of JSW Group to be set up at an estimated investment of ₹ 65,000 crore.

The proposed project would have an annual steel manufacturing capacity of 13.2 million tonne (MT) with a captive power plant and captive jetties with cargo-handling capacity, JSW Steel said in a BSE filing.

The complex at Dhinkia Nuagaon and Gadakujanga under Jagatsinghpur district will also have a cement manufacturing unit and modern township and other components, it said.

The chief minister was joined by JSW Group Chairman Sajjan Jindal and his son Parth Jindal, State Industries Minister Pratap Keshari Deb and other senior company and government officials.

"The integrated steel project by JSW Steel is expected to drive economic growth in the region by fostering a robust ancillary and downstream ecosystem with employment potential of approximately 30,000 direct & indirect jobs," the company said.

The Industrial Development Corporation of Odisha (IDCO) has handed over 2,958 acre of land to JSW for setting up the integrated manufacturing facility with 30 per cent of the total project land to be dedicated for preservation of forests and water bodies.

On the investments, the filing said "JSW Steel & JSW Group entities have envisaged an investment of approximately ₹ 65,000 crore, subject to necessary approvals, in order to establish this integrated complex in a phased manner."

JSW Steel is the flagship business of the diversified USD 23 billion JSW Group which also has interests in energy, infrastructure, cement, paints, sports, and venture capital. *(PTI)*

CCPA seeks public comments on draft guidelines to prevent misleading ads in coaching sector

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Consumer protection regulator CCPA has sought public comments by March 16 on draft guidelines for prevention of misleading advertisements in the coaching sector.

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has prepared draft guidelines after a detailed deliberations with all stakeholders including coaching institutes, law firms, government and voluntary consumer organisations, an official statement said.

"Public comments/suggestions/feedback are solicited and may be provided to the Central Authority within 30 days (until 16th March 2024)," it added.

The draft defines "coaching" and lays out conditions that fall under misleading advertisements.

For instance, coaching institutes are not allowed to conceal information related to name of the course (whether free or paid) and duration of course opted by successful candidate or any other important information which can influence consumers' decision to choose their services.

They should refrain from making false claims regarding success rates, number of selections, or rankings of students in any competitive exam without providing verifiable evidence.

They should not falsely represent that students' success is solely attributable to the coaching, without acknowledging the individual efforts of the students.

Among other conditions, the CCPA said that the coaching centres should clearly state the extent of the coaching involvement in their success.

They should not create false sense of urgency or fear of missing out that may heighten anxieties amongst students, or parents. They should not engage in any other practices that may mislead consumers or subvert consumer autonomy and choice.

The CCPA said the objective of the guidelines is to protect consumers from misleading advertisements in the coaching sector and would be applicable to every person engaged in coaching.

Misleading advertisements by the coaching sector will be governed as per the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the proposed guidelines will bring clarity to the stakeholders and protect consumer interests. *(PTI)*

Foundation stone laid for JSW's mega greenfield steel project

PARADIP (ODISHA), Feb 16: Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Friday laid the foundation stone for three major projects worth Rs 87,500 crore, including a mega integrated steel facility by JSW Utkal Steel Limited.

The two other projects are Re-New E-Fuels Private Limited's Rs 22,000 crore green ammonia plant and Silox India Private Limited's chemical factory worth Rs 5,00 crore, according to a CMO statement.

The three projects together are expected to generate employment for 34,810 people.

While JSW Utkal Steel Ltd will set up a 13.2 MTPA integrated steel plant at Dhinkia (the earlier controversial site of South Korean steel major Posco) at the outskirts of the port township of Paradip in Jagatsinghpur, Re-New E-Fuels Private Limited has proposed to set up a 1.195 MTPA green ammonia plant and Silox India Private Limited to establish a 25,000 MTPA chemical factory. *(PTI)*

Paytm Payments Bank gets 15 more days to stop transactions

MUMBAI, Feb 16: The RBI on Friday gave 15 days more till March 15, 2024 to Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to stop deposits, credit transactions or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, and FASTags, keeping in view the interest of customers, including merchants.

As per a January 31 order of the central bank, PPBL was asked to stop further deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, and National Common Mobility Cards, after February 29.

The RBI said this is being done keeping in view the interest of customers (including merchants) of PPBL who may require a little more time to make alternative arrangements and the larger public interest. *(PTI)*

NAME CHANGE

I have change my name from MOHAMMED ABDUL KHALIQYE to ABDUL KHALIK by an affidavit before Notary public Hojai. I will be known as ABDUL KHALIK for All purpose from Today.

Will find another opportunity post Zee merger collapse: Sony

Group will also continue to pursue organic growth as per its strategy in India

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: With the proposed merger of its Indian arm with Zee terminated, Sony will seek various options, including finding another opportunity to replace the plan and organic growth opportunities in India, which has great potential in the long term, according to a top company official.

In an earnings call, Hiroki Totoki, president, COO & CFO of Sony said India is a very appealing market where it would continue to invest.

"India on a long term basis has a great growth potential. It's a very appealing market. Therefore, we will try to seek various opportunities and if we can find another opportunity that would replace this type of plan," Totoki said when asked about the company's strategy in India after the termination of the proposed merger.

On the investment which Sony had committed as part of the deal, he said:"Well, that investment is not going to change a capital allocation or it will not change our behaviour in our investment.

So at the moment, we do not have any concrete plans."

The earnings call was held on February 14.

As per the merger conditions, which was agreed upon between Sony and ZEEL, the Japanese giant was also supposed to invest USD 1.5 billion in the merged entity.

The group will also continue to pursue organic growth as per its strategy in India, where it operates through Culver Max Entertainment (earlier known as Sony Pictures Network India), he said in the investors call.

Sony had last month terminated an agreement with ZEEL to merge its two Indian entities -- Culver Max Entertainment and Bangla Entertainment Private Limited (BEPL) -- with ZEEL.

Sony Group Corporation (SGC) had said ZEEL did not satisfy the merger conditions and initiated arbitration proceedings before SIAC claiming USD 90 million (around ₹ 748.5 crore) as a termination fee.

ZEEL filed a petition before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), seeking a direction to Sony Group to implement the merger scheme.

On February 4, the Singapore International Arbitration Center (SIAC) denied Sony Group's interim plea to restrain ZEEL from moving NCLT for enforcing the failed merger.

The Mumbai bench of NCLT has already issued notice to Sony over a petition filed in this regard.

The NCLT had on August 10, 2023, approved the scheme of merger, which could have created a USD 10 billion media entity.

If the merger was completed, the combined entity would have owned over 70 TV channels, two video streaming services -- ZEE5 and Sony LIV -- and two film studios -- Zee Studios and Sony Pictures Films India-- making it the largest entertainment network in the country.

Sony Pictures Network India (SPNI), which is an indirect wholly-owned subsidiary of Sony Group Corporation, Japan, owns 26 channels which operate in Hindi and several other languages having a viewership of over 700 million.

Besides, it has one OTT platform Sony LIV on which it streams live sports, movies, short films and its original and archival content. It has around 33 million viewers.

The company recorded a revenue of ₹ 6,684 crore for FY23. (PTI)

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Bodoland hosts first ever International Wildlife Conference at Bansbari

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 16: The first-ever Bodoland International Wildlife Conference, 2024, commenced with a three-day colorful program scheduled on Friday at Bansbari in the Manas Tiger Reserve, Baksa district. The event was organised by the Department of Forest & Environment, Government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), which has been emphasising the importance of raising awareness on the conservation of forests and wildlife in the Bodoland region.

Approximately fifteen resource persons, including four internationally acclaimed personalities from Bhutan, Italy, and Bangladesh, along with others from seven states of India, participated in the conference. The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro, graced the inaugural ceremony as the chief guest, alongside BTR executive member of the Forest and Environment Department, Ranjit Basumatary, and several dignitaries.

CEM Boro highlighted that the Bodoland region is blessed with diverse and rich biodiversity, and its verdant biospheres are home to many exotic and endangered species, making it a hotspot for the tourism sector. He praised the organisers for hosting the international conference, which aims to deepen the understanding of conservation of forests and wildlife across the region.

"It is a joyous moment to be part of the inaugural ceremony of the Bodoland International Wildlife Conference at Bansbari, along the Manas Tiger Reserve Project, Baksa. Our BTR is blessed with diverse and rich biodiversity, and our verdant biospheres are home to many exotic and endangered species," Boro said, adding that the conference will seek sustainable solutions to preserve BTR's incredible ecosystems.

"It remains our government's enduring effort to bring together all stakeholders towards creating and securing safe havens for our BTR's wildlife," he added.

Among others, BTR EMs Reoreoa Narzihary, Dr Dharma Narayan Das, and MCLA Montu Boro were prominent attendees at the event.

Deputy director calls for immediate action amidst social media breach concerns

Dima Hasao Tourism's official Facebook page hacked

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Deputy director Nirmendu Kemprai addressed the media in Haflong on Friday, revealing that the official social media Facebook page of Dima Hasao Tourism was recently breached, shocking its followers and officials. Despite the efforts of the administrators of the Dima Hasao Tourism FB account to regain control of the page, they failed to stop the objectionable contents posted on the official page.

Nirmendu Kemprai urged people to follow the newly created page, Dima Hasao Tourism Official, stating that the earlier created page should be unfollowed immediately. He highlighted the increasing nuisance of hacking user accounts and pages on social media, affecting high-profile individuals, politicians, and official pages. In response to such explicit activities, the department, under the guidance of the council, promptly lodged a complaint with the Facebook Support team and informed the Cyber Cell at Haflong Police Station.

The department urged all followers of the Facebook page 'Dima Hasao Tourism' to unfollow the old page and start following the new page, 'Dima Hasao Tourism Official', which can be accessed at https://www.facebook.com/dimahasaotourismofficial?mibextid=ZbWKwL for updates.

The Department of Tourism, Dima Hasao, under the administrative control of NC Hills Autonomous Council, has been operating an official Facebook page 'Dima Hasao Tourism' since 2016, with a current follower count of about 11,000. The page can be found at Page Id: 574914052689140 & URL – https://www.facebook.com/TourismDimaHasao?mibextid=ZbWKwL.

It is worth mentioning that Facebook users and officials were stunned to witness such strange activities. An official statement was issued earlier, indicating that the page was inaccessible and compromised.

Notably, Dima Hasao district is a popular tourist destination, attracting a good number of domestic and foreign tourists every year.

Morigaon POCSO Court delivers justice

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Feb 16: In a significant development, the Morigaon POCSO Court has handed down a life imprisonment sentence to Wahid Ali, aged 65, from Ghunuchahabi village under the jurisdiction of Jagiroad Police Station in Morigaon district on Friday. The conviction comes in connection to the heinous crime of raping a minor girl. The incident occurred on March 24, 2023, when Wahid Ali perpetrated the assault, rendering the victim unconscious.

The case, registered under IPC no 135/23 at Jagiroad Police Station, saw diligent investigation. Banti Handique, a sub-inspector of Jagiroad police station, filed a charge sheet in the Morigaon Court on May 24, 2023. Wahid Ali was subsequently apprehended on charges related to rape and murder.

HSLC and HSSLC Examinations commence

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Like in other places, the HSLC and HSSLC examinations began in different examination centers across the Dima Hasao district on Friday. In Dima Hasao district, there are 3221 candidates for HSLC and 2388 candidates appearing for HSSLC. To prevent any untoward incidents related to the exams, the district administration has imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) in Dima Hasao district.

Sivasagar reporter sentenced to two years in prison

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 16: The Guwahati High Court delivered a sensational verdict on February 12, in which the Court of Honourable Justice Rabin Phukan upheld the verdict of the Lower Court in the CBI Special case (No 07/2005) delivered on August 21, 2009, related to ASCARD Bank fraud. Reporter Khallilur Rahman Hazarika was convicted and sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 5000 under sections 13(1)(d), 13(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988. Rahman Hazarika had appealed against the verdict (Criminal Appeal 210/2009). Hazarika allegedly obtained a car loan fraudulently from the ASCARD Bank.

Hazarika, associated with the prestigious Assamese Daily 'Amar Asom', serves as the president of the Working Journalists Association, Sivasagar, and the general secretary of the Sivasagar Press Club.

Hazarika recently gained attention for his purported involvement in obtaining Power of Attorney and issuing Khatian to illegal occupiers on lands belonging to Rasaraj Lakshminath Bezbaruah in Pacipathar Gaon near NH37 bypass, aiding Bidyadhar Gohain in land grabbing, as reported by Satyakam Bezbaruah of the Bezbaruah family. The family has approached chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for intervention. The Sahityarathi Laksminath Bezbaroa Smritirakhsa Samiti and the residents of the town have expressed concern over the alleged criminal acts by a member of the media.

MDSP felicitates champions

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Feb 16: In a heartwarming ceremony at the Guwahati Railway Station, Morigaon district sports officer (MDSP), Chandan Talukdar, accompanied by assistant director SJT Satyabrata Gogoi, lavishly praised the remarkable achievements of Vikram Jyoti Konwar, Darshan Bordoloi, Gargi Priyadarshini Bardoloi, and their coach, Ananta. Their outstanding performance at the 34th National Kayaking & Canoeing Championship, hosted in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, recently, has brought immense honour not only to themselves but also to their hometown and the entire state. The triumphant team showcased exceptional skill and determination, securing a Gold medal in the K2 200 MTR event, as well as Silver medals in both the K2 500 MTR and the K2 Mixed 500 mtr categories. Their dedication and hard work have undoubtedly set a benchmark for aspiring athletes across the region.

Renowned cultural figure Moon Baruah passes away

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 16: Moon Baruah, a renowned cultural worker, artist, founder member of Milita Silpi Samaj, Sivasagar Natya Samaj, and Sivasagar Nagarik Santha, as well as the proprietor of Picolo Hotel, passed away on Friday afternoon at Siu Ka Pha Hospital, near here, after a brief illness. He was 87.

Moon Baruah, the grandson of maujadar Durga Prasad Baruah and the fourth son of Tarini Prasad Baruah, was actively involved in the cultural world of the state and was a close associate of Parag Chaliha, Phunu Baruah, Girija Prasad Baruah, and many other renowned cultural workers of yesteryears.

Baruah is survived by his wife, two daughters, two sons-in-law, and grandchildren.

Several organisations in Sivasagar, including Natya Samaj, Milita Silpi Samaj, Rangpur Sahitya Sabha, Brihattar Sivasagar Press Club, Sivasagar Press Club, E-media Association, Griffon Club, Sivasagar Byabosayee Santha, have expressed their condolences on the passing of this leading citizen. His last rites will be performed on Sunday.

NABARD supported CSS-FPO opens office in Batadroba

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 16: The first annual general meeting of Naba Batadroba Dol Gobinda Agro Producer Company Ltd, an FPC promoted under the CSS-FPO scheme by NABARD, was held last Wednesday at Rampur Gram Panchayat in the Batadroba Development Block. Rajendra Perna, DDM NABARD, Ranjan Prasad Deka, district agriculture officer, local dignitaries, as well as coordinators of ATMS, attended the meeting as special invitees. Over 250 shareholder members of the company were present at the meeting.

Addressing the occasion, Rajendra Perna, DDM NABARD, informed the participants about the basic tenets of the CSS-FPO scheme rolled out by the Government of India since 2021, with special emphasis on the aggregation and processing of agricultural produce from small-marginal farmers. NABARD has been playing a proactive role as one of the principal implementing agencies in promoting and nurturing numerous FPOs across the country to enhance the farmers' income on a sustainable basis, Perna asserted.

Ranjan Prasad Deka, DAO, Nagaon, also spoke at the occasion and assured the shareholder members of the FPO that the district agriculture office would extend all possible support such as soil testing, application of fertilisers, demonstrations of seeds, farm equipment, etc., to them in the future.

The ATMS coordinators - Amarjyoti Das and Siddhartha Bora - also shared information regarding the activities under the project. During the meeting, the dignitaries distributed share certificates among a few shareholder members of the company. Additionally, the office of Naba Batadroba Dol Gobinda Agro Producer Company Ltd was ceremonially inaugurated by the invitees near the Batadroba Bus Stand, as stated in a release.

Naduar Revenue Circle ranks second in Mission Basundhara 2.0

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 16: Naduar Revenue Circle achieved the second position in the state for successfully addressing and resolving land cases as part of Mission Basundhara 2.0, which concluded on Friday. Dr Akashdeep Kakaty, the revenue circle officer of Naduar Revenue Circle, received the award from the chief minister at a function held at Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra on Friday.

Mission Basundhara 2.0 was officially launched on November 14, 2022, to tackle land issues, resolve disputes, and allocate land to landless indigenous people of the state. Naduar Revenue Circle serves a section of Biswanath LAC and Sootea LAC as a whole. A total of 19,083 applications were received at Naduar Revenue Circle during Mission Basundhara 2.0, with 6,979 applications from Sootea LAC and 12,104 applications from Biswanath LAC.

Naduar Revenue Circle demonstrated excellence in resolving a maximum number of cases, while also providing efficient services such as online revenue payment, online composite land transfer, and digital stamping facilities.

SPIC MACAY founder Kiran Seth inspires students in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 16: Renowned Padma Shri awardee, Kiran Seth, the visionary behind SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth), embarked on a meaningful journey to Dibrugarh, where he engaged with students and educators to kindle interest in Indian classical music and cultural heritage.

For Seth, Dibrugarh held profound significance, as it was not just a visit but a nostalgic return to his childhood roots. His father, BR Seth, had served as the inaugural vice chancellor of Dibrugarh University in 1966. Paying homage to his father's legacy, Seth revisited the old bungalow at Dibrugarh University, imbued with memories of his formative years.

During his stay on Friday, Seth graced the Delhi Public School and the Shree Bharati Institute of Professional Education, exchanging insights with students and faculty members. The day culminated in an open dialogue session at Dibrugarh University, where ideas on cultural preservation and youth engagement flourished.

On Saturday, Seth is slated to convene with esteemed patrons of SPIC MACAY's Dibrugarh chapter, followed by an organisational gathering with members of the Heritage Club at Dibrugarh Hanumanbax Surajmall Kanoi (DHSK) College. The itinerary extends to February 18, featuring engagements at the Dibrugarh Sattriya Sanskritik Kendra and JN Vidyalaya in Moran.

In a conversation with the press, Dr Seth said, "We have been organising programs nationwide to promote interest in Indian heritage amongst youth. By 2030, SPIC MACAY hopes to reach out to every child of this nation and promote Indian heritage. We need a movement to change society, and for that, we need the support of the young generation. We need to know the basic things which we have forgotten. The young generation should play a proactive role in changing society."

He added, "Indian classical music is being looked upon as a way to perform on stage. Through SPIC MACAY, we want children to touch the soul of Indian classical music. Once they identify with the soul, there is nothing that will stop them from becoming human beings who can never go wrong."

Superfast trains introduced to accommodate extra passenger rush

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: In order to clear the extra rush of passengers, it has been decided to operate two fortnightly superfast special trains between Kanyakumari and Dibrugarh. The superfast special trains numbered 06103/06104 (Kanyakumari – Dibrugarh - Kanyakumari) and 06105/06106 (Kanyakumari – Dibrugarh - Kanyakumari) will run for eight trips each in both directions. These trains aim to benefit waitlisted passengers from Northeast and North Bengal areas who need to travel towards Southern India.

Special train no 06103 (Kanyakumari – Dibrugarh) Superfast special will depart from Kanyakumari at 17:25 hours on February 16, March 1, 15, and 29, 2024, on Friday, reaching Dibrugarh at 20:50 hours on Monday. In the return direction, train no 06104 (Dibrugarh – Kanyakumari) Superfast Special will depart from Dibrugarh at 19:55 hours on February 21, March 6, 20, and April 3, 2024, on Wednesday, reaching Kanyakumari at 21:55 hours on Saturday. These trains will offer AC-3 Tier, AC-3 tier economy class, sleeper class, and general second-class accommodations for passengers.

Special train no 06105 (Kanyakumari – Dibrugarh) Superfast Special will depart from Kanyakumari at 17:25 hours on February 23, March 8, 22, and April 5, 2024, on Friday, reaching Dibrugarh at 20:50 hours on Monday. In the return direction, train no 06106 (Dibrugarh – Kanyakumari) Superfast Special will depart from Dibrugarh at 19:55 hours on February 28, March 13, 27, and April 10, 2024, on Wednesday, reaching Kanyakumari at 21:55 hours on Saturday. These trains will provide AC-2 tier, AC-3 tier, sleeper class, and general second-class accommodations for passengers.

These trains will traverse via Mariani Jn, Dimapur, Lumding Jn, Goalpara Town, Kokrajhar, New Cooch Behar, New Jalpaiguri, Malda Town, Barddhaman Jn, Kharagpur Jn, Bhubaneswar, Vizianagram Jn, Vijayawada Jn, Nellore, Coimbatore Jn, Ernakulam Town, and Thiruvananthapuram Central, among other stops.

Waitlisted passengers of other trains traveling along this route can avail themselves of this opportunity for comfortable travel. The details of the special trains are available on the social media platforms of NF Railway. Passengers are urged to verify the details before commencing their journey.

Second edition of Bodoland Sports Meet 2024 kicks off

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 16: The second edition of the Bodoland Sports Meet 2024 commenced on Thursday with a three-day program held at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) stadium, Kanthalguri Titaguri in Kokrajhar. The event was organised under the initiative of the Sports & Youth Welfare Department, Government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), and Bodoland Indigenous Games Association (BIGA) to foster a sporting environment across the region.

The chief executive member (CEM) of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, inaugurated the event in the presence of BTR executive member Daobaisa Boro, sports personalities, and other dignitaries. Nearly 1000 participants from five districts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) including Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur, and Udalguri are participating in five sports disciplines such as athletics, football, volleyball, kabaddi, archery, and indigenous games during the event.

Moreover, Divangya Sports is also being conducted under the Bodoland Sports Meet for the first time. CEM Pramod Boro emphasised that sports are integral to life in Bodoland Territorial

Region. He extended his best wishes to all the participating sportspersons for a successful event and stated that this initiative aims to nurture promising sports personalities.

"It is a happy moment to inaugurate the second edition of the Bodoland Sports Meet at SAI Stadium, Kokrajhar. My best wishes to all the participating sportspersons for a successful event ahead," he added. Among others, secretary of Assam Football Association Dr Sangrang Brahma and president of All Assam Masters Athletes Association Maguram Balary were prominent attendees at the event.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Every man dies. Not every man really lives.
-William Wallace

Electoral Bond setback for govt

The recent ruling by the Supreme Court declaring the 'Electoral Bond Scheme' unconstitutional marks a pivotal moment in the narrative shaping the forthcoming Lok Sabha election of 2024. This landmark judgement underscores a significant deviation from the norm, shedding light on the potential manipulation of past elections since the scheme's inception in 2018. The implications of this decision extend far beyond mere legal scrutiny; they pierce through the very heart of democratic principles, revealing a landscape marred by undue advantage and distorted electoral practices. Central to this unfolding narrative is the assertion that the electoral playing field has been skewed, with unconstitutionally amassed funds tilting the balance in Favor of the ruling establishment, particularly benefiting Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The revelation that corporate entities, under questionable circumstances, funnelled substantial sums into the coffers of the ruling party prompts a necessary reckoning with the integrity of our electoral processes. The impending disclosure of the beneficiaries and donors involved in this unconstitutional financing, scheduled for release by the Election Commission of India on March 13, 2024, promises to unravel a complex web of electoral impropriety. Through this unveiling, the electorate will gain insight into the symbiotic relationship between political power and corporate interests, potentially reshaping public perception and voter behaviour.

The opposition's long-standing accusations of coercion and extortion by the Modi government, purportedly leveraging central investigative agencies to secure corporate funding, further underscore the erosion of democratic norms. Financial constraints imposed on opposition parties, exacerbated by alleged governmental intimidation tactics, have undoubtedly compromised the pluralistic essence of our democracy. The evolving political narrative, punctuated by shifting alliances and ideological confrontations, underscores the multifaceted dynamics at play. From the resurgence of Congress to the formation of the INDIA alliance and the subsequent fracturing of its constituents, each development has contributed to the intricate tapestry of electoral discourse. Amidst these tumultuous currents, the spectre of Hindutva and its intersection with political manoeuvring looms large. The Ram Mandir temple inauguration in Ayodhya, coupled with allegations of communal polarization, underscores the enduring potency of identity politics in shaping electoral outcomes.

Furthermore, concerns surrounding the impartiality of electoral institutions, particularly in light of amendments to the appointment process of Election Commissioners, raise pertinent questions about the sanctity of our electoral framework. The consolidation of power in the hands of the ruling government risks undermining the checks and balances essential for a fair and transparent electoral process. As the nation stands on the precipice of yet another electoral showdown, the Supreme Court's verdict serves as a clarion call for safeguarding the fundamental tenets of democracy. The onus now lies with the judiciary and the Election Commission to uphold the principles of free and fair elections, ensuring that the will of the people remains unencumbered by undue influence or manipulation. In this ever-shifting landscape of political narratives, the integrity of our electoral process must emerge unscathed, lest we compromise the very foundation of our democratic ethos.

German govt's strict measures against far right signal victory of Left

By: Satyaki Chakraborty

Finally, the Social Democratic Chancellor Olaf Scholz has shown some guts by taking strict measures against the far right including the neo fascists, following the massive demonstrations organized by the left parties, trade unions, the Social Democrats and other sections of the civil society. The huge participation of the common German people in the continuing demonstrations during week end in major cities of the country, surprised the political watchers.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said the protests had been "an encouragement and a mandate" to act politically. "We want to use all instruments of rule of law to protect our democracy." We want to break up right-wing extremist networks, cut their funding and take away their weapons," she said. The 13 point plan includes laws that include freezing bank accounts, cut funding models for the extremist organisations and target their donors. The interior minister said that this 13 point programme would certainly combat right extremism which she described as the biggest threat facing the German society.

The government also plans to ban right-wing extremist events more easily and far-right activists will be stopped from entering or leaving Germany whenever possible. German government sources say that there are around 38,000 right wing extremists in Germany and out of them, around 14,000 are potentially violent. Sources said that the official agencies are monitoring the movements and activities of these extremists and if they fail to get the funds from their donors, their anti-national activities, will come down.

The freezing of bank accounts is an important step to deal with the extremists because in recent years, they got strengthened because of the huge financial help from pro fascist business people and rich donors. In Hitler's Germany also in 1930's the Nazi party got big support from some industry people, especially arms and weapons manufacturers and this helped the party in expanding the organisation as also funding the Gestapo with huge resources. The Left parties as also the Greens, a member of the federal coalition have been demanding the freezing of the bank accounts of the extremist groups for long. That way, the government agreeing to the demand is a victory for the Left.

Though the official far right party AFD operates as a legal political party, many of its members have neo-fascist past and they are more active in the organization now as the AFD is fighting hard to win more seats in the coming elections for European Parliament slated in June this year. Till last month, there was a fear that the AFD will be gaining more seats compared to the coalition government partners and the Left and this will help the new European Parliament to move right after the June elections. Seasoned political observers say that there has been some change in political mood in Germany and presently AFD is a bit down compared to its surge in the last year. The AFD may not do well as it was thinking before.

At the other end, the two left parties de Linke and the new party BWS are preparing for the June elections. The BWS has started massive campaign to spread its message and its target is the working class areas where the AFD has made inroads in the base of the Left.

Both de Linke and BWS are in a competition to draw the attention of the working class and that is a good sign for the German Left as a whole. The Left has won the first stage of its battle against far right with the German government action against the extremists, now the next stage of battle is to defeat the AFD in as many seats as possible in the European Parliament elections. That will be known in June only. ***(IPA Service)***

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

Assam's vision for sustainable growth

....continued from Feb 16 issue.

The budget snapshot for the fiscal year 2024-25 demonstrates a meticulous commitment to addressing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by providing a goal-wise allocation for the year 2022-23 in Assam. Notable allocations include 8,879 crore towards eradicating poverty, underscoring the state's dedication to social welfare. A substantial 25,856 crore is allocated for Good Health and Well-being, reflecting a significant investment in healthcare infrastructure and services. Education is also a priority, with 4,845 crore allocated for Quality Education. The budget allocates funds across various SDGs, including Zero Hunger, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced Inequalities, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Climate Action, Life on Land, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and Partnership for the Goals. This goal-wise allocation showcases the state's comprehensive approach to sustainable development, emphasizing economic growth, social well-being, environmental sustainability, and inclusive governance.

The budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 highlights the top 15 departments based on budget demand, showcasing the state's priorities and financial allocations. The Finance Department leads with a substantial allocation of 31,273 crore, indicating its central role in managing the state's fiscal affairs. School Education follows closely with 16,658 crore, underscoring the government's commitment to enhancing the education sector. Administration Reforms and Training & PPG receive 15,538 crore, reflecting a focus on improving administrative efficiency. Public Works (Roads) and Panchayat & Rural Development departments receive significant allocations of 8,998 crore and 8,403 crore, respectively, emphasizing infrastructure development and rural progress. The Home Department is allocated 7,861 crore, indicating a commitment to maintaining public safety. Health and Family Welfare receive 5,355 crore, showcasing a substantial investment in healthcare services. This financial distribution underscores the government's strategic approach to address diverse sectors, including education, infrastructure, healthcare, and rural development, fostering overall progress and well-being in the state.

The commitment to inclusivity is evident in the budgetary allocations for Gender, Child, and Divyang (Persons with Disabilities) sectors over the fiscal years 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25. For Gender Budget in 2022-23, 20 departments reported, receiving an allocation of 21,929 crore, demonstrating a focus on gender-sensitive initiatives. In the following fiscal year 2023-24, the number of departments reporting increased to 22, with an allocation of 19,387 crore, indicating a sustained effort in promoting gender inclusivity.

However, the budget for the Financial Year 2024-25 shows a slight decrease, with 24 departments reporting and an allocation of 16,937 crore, emphasizing the need for continued attention to gender-specific programs. Similarly, the Child Budget reflects a substantial increase from 7,376 crore in 2022-23 (10 reporting departments) to 18,566 crore in 2023-24 (13 reporting departments), underlining the government's emphasis on child welfare. In 2024-25, the allocation remains substantial at 16,834 crore, indicating ongoing support for child-focused initiatives across 12 reporting departments. The Divyang Budget reflects a fluctuating pattern, with 1,569 crore allocated to 6 reporting departments in 2022-23, increasing to 2,548 crore across 9 departments in 2023-24, and a slight decrease to 1,968 crore for 11 reporting departments in 2024-25. These allocations underscore the government's concerted efforts to create an inclusive budget, addressing the specific needs of diverse segments of the population.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

Green Budgeting serves as a strategic tool within Public Finance Management (PFM), facilitating evidence-based and output-oriented budgeting. It plays a pivotal role in directing financial resources effectively to address climate change, promote sustainability, and achieve environmental targets. This approach allows for efficient allocation of resources towards both climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. A Green Budget, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), contributes significantly to building a sustainable and resilient future. By adhering to the principles outlined in the United Nations' SDGs and aligning with India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, as well as other national and state commitments, Green Budgeting becomes a catalyst for fostering positive environmental outcomes.

The essence of Green Budgeting lies in its commitment to addressing the pressing challenges of our era -environmental sustainability and climate change. This approach involves integrating sustainability principles seamlessly into the systems and procedures of public financial management (PFM). The objective is to provide state governments with the tools to fortify ongoing initiatives and create financial avenues for new endeavors. In the fiscal year 2024-25, the Green Budget constitutes 10.02% of the total budget for 18 key departments, totaling ₹ 4,636 Crore. This allocation signifies a dedicated effort towards promoting initiatives that not only mitigate environmental impact but also contribute to the overall resilience and sustainability of our communities.

In the fiscal year 2024-25, the commitment to environmental sustainability is reflected in the departments' allocations towards the Green Budget. Notably, the Agriculture Department has earmarked 165.95 crore from its budget estimate (BE) of 2445.71 crore, emphasizing a green approach to agricultural practices. Similarly, the Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department allocates 20.28 crore from its 618.63 crore BE, promoting eco-friendly initiatives in animal husbandry. The Environment & Forest Department leads by example with a substantial green estimate of 265.88 crore out of its 1207.25 crore BE, emphasizing the importance of conservation efforts. Panchayat & Rural Development allocates a significant 1396.80 crore from its 8402.58 crore BE, indicating a strong focus on sustainable rural development. The Health and Family Welfare Department also contributes significantly, allocating 519.40 crore from its 5354.68 crore BE to green initiatives. This trend extends across various key departments, such as Power, Public Works, Water Resources, and Housing & Urban Affairs, collectively culminating in a noteworthy total Green Estimate of 4636.30 crore out of the Total Budget Estimate of 46270.09 crore. This dedicated allocation underscores the state's commitment to fostering environmentally conscious practices across diverse sectors, contributing to a more sustainable and resilient future.

In the flagship schemes for the fiscal year 2024-25 in Assam, the government is set to embark on the Ashtadash Mukutor Unnoyonee Maala initiative, encompassing a diverse range of programs aimed at fostering holistic development. Among these initiatives are the Mukhya Mantri Nijut Moina (MMNM) and the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan, both focusing on empowering individuals and promoting entrepreneurship, particularly among women. The Orunodoi 2.0 project aims at expanding inclusivity, while the Assam Micro Finance Incentive and Relief Scheme under Category III targets supporting microfinance endeavors. The Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Assam Abhijan and One Lakh Plus Jobs initiative underscore the commitment to self-reliance and job creation. Additionally, projects for Amrit Kaal, the creation of growth corridors, and the Mukhya Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin) demonstrate a multifaceted approach to sustainable development. The government's focus on innovative integration of wetlands with the River Brahmaputra, green growth for a greener Assam, and welfare measures for the Tea Tribe Community showcases a comprehensive strategy for environmental conservation and social welfare.

Other noteworthy schemes include initiatives for cultural identity, pilgrimage under Punya Tirth Yojana in Ayodhya, future prospects for children, sports development through Khel Maharan and Youth Clubs, and a Global Investors' Summit scheduled for November 2024, emphasizing the state's commitment to economic growth and global engagement. Lastly, the Mukhya Mantri Sanrahalaya initiative underscores the government's dedication to the preservation and promotion of heritage.

In the major announcements for the fiscal year 2024-25 in Assam, the government has unveiled a spectrum of initiatives designed to address key sectors and foster inclusive development. Notably, the introduction of reservation for Agniveers in the Assam Police reflects a commitment to diversifying the workforce. The emphasis on achieving self-sufficiency in egg, milk, and fish production underlines the government's dedication to enhancing food security and promoting local agriculture. The promotion of small tea growers and the establishment of a Start-up Mission signal support for entrepreneurship and innovation. Setting up a Training Centre at Padmashree Hemaprova Chutia's residence underscores the importance of skill development. PM Vishwakarma Yojana and Farm Mechanization initiatives aim to boost the agricultural sector, while Rooftop solarisation and Climate Action projects demonstrate a commitment to sustainable practices. The ambitious Amrit-Guwahati Integrated Global City (Amrit-GIG City) project reflects the state's vision for urban development. Healthcare receives significant attention through Ayushman Asom, a comprehensive healthcare initiative, and the Comprehensive School Health Programme. The Village and Community Outreach Programme for MBBS Students showcases a commitment to grassroots healthcare. Digital transformation and artificial intelligence take center stage, with initiatives like Championing Digital Transformation & Artificial Intelligence and Gyan-Dhara, integrating virtual reality technology for experiential learning.

Other initiatives include the establishment of the Third Assam Bhawan in New Delhi, housing support for employees, the Jeevika Sakhi Express, and monthly remuneration for honorary Gaon Pradhans in forest areas, all contributing to a holistic and inclusive development agenda.

The Budget Estimates for the fiscal year 2024-25 reveal a receipt of ₹ 1,43,605.56 crore in the Consolidated Fund of the State, with ₹ 1,11,943.84 crore allocated to Revenue Account and the remaining ₹ 31,661.73 crore under Capital Account. Additionally, the estimated receipt in the Consolidated Fund from various sources, combined with ₹ 1,44,550.08 crore under Public Account and ₹ 2,000.00 crore under the Contingency Fund, culminate in total receipts of ₹ 2,90,155.65 crore. In contrast, the anticipated total expenditure from the Consolidated Fund for 2024-25 is ₹ 1,43,890.62 crore, distributed as ₹ 1,10,091.86 crore on Revenue Account and ₹ 33,798.76 crore on Capital Account. Factoring in the expenditure of ₹ 1,42,670.09 crore under Public Account and ₹ 2,000.00 crore under the Contingency Fund, the aggregate expenditure for the year is projected at ₹ 2,88,560.71 crore. The estimated transactions throughout the year are anticipated to yield a surplus of ₹ 1,594.94 crore. This surplus, in conjunction with the opening deficit of ₹ 2,369.41 crore, results in a projected budget deficit of ₹ 774.47 crore at the conclusion of the financial year 2024-25. ***(The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)***

China's dam on the Brahmaputra to threaten Bangladesh, India

By: Saleem Samad

China secretly building the world's biggest dam over the mighty Brahmaputra River which is likely to jeopardise the ecology, environment and morphology.

If the mega project goes through will immensely cause hardship for several million people in downstream India, and of course Bangladesh. China's $1.5 billion dam over Brahmaputra, known as Zangmu Hydropower Station, has raised serious concerns in Bangladesh and India.

China did not consult with the two neighbouring countries, which is mandatory according to the Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers is an international guideline regulating how rivers and their connected ground waters that cross national boundaries may be used, adopted by the International Law Association (ILA) in Helsinki, Finland in 1966.

Dhaka and New Delhi know very well that diplomatic parleys will not dent the simmering issue with the arrogant Beijing administration.

The hydropower dam over the mighty Brahmaputra River, China is opening another flash-point with India, as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has its party in power in the northeast state of Assam, where the river flows further south and enters Bangladesh delta.

The Brahmaputra River once it enters Bangladesh, at Bahadurabad in Jamalpur, gets a local name. The Jamuna River directly flows from the yawning Brahmaputra River, said researcher and writer Mohiuddin Ahmad.

The people along the Jamuna River people are critically dependent on the river for rejuvenating life in the monsoon for massive agricultural activities and navigation to millions in the floodplains.

China's planned super dam on a major river that flows into northeast India threatens to turn into another in a series of flash-points with New Delhi and Beijing and is likely to spark concerns in Bangladesh.

Brahma Chellaney is professor emeritus of strategic studies at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi and a former adviser to India's National Security Council. He is the author of nine books, including 'Water: Asia's New Battleground.'

China is unmatched as the world's hydro hegemony, with more large dams in service than every other country combined. Now it is building the world's first super dam, close to its heavily militarised frontier with India.

This megaproject, with a planned capacity of 60 gigawatts, would generate three times as much electricity as the Three Gorges Dam, now the world's largest hydropower plant.

China, though, has given few updates about the project's status since the National People's Congress approved it in March 2021.

China presented the super dam project for the approval of the National People's Congress only after it had built sufficient infrastructure to start transporting heavy equipment, materials and workers to the remote site.

Barely two months after parliament's approval nearly three years ago, Beijing announced that it had accomplished the feat of completing a "highway through the world's deepest canyon." That highway ends very close to the Indian border.

Opacity about the development of past projects has often served as cover for quiet action. Beijing has a record of keeping work on major dam projects on international rivers under wraps until the activity can no longer be hidden in commercially available satellite imagery.

The super dam is located in some of the world's most treacherous terrain, in an area long thought impassable. The hydrology and river morphology have not been fully explored, meaning research on the gigantic river is still under study by experts.

Bangladesh is trailing behind in conducting a study on the river Brahmaputra, said Ahmad, who had worked for Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP) for 100 years.

To understand, the Brahmaputra, known to Tibetans as the Yarlung Tsangpo, drops almost 3,000 meters as it takes a sharp southerly turn from the Himalayas into India, with the world's highest-altitude major river descending through the globe's longest and steepest canyon.

Twice as deep as the Grand Canyon in the United States, the Brahmaputra gorge holds Asia's greatest untapped water reserves while the river's precipitous fall creates one of the greatest concentrations of river energy on Earth. The combination has acted as a powerful magnet for Chinese dam builders.

During the British Raj, several British expeditions and researchers failed to enter Tibet, now a territory of China, said Sanat Chakraborty, a journalist and researcher on the river morphology, life and history of rivers in northeast India.

Another journalist Samrat Chowdhury, an acclaimed Indian journalist who floated on the Brahmaputra for days in the northeast as well as in Bangladesh has written a book The Braided Rivers, which describes the life of boatmen, fishermen, the chars (shoals) people, vibrant trading in hats (market) and farmers. He described how millions of people are dependent on the river.

The behemoth dam, however, is the world's riskiest project as it is being built in a seismically active area. This makes it potentially a ticking water bomb for downstream communities in India and Bangladesh, writes Chellaney.

What is alarming, the south-eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau is earthquake-prone because it sits on the geological fault line where the Indian and Eurasian plates collide.

The 2008 Sichuan earthquake, along the Tibetan Plateau's eastern rim, killed 87,000 people and drew international attention to the phenomenon of reservoir-triggered pressure from a dam's reservoir may have helped trigger the earthquake.

Some Chinese and American scientists drew a link between the quake and Sichuan's Zipingpu Dam, which came into service two years earlier near a seismic fault. They suggested that the weight of the several hundred million cubic meters of water impounded in the dam's reservoir could have triggered RTS or severe tectonic stresses.

But even without a quake, the new super dam could be a threat to downriver communities if torrential monsoon rains trigger flash floods in the Great Bend of the Brahmaputra. Barely a few years ago, some 400 million Chinese were put at risk after record flooding endangered the Three Gorges Dam.

In pursuing its controversial megaproject on the Brahmaputra, China is cloaking its construction activity to mute international reaction, alleges the Centre for Policy Research.

The Brahmaputra was one of the world's last undammed rivers until China began constructing a series of midsized dams on sections upstream from the famous canyon. With its dam building now moving close to border areas, China will in due course be able to leverage transboundary flows in its relations with rival India.

But the brunt of the environmental havoc that the megaproject is likely to wreak will be borne by Bangladesh, in the last stretch of the river. The environmental damage, however, is likely to extend up through Tibet, one of the world's most bio-diverse regions.

In fact, with its super dam, China will be desecrating the canyon region which is a crucial Tibetan holy place.

A cardinal principle of water peace is transparency. The far-reaching strategic, environmental and inter-riparian implications of the largest dam ever conceived make it imperative that China be transparent. Only sustained international pressure can force Beijing to drop the veil of secrecy surrounding its project. ***(The author is an award-winning journalist is Deputy Editor of The Daily Messenger. He can be reached at saleemsamad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @saleemsamad)***

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Importance of STEM careers for women and girls

By: Ranjan K Baruah

Many of us have noticed one important thing that is the absence of women in science or maths or technical stream when it comes to higher education or technical education. We must know that women are typically given smaller research grants than their male colleagues and, while they represent 33.3% of all researchers, only 12% of members of national science academies are women.

At present the popular avenues like machine learning or artificial intelligence have less number of women in comparison with men. In cutting edge fields such as artificial intelligence, only one in five professionals (22%) is a woman. Global data says that despite a shortage of skills in most of the technological fields driving the Fourth Industrial Revolution, women still account for only 28% of engineering graduates and 40% of graduates in computer science and informatics.

The irony is female researchers tend to have shorter, less well-paid careers. Their work is underrepresented in high-profile journals and they are often passed over for promotion. We need to generate more awareness amongst girls to take up career choice in the field of science.

We need more women working in the field of science to bring more positive changes in society. Diversity in research expands the pool of talented researchers, bringing in fresh perspectives, talent and creativity. 11th February is observed as the international day of women and girls in science. This Day is a reminder that women and girls play a critical role in science and technology communities and that their participation should be strengthened.

We should be aware that although Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields are widely regarded as critical to national economies, so far most countries, no matter their level of development, have not achieved gender equality in STEM. A significant gender gap has persisted throughout the years at all levels of STEM.

On 14 March 2011, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted a report at its fifty-fifth session, with agreed conclusions on access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, and for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work.

On 20 December 2013, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on science, technology and innovation for development, in which it recognized that full and equal access to and participation in science, technology and innovation for women and girls of all ages is imperative for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and, therefore, also half of its potential. Gender equality, besides being a fundamental human right, is essential to achieve peaceful societies, with full human potential and sustainable development. We must encourage young girls to take up courses related to STEM. When I visit different universities or institutions of higher education then I could see more girls in humanities.

In engineering branches we have less girls and technical institutions like ITIs get more women in makeup artist or tailoring but very less in electrician or motor mechanic. We need to encourage young girls to take up careers in the field of STEM and this can be done when all of us put our effort. ***(The author is the Advisor or Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department (SEED) of Bodoland Territorial Council and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjan@gmail.com for any career related queries)***

RRB ALP Recruitment 2024 – 5696 Assistant Loco Pilot Posts

Last Date: 19/02/2024

Railway Recruitment Board (RRB), Ministry of Railways, Govt. of India has released an employment notification CEN No. 01/2024 for the recruitment of 5696 Assistant Loco Pilot Posts in various RRBs. The online application process for RRB ALP Vacancy 2024 will be started from 20th January 2024 to 19th February 2024.

Name of post: Assistant Loco Pilot (ALP)

No of posts: 5696 posts

No of posts under RRB Guwahati: 62 posts

Pay scale: Level 02 of 7th CPC Pay Matrix with initial pay of ₹ 19900 plus other allowances as admissible.

Eligibility Criteria of RRB ALP Recruitment

Age Limit: Candidates age must be between 18 to 30 years as on 1st July 2024 .

Age Relaxation: The relaxation of upper age limit for reserved categories are as follows:

Category	Age Relaxation
OBC-NCL	3 years
SC/ST	5 years

Educational Qualification:
A) Matriculation / SSLC plus ITI from recognised institutions of NCVT/SCVT in the trades of Fitter, Electrician, Instrument Mechanic, Millwright Maintenance Mechanic, Mechanic Radio & TV, Electronics Mechanic , Mechanic Motor Vehicle, Wireman, Tractor Mechanic, Armature and Coil Winder, Mechanic Diesel, Heat Engine, Turner, Machinist, Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Mechanic.
OR
Matriculation / SSLC plus Course Completed Act Apprenticeship in the trades mentioned above. OR
B) 3 years Diploma in Mechanical / Electrical / Electronics / Automobile Engineering. OR

Combination of various streams of these Engineering disciplines from a recognised Institution in lieu of ITI. OR

Note: Degree in the Engineering disciplines as above will also be acceptable in lieu of Diploma in Engineering.

RRB ALP Physical and Medical Standard Requirement

Physical and Medical Standard of the candidates for RRB Assistant Loco Pilot posts must be as mentioned below.

Category	Requirement
Medical Standard	A1
Physical Standard	Physically Fit in All Standards
Vision Standard	• Distant Vision: 6/6, 6/6 Without glasses with fogging test (must not accept +2D) • Near Vision: Sn: 0.6. 0.6 Without glasses • Must Pass test for Color Vision, Binocular Vision, Field of Vision, Night Vision, Mesopic Vision, etc.

Helpline of RRB ALP Recruitment: Candidates may contact following helplines for any queries related to technical issues.

 # Phone: 9592001188
 # Email: rrbhelp@csc.gov.in
 # Time: 10 AM to 5 PM

Application Fee: Candidates have to pay an application fee as mentioned below:

Category	Fee
• SC / ST / Ex-Serviceman / PWDs / Female / Transgender / Minorities / Economically backward class. (The fee for these categories shall be refunded after deducting bank charges as applicable, on appearing in First Stage CBT.)	₹ 250
• Others	₹ 500

Important Dates of RRB Recruitment 2024

 # Starting date of submission of online application: 20th January 2024
 # Last date of submission of online application: 19th February 2024 up to 23:59 Hrs

Women & Child Development Recruitment 2024 – 33 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 24/02/2024

Directorate of Women & Child Development, Assam has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 33 Statistical Assistant posts under Women and Child Development (WCD) Department, Assam. The post will be filled up against existing vacancy in ICDS Projects. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Statistical Assistant

No of posts: 33 posts

Category-wise vacancy:

UR: 17
OBC/ MOBC: 9
SC: 2
STP: 3
STH: 2
PWD: 1

Scale of pay: Pay Band 2, ₹14,000-70,000/- plus Grade Pay of ₹7,400/- per month.

Eligibility Criteria of Women and Child Development Recruitment

Age Limit: The candidate should not be less than 21 years and more than 40 years of age as on 01.01.2024.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

 # SC/ST: 5 years
 # OBC/ MOBC: 3 years
 # PwD: 10 years
 # Ex-servicemen: 2 years

Note: The age limit of the candidates will be calculated on the basis of the Matriculation/ HSLC Admit Card/HSLC passed certificate issued by a recognized Board/Council.

Citizenship: Candidates must be Indian Citizens as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.

Residentship: The candidate must be ordinarily a resident of Assam.

Employment Exchange Registration: A candidate should be registered in a District Employment Office of Assam.

Educational Qualification: Candidates must be a Graduate in Arts , Science & Commerce with Economics /Statistics /Mathematics as one of the subject at degree level.

Desirable Qualification: Diploma in computer application.

Application Fee: Candidates are not required to pay application fee for submission of their online applications.

Important Dates of Women and Child Development Assam Vacancy 2024

 # Starting date of submission of online application: 4th February 2024
 # Last date of submission of online application: 24th February 2024

Punjab National Bank Recruitment – 1025 Officer & Manager Posts

Last Date: 25/02/2024

Punjab National Bank has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 1025 Officer & Manager vacancy. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. Officer-Credit in JMG Scale-I
No of posts: 1000 posts
Pay: ₹36000-1490/7-46430-1740/2-49910-1990/7-63840
Age Limit: 21 to 28 years as on 01.01.2024.
Educational Qualification: Chartered Accountant (CA) from Institute of Chartered Accountants of India Or
Cost Management Accountant-CMA (ICWA) from Institute of Cost Accountants of India Or
Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) from CFA Institute (USA) Or
Full time MBA or Post Graduate Diploma in Management or equivalent with specialization in Finance from any Institute/ College/ University recognized/ approved by Govt. bodies/ AICTE/ UGC with minimum 60% marks or equivalent grade.

2. Manager-Forex in MMG Scale-II
No of posts: 15 posts
Pay: ₹48170-1740/1-49910-1990/10-69810
Age Limit: 25 to 35 years as on 01.01.2024.

Educational Qualification: Full time MBA or Post Graduate Diploma in Management or equivalent with specialization in Finance/ International Business from any Institute/ College/ University recognized/ approved by Govt. bodies/ AICTE/ UGC with minimum 60% marks or equivalent grade.

Experience: Minimum 2 years experience as an Officer in the related field.

3. Manager-Cyber Security in MMG Scale-II
No of posts: 5 posts
Pay: ₹48170-1740/1-49910-1990/10-69810
Age Limit: 25 to 35 years as on 01.01.2024.

Educational Qualification: Full time degree in B.E./ B.Tech in Computer Science/ Information Technology/ Electronics and Communications Engineering Or Full time M.C.A. from any Institute/ College/ University recognized/ approved by Govt. bodies/ AICTE/ UGC with minimum 60% marks or equivalent grade.

Experience: Minimum 2 years experience in IT of which at least one year experience in managing IT & Cyber Security in large data centre/ soc/ c-soc handling following operations: -
Security Incidence Event Management (SIEM)/ Perimeter Security including security devices such as Firewalls/ NIPS/ Anti DDoS/ WAF/ Application Delivery Controller (ADC)/ IS Audit experience especially on application testing/ penetration testing using automated tools.

4. Senior Manager - Cyber Security in MMG Scale-III
No of posts: 5 posts
Pay: ₹63840-1990/5-73790-2220/2-78230
Age Limit: 27 to 38 years as on 01.01.2024.

Educational Qualification: Full time degree in B.E./ B.Tech in Computer Science/ Information Technology/ Electronics and Communications Engineering Or Full time M.C.A. from any Institute/ College/ University recognized/ approved by Govt. bodies/ AICTE/ UGC with minimum 60% marks or equivalent grade.

Experience: Minimum 4 years experience in IT of which at least 2 years experience in managing IT & Cyber Security in large datacentre/ soc/ c-soc handling following operations: -
Security Incidence Event Management (SIEM)/ Perimeter Security include security devices such as Firewalls/ NIPS/ Anti DDoS/ WAF/Application Delivery Controller (ADC)/ Network Detection and Response/ Threat Hunting/ IS Audit experience especially on application testing/ penetration testing using automated tools.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.
SC/ST: 5 years
OBC/ MOBC: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years
Ex-servicemen: 5 years

Application Fee: Candidates have to pay an application fee as mentioned below:

Category	Fee
SC/ST/PwBD category	₹59
Other category	₹1180

Important Dates of Punjab National Bank Recruitment 2024

 # Starting date of submission of online application: 7th February 2024
 # Last date of submission of online application: 25th February 2024

Indian Coast Guard Recruitment – 70 Assistant Commandant Posts

Last Date: 28/02/2024

Indian Coast Guard has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 70 Assistant Commandant (Group 'A' Gazetted Officer) posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. Assistant Commandant General Duty (GD)

No of posts: 50 posts

Gender: Male

Age Limit: Born between 01 Jul 1999 & 30 Jun 2003 (Both dates inclusive).

Educational Qualification:
(i) Should hold a degree of recognised university with minimum 60% aggregate marks.
(ii) Mathematics and Physics as subject upto Intermediate or class XII of 10+2+3 scheme of education or equivalent with minimum 55% aggregate marks in Mathematics and Physics. The candidates who have completed graduation after diploma, are also eligible, provided they should possess an aggregate of 55% marks in diploma with physics and mathematics in its curriculum.)

2. Assistant Commandant Technical (Mechanical)

Gender: Male

Age Limit: Born between 01 Jul 1999 & 30 Jun 2003 (Both dates inclusive).

Educational Qualification:
Should hold an Engineering degree of recognised university in Naval Architecture or Mechanical or Marine or Automotive or Mechatronics or Industrial and Production or Metallurgy or Design or Aeronautical or Aerospace with minimum 60% aggregate marks. OR
Equivalent qualification in any of the above disciplines recognised by the Institutes of the Engineers (India) as exempted from section 'A' and 'B' and their associate membership examination (AMIE).
Mathematics and Physics as subject upto intermediate or class XII of 10+2+3 scheme of education or equivalent with minimum 55% aggregate marks in Mathematics and Physics. The candidates who have completed graduation after diploma, are also eligible, provided they should possess an aggregate of 55% marks in diploma with physics and mathematics in its curriculum.

3. Assistant Commandant Technical (Electrical/ Electronics)

No of posts: 20 posts (Mechanical + Electrical/ Electronics)

Gender: Male

Age Limit: Born between 01 Jul 1999 & 30 Jun 2003 (Both dates inclusive).

Educational Qualification:
(i) Should hold an Engineering degree of recognised university in Electrical or Electronics or Telecommunication or Instrumentation or Instrumentation and Control or Electronics and Communication or Power Engineering or Power Electronics with minimum 60% aggregate marks. OR Equivalent qualification in any of the above disciplines recognised by the Institutes of the Engineers (India) as exempted from section 'A' and 'B' and their associate membership examination (AMIE).
(ii) Mathematics and Physics as subject upto intermediate or class XII of 10+2+3 scheme of education or equivalent with minimum 55% aggregate marks in Mathematics and Physics. The candidates who have completed graduation after diploma, are also eligible, provided they should possess an aggregate of 55% marks in diploma with physics and mathematics in its curriculum.

Other Criteria of Indian Coast Guard Recruitment

Medical Standards

 # Height

 # Asst Commandant (GD), Technical: 157 cms minimum. Reduction in height for candidates from hilly areas and tribal areas will be in accordance with the Central Govt. regulations.

 # Weight

Proportionate to the Height and Age, + 10 % acceptable.

 # Chest

Well proportionate, minimum expansion 5 cms.

 # Eye Sight

(i) Asst Commandant (GD) 6/6 6/9 – Uncorrected without Glass.
6/6 6/6 – Corrected with Glass.

(ii) Asst Commandant (Tech) 6/36 6/36 – Uncorrected without Glass.
6/6 6/6 – Corrected with Glass

Examination Fee:

 # UR/OBC: ₹ 300
 # SC/ST: Nil
 # Mode of Payment: Net banking or by using Visa/ Master/ Maestro/ Rupay Credit/ Debit Card/ UPI .

Important Dates of Indian Coast Guard Vacancy 2024

 # Starting date of online application submission: 19th Feb 2024
 # Last date of online application submission: 06th Mar 2024

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Greece just legalized same-sex marriage. Will other Orthodox countries join them any time soon?

ATHENS, Feb 16: Greece has become the first majority-Orthodox Christian nation to legalize same-sex marriage under civil law. At least for the near future, it will almost certainly be the only one.

Eastern Orthodox leadership, despite lacking a single doctrinal authority like a pope, has been united in opposing recognition of same-sex relationships both within its own rites and in the civil realm. Public opinion in majority Orthodox countries has mostly been opposed, too.

But there are some signs of change. Two small majority-Orthodox countries, Montenegro and Cyprus, have authorized same-sex unions in recent years, as did Greece in 2015 before upgrading to this week's approval of full marital status.

Civil unions may become more common among Orthodox countries gravitating toward the European Union. They remain off the table in Russia, which has cracked down on LGBTQ+ expression, and countries in its orbit.

Following is a summary of church positions and public opinion in the Orthodox world, followed by the situation in individual majority-Orthodox lands.

Eastern Orthodoxy is a socially conservative, ancient church with elaborate rituals and a strict hierarchy.

Churches are mostly organized along national lines, with multiple independent churches that share ancient doctrine and practices and that both cooperate and squabble.

Roughly 200 million Eastern Orthodox live primarily in Eastern Europe and

neighboring Asian lands, with about half that total in Russia, while smaller numbers live across the world. Like other international church bodies, Orthodoxy has confronted calls for LGBTQ+ inclusion.

A 2016 statement by a council of most Orthodox churches called marriage between a man and a woman "the oldest institution of divine law" and said members were forbidden from entering same-sex unions.

In countries where they are a majority, Orthodox believers overwhelmingly said society should not accept homosexuality or approve same-sex marriage, according to surveys conducted in 2015 and 2016 by the Pew Research Center, a Washington-based think tank.

Greek Orthodox showed relative tolerance, with half of Orthodox saying homosexuality should be accepted and a quarter favoring same-sex marriage. In more recent polls, Greeks overall narrowly supported the marriage law.

The Greek law validates marriage in the civil realm but doesn't require any church to perform such rites.

Nevertheless, Greece's Orthodox leadership unanimously opposed the law in January, saying the "duality of genders and their complementarity are not social inventions but originate from God."

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis acknowledged the church's position but said, "We are discussing the decisions of the Greek state, unrelated to theological beliefs."

Civil unions may be in some Orthodox countries' near future, said George Demacopoulos, director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University in New York.

"In terms of civil marriage, I think the countries that are in the European Union will eventually all do it," Demacopoulos said. "My guess is the assemblies of bishops in those countries will offer some resistance to the measure, and depending on where you are, that may or may not delay it." In Ukraine, same-sex couples cannot register their status legally.

In 2023, the issue became acute as many LGBTQ+ people joined Ukraine's armed forces. That year, a bill was introduced in Parliament to establish civil partnerships for same-sex couples, providing basic rights such as compensation if one of the partners is killed in action.

The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations — which includes Ukraine's two rival Orthodox churches — opposed the draft law, contending that some international entities are using the country's current vulnerability to force unwanted changes.

The legislation remains pending. *(AP)*

The raid came after troops had besieged Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis for nearly a week

4 patients die as oxygen runs out in Gaza hospital seized by Israeli forces, health officials say

RAFAH, Feb 16: The storming by Israeli troops of southern Gaza's main hospital brought chaos to hundreds of staff and patients inside, as health officials on Friday said four people in intensive care died after their oxygen cut off. Troops were searching the facility, where the military said it believes the remains of hostages abducted by Hamas might be located.

The raid came after troops had besieged Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis for nearly a week, with staff, patients and others inside struggling under heavy fire and dwindling supplies, including food and water. Hours before troops seized the hospital Thursday, Israeli fire killed a patient and wounded six others inside the complex, staff said.

Negotiations over a cease-fire in Gaza, meanwhile, appear to have stalled, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday pushed back hard against the U.S. vision for after the war - particularly its calls for the creation of a Palestinian state. After speaking overnight with President Joe Biden, Netanyahu wrote on X that Israel will not accept "international dictates regarding a permanent settlement with the Palestinians."

He said that if other countries unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state, it would give a "reward to terrorism." Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected creation of a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive and expand it to the Gaza city of Rafah, near Egypt, until Hamas is destroyed and scores of hostages taken during the militants' Oct. 7 attack are freed. In their phone call, Biden again cautioned Netanyahu against moving forward with a military operation in Rafah before coming up with a "credible and executable plan" to ensure the safety of Palestinian civilians, the White House said. With the war showing no sign of ending, the risk of a broader conflict grew as Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group had deadliest exchange of fire along the border since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. Israel launched airstrikes into southern Lebanon for a second day on Thursday after killing 10 civilians and three Hezbollah fighters on Wednesday in response to a rocket attack that killed an Israeli soldier and wounded several others.

Nasser Hospital was the latest in a series of hospitals Israeli forces have besieged and stormed during the war, claiming Hamas was using them for military purposes. The assaults have gutted Gaza's health sector as it struggles to treat a constant stream of people wounded in daily bombardments.

Israeli troops, tanks and snipers have surrounded Nasser Hospital for at least a week, with food, water and supplies inside dwindling and fire from outside killing several people inside, according to health officials.

Troops moved into the hospital Thursday after the military said it had "credible intelligence" that Hamas had held hostages there and that the hostages' remains might still be inside. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief military spokesperson, said forces were conducting a "precise and limited" operation there and would not forcibly evacuate medics or patients. Later on Thursday, Hagari said troops were still searching the hospital. He said dozens of militants were arrested from the hospital grounds, including three who participated in the Oct. 7 attack. He also said troops found grenades and mortar shells, and that Israeli radar determined that militants fired mortars from the hospital grounds a month ago. The claims could not be independently confirmed.

A released hostage told The Associated Press last month that she and over two dozen other captives had been held in Nasser Hospital. International law prohibits the targeting of medical facilities, though they can lose those protections if they are used for military purposes. Even then, Israel must take precautions and follow principles of proportionality, the U.N. Human Rights Office said, adding that "as the occupying power" Israel has the duty to maintain medical facilities.

As they searched, troops ordered the more than 460 staff, patients and their relatives to move into an older building in the compound that isn't equipped to treat patients, the Gaza Health Ministry said. They were "in harsh conditions with no food or baby formula" and severe water shortages, it said. *(AP)*

UK by-election results deliver double trouble for Rishi Sunak

LONDON, Feb 16: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak suffered two heavy blows to his leadership ahead of a general election later this year as the Opposition Labour Party overturned strong Conservative majorities to win by-elections in England on Friday.

Labour's Dan Egan won the House of Commons seat of Kingswood, south-west England, and the party's Gen Kitchen won Wellingborough, in the East Midlands region of England.

The results reflect double trouble for the British Indian leader as the Conservatives had won both seats by decisive margins at the last general election under Boris Johnson in December 2019.

Another emerging trend saw the far-right Reform UK – the re-organised anti-immigration Brexit Party – coming third, ahead of the Liberal Democrats and Green Party, piling further pressure on the Conservatives on contentious issues such as migration. The latest results from this week's polls are the ninth and 10th by-election defeats for the Tory-led government since the 2019 general election.

The by-poll in Kingswood was held after Tory leader Chris Skidmore resigned as an MP in protest over Sunak's green policies. Labour's Egan managed to overturn his majority of more than 11,000 in the seat.

In Wellingborough, the voter followed Tory MP Peter Bone being recalled by his constituency over claims of bullying and sexually inappropriate behaviour, which he denies. Labour's Kitchen overturned his majority of more than 18,000 to win the seat with a swing of 28.5 per cent – the second highest of all time.

"The Kingswood and Wellingborough results show that people want change and are ready to put their faith in a changed Labour Party to deliver it," said Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer. "The Tories have failed, Rishi's recession proves that. Labour is back in the service of working people," he said. The twin defeats will come as a major blow for the governing Tories as they prepare for a general election, which Sunak, 43, has indicated will be held in the second half of the year.

The party, which has already been trailing Labour in opinion polls, sought to downplay the significance of the by-election result as a vote of discontent against the Tories.

Conservative MP and former minister in Boris Johnson's Cabinet Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg told the BBC the Kingswood result was "not as bad as I'd expected" as Tory voters appeared to have stayed at home. He suggested more could turn out at a general election, which he said "focuses people's minds in a different way to a by-election". He insisted that support for Sunak's leadership was "solid" and "by-elections don't change that".

However, news of the economy falling into recession earlier this week and this double poll blow will rattle the Sunak-led Tories as the scale of anti-incumbency becomes clear. *(PTI)*

Zelenskyy will sign security agreements with Germany, France as Kyiv shores up support

BERLIN, Feb 16: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is expected to sign bilateral security agreements with Germany and France on Friday as Kyiv works to shore up Western support nearly two years after Russia launched its full-scale war.

The Ukrainian leader is meeting German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin and continuing to Paris to meet French President Emmanuel Macron.

The bilateral security and long-term support agreements follow a security agreement between Ukraine and the U.K. signed when British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak visited Kyiv last month. That accord covers the next 10 years.

Zelenskyy will continue Saturday to the Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of high-ranking security and foreign policy officials, where he plans meetings with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris among others.

Ukraine has moved onto the defensive in the war, hindered by low ammunition supplies and a shortage of personnel, although it has kept up strikes behind the largely static 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line.

European allies have appealed to the U.S. Congress in recent days to approve a package that includes aid for Ukraine, a $60 billion allotment that would go largely to U.S. defense entities to manufacture missiles, munitions and other military hardware that are being sent to the battlefields in Ukraine.

Scholz traveled to Washington a week ago to underscore the urgency of releasing U.S. funding. After meeting President Joe Biden, he said: "We shouldn't beat around the bush: support from the United States is indispensable for the question of whether Ukraine will be in a position to defend itself."

Germany is now the second-biggest supplier of military aid to Ukraine after the U.S., and Scholz has called recently for other European countries to step up with more weapons deliveries.

Zelenskyy has made one previous visit to Berlin since the Russian invasion in February 2022, in May last year. Friday's trip will be his third to Paris since the invasion, following visits in February and May 2023. *(AP)*

Biden to host Polish president and PM on Mar 12, 25 years after Poland joined NATO

WARSAW, Feb 16: U.S. President Joe Biden will host Poland's President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Donald Tusk for a meeting in Washington on March 12, the 25th anniversary of Poland's joining the NATO Alliance, the White House said on Thursday.

A statement from Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the leaders will "reaffirm their unwavering support for Ukraine's defense against Russia's brutal war of conquest." The struggle is taking place across Poland's eastern border, on NATO's eastern flank.

The declaration of support is especially significant now, when political infighting in U.S. Congress is stalling approval of a $60 billion aid package for Kyiv.

NATO Alliance, which makes us all safer," the statement said, adding that the three leaders will "coordinate" ahead of the NATO Summit in Washington in July.

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said Thursday that the meeting is "also a terrific opportunity to show our gratitude for everything that Poland has done, not just as a great NATO ally (...) but everything they've done to help support Ukraine."

Poland last year spent some 4% of its GDP on defense and has earmarked some 3.1% of its 2024 GDP for that purpose, among the highest rates of defense spending for NATO's 31 member countries.

Duda said that rate of spending shows that Poland is a "reliable ally and a model" for fellow NATO members. Many of them have been criticized by former U.S. President Donald Trump and others for spending less than the 2% of GDP they committed to a decade ago.

Duda said on X, formerly Twitter, that the joint trip on the anniversary of Poland's accession to NATO "shows that the Polish-U.S. alliance is strong and will remain strong regardless of who rules in both countries."

The U.S.-Polish strategic energy security partnership, economic ties and "shared commitment to democratic values" will also be a theme of discussions.

In Poland, the joint trip of the two top figures will have additional significance, because the two men come from opposite sides of the country's political divide.

Tusk and his liberal Cabinet took office in December and have been energetically reversing policies of their right-wing predecessors, who they have accused of violating the rule of law and democratic principles.

Duda hails from the right-wing party that ruled until December, and he has accused Tusk's government of violating Poland's constitution and using authoritarian methods. Duda and Tusk met with Biden in Warsaw on Feb. 21, 2023, when the U.S. leader visited after a trip to Kyiv. *(AP)*

Indian-origin software engineer identified as suspect in family murder-suicide in US

NEW YORK, Feb 16: Anand Henry, an Indian-origin former Meta software engineer is suspected of killing his wife and twin sons before turning a gun on himself in a gruesome murder-suicide in the US state of California, according to authorities.

Henry, 37, and his wife, Alice Benziger, 36, were found dead in the bathroom of their home in Alameda de las Pulgas on Monday morning, according to the San Mateo Police Department.

A 9mm handgun registered to Henry was lying on the bathroom floor by their bodies.

"Our investigation shows Benziger succumbed to multiple gunshot wounds, while Henry suffered from a single shot," police said in a statement on Thursday.

The 4-year-old twin boys, meanwhile, did not die from gunfire. They showed no signs of trauma, and authorities have not yet determined their cause of death. Police allege that Henry was responsible for all four deaths.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Henry used to work at Meta as a software engineer and before that for Google in a similar role. Meta did not immediately respond to a request for comment, the Los Angeles Times reported.

He was working in artificial intelligence at the time of his death, according to his profile. Benziger worked for Zillow as a data scientist, according to her profile on LinkedIn. *(PTI)*

PML-N & PPP set to discuss power-sharing deal for coalition government: Report

ISLAMABAD, Feb 16: A second round of talks between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party is expected to take place on Friday on the power-sharing formula between them for the formation of a coalition government, according to a media report.

The Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari-led PPP has promised to back PML-N in the formation of a government as well as the election of the next prime minister, on the condition that Nawaz Sharif's party will support them in elections to key constitutional offices like that of the President.

A scheduled second round of talks between the Contact and Coordination Committees (CCCs) of the PPP and PML-N could not take place on Thursday, as both sides sought more time to assess proposals that came up in their first meeting.

The next meeting between the two sides is likely to take place on Friday for clarity on the power-sharing formula, the Dawn newspaper reported.

However, given the tough competition between individuals, nominating people to fill those coveted spots is proving to be a tough nut to crack for PPP Chairman Bilawal, the report said.

Sources said that former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani was in contention for National Assembly Speaker. He had been instructed to retain his Senate seat, indicating that he may be fielded for the slot of Senate chairman.

Meanwhile, former opposition leader Khursheed Shah's name has also been floated for the post of Speaker, as word within party circles is that the custodians of both houses may hail from Sindh. *(PTI)*

FBI informant charged with lying about Joe and Hunter Biden's ties to Ukrainian energy company

WASHINGTON, Feb 16: An FBI informant has been charged with fabricating a multimillion-dollar bribery scheme involving President Joe Biden, his son Hunter and a Ukrainian energy company, a claim that is central to the Republican impeachment inquiry in Congress.

Alexander Smirnov falsely reported to the FBI in June 2020 that executives associated with the Ukrainian energy company Burisma paid Hunter and Joe Biden $5 million each in 2015 or 2016, prosecutors said in an indictment. Smirnov told his handler that an executive claimed to have hired Hunter Biden to "protect us, through his dad, from all kinds of problems," according to court documents.

Prosecutors say Smirnov in fact had only routine business dealings with the company in 2017 and made the bribery allegations after he "expressed bias" against Joe Biden while he was a presidential candidate. Smirnov, 43, appeared in court in Las Vegas briefly on Thursday after being charged with

making a false statement and creating a false and fictitious record. He did not enter a plea. The judge ordered the courtroom cleared after federal public defender Margaret Wightman Lambrose requested a closed hearing for arguments about sealing court documents. She declined to comment on the case.

The informant's claims have been central to the Republican effort in Congress to investigate the president and his family, and helped spark what is now a House impeachment inquiry into Biden. An attorney for Hunter Biden, who is expected to give a deposition later this month, said the charges show the probe is "based on dishonest, uncredible allegations and witnesses." The top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee, Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, called for an end to the Biden impeachment inquiry.

Raskin said the allegations from the Republicans against Biden "have always been a tissue of lies built on conspiracy theories." He called on Speaker Mike Johnson, Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer and House Republicans "to stop promoting this nonsense and end their doomed impeachment inquiry."

Comer, R-Ky., downplayed the importance of the informant, who had figured centrally to the start of the probe. "To be clear, the impeachment inquiry is not reliant on the FBI's FD-1023," Comer said in a statement, referring to the form documenting Smirnov's allegations.

The chairman said the inquiry "is based on a large record of evidence, including bank records and witness testimony," including interviews this week. *(AP)*

There are no recent signs that the Taliban has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the country

Terror groups enjoy greater freedom in Afghanistan than at any time in recent history: UN SG report

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 16: There are no recent signs that the Taliban, which seized power in Afghanistan in 2021, has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the war-torn country, according to a report by UN chief Antonio Guterres.

The report also voiced member nations' concern that terrorist groups enjoy "greater freedom" in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan than at any time in recent history, especially noting the spike in the strength of the dreaded ISIL-k terror group which has nearly doubled from earlier estimates of 2,200 fighters following the release of several thousand individuals from prison. "The security landscape in Afghanistan changed dramatically on August 15, following a Taliban military campaign that seized 33 of 34 provincial capitals, including Kabul," according to the '14th report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat'.The report said that there are no recent signs that the Taliban has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the country.

"On the contrary, Member States are concerned that terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom in Afghanistan than at any time in recent history," it said. Member States assess that the strength of the Da'esh affiliate in Afghanistan - Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) - has increased from earlier estimates of 2,200 fighters to now approaching 4,000 following the release by the Taliban of several thousand individuals from prison.

According to the Secretary General's report, one Member State assessed that up to half the individuals are foreign terrorist fighters. While Da'esh controls limited territory in eastern Afghanistan, it is capable of conducting high-profile, complex attacks such as the August 27, 2021 bombing at Kabul airport, which killed over 180 people, and several subsequent attacks, in particular against the Taliban and members of the Shia community. The report further said that Da'esh in Afghanistan continues to be led by Sanaullah Ghafari, an Afghan national. The group is taking advantage of the turmoil in the country, including by recruiting fighters from the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Turkistan Islamic Party, among other foreign terrorist groups.

Da'esh in Afghanistan "aims to position itself as the chief rejectionist force in Afghanistan and to expand into neighbouring Central and South Asian countries and is viewed by the Taliban as its primary armed threat. Member States are concerned that, if Afghanistan descends into further chaos, some Afghan and foreign violent extremists may shift allegiances to Da'esh," the report said.

The report was prepared by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in close collaboration with other United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities. *(PTI)*

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Petrol pumps in Manipur shut down for 3 days over financial crisis

Profit margins of retain fuel outlets decrease by 40-50 % due to decline in sales

IMPHAL, Feb 16: Fuel outlets operating in the valley districts of Manipur have decided to shut down for three days starting Friday due to alleged financial crisis and donation demands by various organizations.

Representatives of the retail outlets made this announcement after an emergency meeting on Thursday, stating that any additional pressure during this time will result in further closures.

On February 10, the representatives had informed Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh that they might be forced to close their retail outlets if the financial demands or donations exceed their capacity to pay.

In the letter to the CM, representatives of the retail outlets highlighted the challenges faced by them, including a decline in sales, significant decrease in profit margins (almost 40-50%), and an excessive number of demands for donations from various organisations.

"We are facing a decline in sales due to the present crisis and our profit margins have decreased considerably by almost 40 to 50 per cent," the letter stated.

"Our employees have been getting threats and some of them have been kidnapped for ransom," the letter added.

"Some of our retail outlets (petrol pumps) have been asked to close down if we are unable to meet their demands," it informed.

The representatives explained that managing expenses such as employee salaries, company fees, insurance, and income tax have become difficult with their current income.

"In light of these challenges, we have requested the chief minister's assistance in overcoming the financial crisis," they added. *(PTI)*

2 killed, 4 injured in Sikkim accident

GANGTOK, Feb 16: Two persons died and four were injured after the car in which they were travelling fell into a gorge in Sikkim's Pakyong district, police said on Friday.

According to police, the driver made a wrong turn on the highway because of poor visibility and fell into a ravine at Ganek near Zuluk, 93km from Gangtok, around 5.30pm on Thursday.

The rescue operations were carried out by Sikkim police, SSB jawans stationed in the area and locals, police added.

The deceased have been identified as Hishey Lhamu Sherpa (27) and Kushwant Subba (24). The injured are Sakuntala Sherpa (58), Thupden Lhamu Sherpa (33), Ajit Banya (36), and Abay Chettri (25), who were rescued and admitted to the Sri Thutob Namgyal Memorial Hospital. *(PTI)*

Tripura BJP delegation to take part in national council meeting

AGARTALA, Feb 16: A 144-member delegation of the BJP's Tripura unit left for New Delhi to take part in a two-day meeting of the saffron party's national council.

The delegation includes Chief Minister Manik Saha and BJP state president Rajib Bhattacharjee. The national council meeting will begin on Saturday in New Delhi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to lay down the BJP's agenda for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls at the meeting.

"We are looking forward to hearing the Prime Minister and other senior party leaders," Bhattacharjee told reporters at the airport in Agartala. BJP national president J P Nadda will inaugurate the meeting, and Modi will on Sunday deliver the valedictory address, a speech which is likely to draw the broader contours of the party's campaign, and exhort its members to go all out to achieve his target for the BJP to win 370 seats in the elections.

The meeting is going to be the biggest gathering of BJP delegates from across the country in recent memory, with some leaders recalling the gigantic plenary organised in Mumbai by the party in 1995 in which tens of thousands of its members had participated.

The Prime Minister is also scheduled to virtually address the people of the northeastern state on February 24 as part of the 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Tripura' (Developed India Developed Tripura) programme. *(PTI)*

Lui-Ngai-Ni celebrated in Manipur

IMPHAL/TAMENGLONG, Feb 16: Nagas in Manipur celebrated Lui-Ngai-Ni, the seed sowing festival, in various parts of Manipur at varied levels. Cultural bonanza, concerts and feasting marked the gala occasion. The state level celebration was held at Tamenglong district headquarters under the aegis of the United Naga Council (UNC). Nagas from all walks of life engaged in the day-long jamboree of cultural extravaganza during the day on Thursday. They came to the celebration venue in bonhomie to rejoice in promoting their roots and in the spirit of brotherhood.

In every Lui-Ngai-Ni, the celebration is laced with festoons and fanfare with the showcasing of tradition and culture. The festival is also a connection between the gaping hole of their roots and modernity.

On this day, Nagas in Manipur make every effort to reunite with their roots despite the mad drive along the tide of the fast moving world.

This year's theme for Lui-Ngai-Ni was 'Quintessential cultural resurgence'.

Meanwhile, in his presidential address, UNC president Ng. Lorho said Lui-Ngai-Ni marks the onset of the seed sowing season. It is an occasion to invoke the Almighty's blessings for the crops and a bountiful harvest and for the prosperity of the people, the UNC president also said.

Lui-Ngai-Ni has been celebrated for the last 36 years and in each celebration, the rich cultural heritage and identity are showcased through various cultural programmes and performances in the forms of dances, songs, indigenous games and colorful traditional attires to preserve and pass on the Nagas' cultural values.

Lorho said, "In today's increasingly interconnected world, the need to preserve and ensure the continuity of our rich culture is felt more than ever. With westernization penetrating deep into the remotest village and among people of all ages and groups, our cultural system, fundamental principles, and social norms have been diluted and are dominated by foreign cultures. If this is not kept in check, there is a danger of cultural assimilation."

"The ongoing ethnic conflict between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities has caused immense loss to human lives and properties and our day-to-day livelihood has also been adversely affected. The unending conflict is detrimental to the whole. With no law-and-order in sight, Manipur is in a sorry state of affairs. The failure on the part of the Centre and state government to restore normalcy even after nine months of conflict is very unfortunate," he lamented.

The UNC president said that despite disturbances, violence, provocations and sporadic incidents inflicted on the Nagas, the United Naga Council, in order to avoid escalating the issue into communal tension between any communities, has thus addressed and resolved all sensitive issues through its customary law, as a neutral entity. At this time, the Nagas should be extra cautious and should not succumb to the evil game plan designed by the anti-elements who are very active in trying to drag the Nagas into the conflict.

"However, if our peaceful nature should be taken for weakness, and if such violence, provocations and attacks continue, it may attract retaliation from the Nagas out of intolerance. Therefore, we appeal to all concerned to shun violence and give peace a chance," he appealed.

On the occasion, the UNC chief urged the Nagas to reaffirm their stand and commitment to the cause of the Naga nation and face any challenges and also urged upon the Centre to materialize the Framework Agreement with the NSCN-IM in letter and spirit as early as possible.

"To see the dawn of peace in the region and the country at large, an early solution to the Naga political issue is a must," he added.

Speaking as chief guest of the festival, Awangbou Newmai, state minister for water resources, relief and disaster management made a clarion call for peace in the state. Awangbow said, "Peace only starts from each one of us and we should start the initiative for peace in our own respective levels. Playing the blame game and pointing fingers at each other are not going to bring any solution and long-lasting peace".

Lok Sabha MP, Lorho Pfoze was the principal guest while MLA Ram Muivah and MLA L Dikho were the honoured guests of the occasion. MLA from Tamenglong, Janghemlung Panmei was the chief host. Special guests of the occasion were MLA N Kaysii, MLA Leishiyo Keishing, MLA SS Olish and MLA Kumo Sha.

The two-day gala event was hosted by the Joint Tribes' Council (JTC) of Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Inpui tribes. Leaders of UNC, Naga Women Union (NWU), All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM) and their subordinate bodies and units attended the occasion. *(NNN)*

No.EE/MSL-II/NIT/2017-18/Tech/158 *Dtd.15/02/2024*

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable Court fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five only. With a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the registered Contractors of Class-III and above category under PWD (Roads Department Assam and Bodoland Territorial Council) according to their eligibilty for submitting tenders for the work as stated below. The tenders will be recieved by the undersigned up to 2.00PM on 26/02/2024 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.15 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Approximate Tender Value	(Earnest Money Deposit)	Cost of Tender Paper	Time of Completion of work
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Bathouguri village near Bathou Mandir under Rupaphuli VCDC of Jalah Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
2	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Udhiaguri village near Didwm Gayary house under Salbari VCDC of Jalah Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
3	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Barphena Pathak, Kalbari near Madan Boros Paddy field under Barphena VCDC of Jalah Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
4	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Danguapara village near Raben Machahary house under Ramchatari VCDC of Jalah Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
5	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Bhalaguri village near Phulok Boro house under Salbari VCDC of Jalah Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
6	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Chamuagati village under Barphena VCDC of Jalah Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
7	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Barghopa village near Mazibar Rahman house under Dhekiajani village of Gabardhana Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
8	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Aikhari Bilor Pathar near PWD road under Bonmaja VCDC of Gabardhana Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
9	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Kaimari village near Fulshan Ali house under Dhekiajani VCDC of Gabardhana Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.
10	Construction of Box Type Culvert at Mayangpara village near Lalit Basumatary house under Bahbari VCDC of Gabardhana Dev Block, Baksa under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24	Rs.5,00,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs.200.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up to 4.30 PM on all working days on 19/02/2024 & 20/02/2024 in the office of the undersigned on submission an application with payment in the form of Bank Draft duly pledged to the undersigned. The Contractors has to submit 2% in case of General and 1% in case of Reserved category as earnest money in the form of FDR/ CDR/BC under any Nationalised Bank duly pledged in favour of the undersigned at the time of submission of Tender paper. The Contractor should submitted attested copy of Registration Certificate for the year 2023-24, PAN Card, latest clearence certificate of Income Tax and Sales Tax, GST along with the tenders. In case the office remain closed on day of the tender receiving/opening the same will be received/opened on the next working day.

N. B. : -

1 Date of receiving application for Tender documents : - 19/02/2024 & 20/02/2024.
2 Date of issue of Tender Paper : - 22/02/2024 (up to 4.30 PM)
3 Date of receiving of Tender Paper 26/02/2024 (up to 2.00 PM)
4 Date of opening of Tender Paper 26/02/2024 (at 2.15 PM)
5 Place of opening Tender Paper : - Office of the E.E, PWD Mushalpur (R&B) Division, Mushalpur.

Sd/-(Pulak Das)
Executive Engineer,
Mushalpur PWD (R&B) Division,
Mushalpur

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1398

Assam Rifles recovers heroin, contraband worth ₹ 130 crore in Mizoram

AIZWAL, Feb 16: Assam Rifles has recovered heroin and other contraband worth ₹ 130 crore in Mizoram over the last 45 days, an official said on Friday. During operations conducted in different parts of the state since January, personnel of the paramilitary force seized 4 kg of heroin, 3.3 lakh tablets of methamphetamine and other contraband, including exotic animals, he said. Three persons, including an Assam resident, have been arrested for possessing the drugs, the official said. The accused were booked under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and produced before the magistrate on Friday, he added. *(PTI)*

7 personnel suspended for negligence of duty in Manipur

IMPHAL, Feb 16: Seven personnel of the India Reserve Battalion have been suspended for dereliction of duties in connection with the looting of arms and ammunition from the special force's Chingarel camp in Manipur's Imphal East district. They have been asked not to leave their headquarters without obtaining prior permission, according to an order issued by the commandant of the 5th India Reserve Battalion on Thursday. The order said the seven personnel were suspended for "grave negligence and dereliction of duties" after arms and ammunition had been looted from the camp three days before. Six people have been arrested and remanded to police custody in connection with the arms looting case, the Manipur police said on Thursday. Four Insas rifles, one AK Ghatak, two magazines of SLR and 16 small boxes of 9 mm ammunition looted from the IRB camp have also been recovered. A mob broke into the camp of the 5th IRB at Chingarel and fled with arms and ammunition on February 13. *(PTI)*

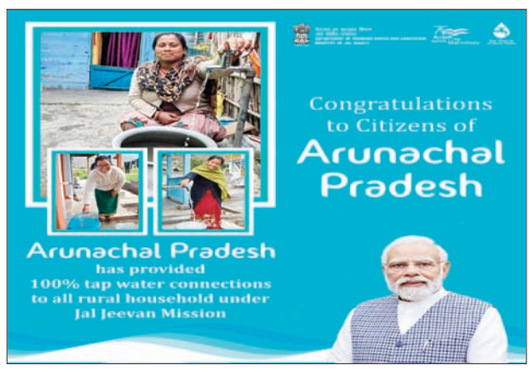
Arunachal achieves 100 % saturation in 'Har Ghar Jal' scheme

Arunachal becomes 1st in Northeast, 10th in country to achieve 'Har Ghar Jal'

ITANAGAR, Feb 16: Arunachal Pradesh has achieved 100 per cent saturation in 'Har Ghar Jal' scheme under the Centre's Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), chief minister Pema Khandu has said.

The state has become the first in the Northeast and tenth in the country to achieve a cent per cent saturation under the central government sponsored scheme, an official of the state public health engineering department said.

"A landmark accomplished in our collective efforts as Arunachal Pradesh logs 100 pc saturation of Har Ghar Jal under Jal Jeevan Mission! It exemplifies total dedication and commitment of Team Arunachal in meeting the goals they set for themselves," Khandu posted on X on Thursday.



Khandu informed that the Centre's share for the scheme in the state was ₹ 3,965.41 crore, while the state contributed ₹ 455.51 crore to complete the project, ensuring every household gets clean and safe piped water.

The chief minister expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for guiding and supporting the state's endeavour to build a self-reliant Arunachal Pradesh.

"Gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji for guiding and supporting our every endeavour in building a self-reliant Arunachal Pradesh. The Centre's ₹ 396541.22 lakh and State's ₹ 45551.18 lakh boost ensured that every household in our state has clean and safe piped water," he said in another social media post.

"First in the Northeast to fully implement JJM, we are determined to make an all-round improvement in our people's ease of living. Odds and challenges are being surmounted in serving them. Proud of Team Arunachal!" the chief minister added.

Launched in 2019 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the 'Jal Jeevan Mission' is a centrally sponsored scheme aimed to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections to all households in rural India by 2024. *(PTI)*

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICER
KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT::::DIPHU

No.DSWO(KA)Esstt.SIU/135/2014-2022/788 Dated,Diphu the 16th February, 2024

VIVA-VOCE INTERVIEW FOR THE POST GRADE-III

This is to inform all the candidates that the result of written examination for different categories of Grade-III posts under District Social Welfare Office, Diphu, Karbi Anglong conducted on 03/12/2023 is hereby declared for the successful candidates as follows.

Sl. No.	Name of Post	Roll No.	Date of Interview	Venue of Interview	Time
1.	LDA	01,4,13,14,15, 16, 19,20,21, 23,24,27	22/02/2024	0/o the District Social Welfare Officer, Diphu, Karbi Anglong.	10.30 AM.
2.	Instructress	3,4,6,7			
3.	Skilled Helper	3,4,8,12,16,18			

All the successful candidates of above mentioned Roll No. are directed to appear for Viva-Voce interview as per the above schedule.

No separate calling letter will be sent to candidates. Candidates are directed to bring all original testimonials/certificate etc. while appearing for interview.

N.B: Computer test will taken for LDA after the Viva-Voce interview.

Sd/-
District Social Welfare Officer
Karbi Anglonq District.Diphu

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IT dept freezes Cong's accounts, appellate tribunal de-freezes them later

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: The Congress' main bank accounts were frozen on Friday over an income tax demand of ₹ 210 crore but an I-T appellate tribunal later allowed it to operate them pending a further hearing next week, a huge relief for the party which said the move had impacted all political activity.

Congress treasurer Ajay Maken, who had earlier addressed a press conference to announce that Income Tax authorities had frozen its accounts, said the tribunal has put a lien of ₹ 115 crore on its accounts and the party has been allowed to spend over and above that.

Party leader Vivek Tankha, who appeared before the tribunal against the order, said he told the tribunal that the Congress would not be able to participate in the "festival of elections" if its accounts remain frozen. The tribunal will hear the matter next Wednesday before a final decision is taken on the matter.

Several party leaders, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi, expressed their outrage and alleged that the government's move was an attack on democracy.

Maken, who said democracy was in danger in the country, detailed the tribunal's order.

"On our petition, Income Tax Department and the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) has said that we have to ensure that ₹ 115 crore have to be kept in the Banks. This 115 crore is the lien marked in the Bank Accounts," he said.

"We can spend an amount over and above that," he said in a post on X using the hashtag "#DemocracyFrozen".

"This means that ₹ 115 crores have been frozen. This ₹ 115 crores is much more than we have in our Current Accounts," he explained. The Congress treasurer had earlier said the freezing of its accounts on "flimsy grounds" had affected all political activity of the party barely two weeks before general elections are announced.

The accounts, including that of the Indian Youth Congress, were frozen on an Income Tax demand of ₹ 210 crore for 2018-19, an election year, Maken said.

According to him, the party filed its Income Tax returns for the concerned year a few days late and that is why this action. The matter, he said, also pertains to a discrepancy in cash receipts of ₹ 14.4 lakh given to the party by its MLAs and MPs as donations made from their salaries.

He said the IT authorities' orders freezing the accounts had come on Wednesday.

While Maken said four main bank accounts were frozen, sources later put the number at nine.

The party was unable to use even the funds received under its crowdfunding scheme, Maken said at the press conference.

Kharge, Gandhi and general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal spoke out in posts on X.

"Don't be afraid Modi ji, Congress is not the name of power of money, but of the power of people... We have never bowed before dictatorship, nor will we ever bow down," Gandhi said.

"Every Congress worker will fight tooth and nail to protect India's democracy," he added, using the hashtag "#DemocracyUnderAttack".

Terming the government "power drunk" for freezing the accounts of India's largest opposition party just before the Lok Sabha elections, Kharge said in his post that it was a "deep assault" on democracy.

The unconstitutional money collected by the BJP would be utilised by them for elections, but the money collected by the Congress through crowdfunding shall be sealed, the party president said.

"That is why, I have said that there won't be any elections in the future. We appeal to the Judiciary to save the multi-party system in this country and protect India's Democracy," the Congress president said.

"Not just the Congress party's accounts, but India's democracy has been frozen," Venugopal said.

Pointing out that the government's dictatorial attitude came barely a month before the 2024 elections, Venugopal made a reference to the Supreme Court scrapping the electoral bond scheme for political funding on Thursday.

"When one avenue to tilt the balance was struck down by the courts yesterday, the Government has chosen a new route now.

"The BJP has hoarded over ₹ 6500 crore through the illegal electoral bond scandal, which remain untouched - but the earnest donations of ordinary INC workers and supporters are frozen," he said on X.

He added that the party will fight "this new assault on democracy tooth and nail".

On Thursday, the Supreme Court said the Centre's electoral bonds scheme was "unconstitutional" and ordered the disclosure of the bond's donors, amount and recipients by March 13. *(PTI)*

'Sandeshkhali: Cong & BJP teams, including union ministers, stopped from'

KOLKATA, Feb 16: The turmoil in Sandeshkhali, where protests have been continuing over alleged TMC-led atrocities against villagers, kept West Bengal's political cauldron on the boil on Friday with police blocking visits by Congress and BJP teams, including Union ministers, to the restive region citing prohibitory orders.

The BJP and Congress, allies with the TMC in the anti-BJP opposition bloc INDIA at the national level, criticised West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for what they termed as fostering a "lawless situation" and attempting to "communalise the issue".

Earlier in the day, a delegation from the BJP, led by Union Ministers Pratima Bhoumik and Annapurna Devi, was intercepted by the police at Rampur village on their route to the Sandeshkhali block.

This prompted a sharp reaction from the delegation, who accused the TMC of instigating lawlessness. Subsequently, they met West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose to address the situation.

Later, a similar fate befell a Congress team led by state president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury. After a confrontation with police, Chowdhury accused Banerjee of politicising and communalising

the issue.

"The BJP central team was stopped by police from visiting unrest-hit Sandeshkhali. Police are citing prohibitory orders. We said only four of us would go, but we were not permitted," said Union Minister Annapurna Devi, the convenor of the team.

After being stopped at Rampur village, the six-member delegation of the saffron party began a sit-in.

Bhoumik, the Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, alleged that police were "trying to protect the culprits" and criticised their handling of the situation.

"We are Union ministers and MPs, and there are certain protocols. The state police and the administration are not bothered about those protocols. Had police shown similar promptness in arresting Shahjahan Sheikh, the situation would have been different," Annapurna Devi said, echoing Bhoumik.

The BJP's fact-finding team was prevented from visiting Sandeshkhali under Section 144, leading them to propose sending only two women representatives to the area. However, this request was also denied.

"Are we criminals that we have been stopped from entering the area?" BJP state general secretary Agnimitra Paul said.

BJP president J P Nadda had constituted a six-member committee of party MPs to investigate the situation in Sandeshkhali, where women have been protesting alleged atrocities by local TMC leaders.

The central team, which included Bhoumik, Annapurna Devi, Sunita Duggal, Kavita Patidar, Sangeeta Yadav, and Brij Lal, later met Governor CV Ananda Bose in Kolkata to address the ongoing issues in Sandeshkhali.

Bengal Congress chief Chowdhury questioned the rationale behind denying access to opposition parties, stating, "Why are opposition parties being prevented from entering Sandeshkhali? What is the state government trying to hide? Why are they trying to politicise it?"

His criticism came amidst Banerjee's allegations implicating the saffron camp in inciting unrest in the area.

Responding to Banerjee's claim that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has a presence in Sandeshkhali, Chowdhury questioned the relevance of the RSS in the ongoing disturbances.

"What connection does the RSS have with the disturbances in Sandeshkhali? Are Uttam Sardar or Shibu Hazra, Hindus or Muslims?" he queried.

Speaking on the BJP's delegation being stopped, the ruling TMC accused the saffron party of trying to "vitiate the atmosphere of the state".

"Police did the right thing by stopping the BJP delegation. It intends to vitiate the atmosphere of the state. When the administration is doing everything to restore peace, the BJP is trying to disturb that for political gains," TMC leader Santanu Sen said.

He also hit out at Chowdhury and dubbed the "Bengal Congress as the B-team of the BJP."

A large number of women in Sandeshkhali accused Trinamool Congress strongman Shajahan Sheikh and his supporters of "land-grab and sexually assaulting" them under coercion.

Shajahan has been absconding after a mob, allegedly affiliated with him, attacked Enforcement Directorate officials who had gone to search his premises in connection with a ration scam on January 5. *(PTI)*

Everyone leaving Cong as it's trapped in vicious circle of nepotism: PM Modi

JAIPUR, Feb 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hit out at the Congress, saying that everyone is leaving the party as it is trapped in the vicious circle of nepotism and dynastic politics.

He said the Congress' sole agenda is to oppose Modi.

The prime minister was virtually addressing an event, 'Viksit Bharat, Viksit Rajasthan', in Jaipur. He also laid the foundation stones of projects worth about Rs 17,000 crore and inaugurated various development works.

"The Congress has only one agenda, anti-Modi. It spreads such things against Modi which divide society. This is what happens to a party when it gets trapped in the vicious circle of nepotism and dynastic politics. Today everyone is leaving the Congress and only one family is seen there," Modi said.

A big problem with the Congress is that it lacks the farsightedness to frame positive policies. Neither can the Congress foresee the future nor does it have any road map for it, he said.

To make India a developed country, the prime minister said, the government is strengthening four sections -- the youth, women, farmers and the poor.

"For us, these are the four biggest castes," he said.

On the 'Viksit Bharat' campaign, Modi said it is not just words or a sentiment.

"This is a campaign to enrich the life of every family, this is a campaign to eradicate poverty, this is a campaign to create good employment for the youth and this is a campaign to create modern facilities in the country," he said. *(PTI)*

'Delhi Chalo' march: Farmers to stay put at Punjab-Haryana borders as deadlock persists

CHANDIGARH, Feb 16: Protesting farmers will stay put at the two borders of Punjab and Haryana over their various demands as the deadlock persisted despite the third round of talks with a panel of Union ministers.

A five-hour meeting, which started around 8:45 pm on Thursday, between three Union ministers and the farmer leaders remained inconclusive. The two sides will now meet on February 18 for the fourth round of talks. The two previous rounds of dialogue on February 8 and 12 also remained inconclusive.

Union Agriculture and Farmer Welfare Minister Arjun Munda, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai represented the Centre at Thursday's meeting over the farmer unions' various demands, including a law guaranteeing a minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann and finance minister Harpal Singh Cheema also joined the meeting at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26 here.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have given a 'Delhi Chalo' call to press the BJP-led central government to accept their demands.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Union Minister Munda said the meeting between the government and the farmer leaders took place in a cordial atmosphere.

There was a positive discussion, he said. The talks will continue and will now take place on Sunday at 6 pm, he said.

"We will find a solution by sitting together," he added.

Mann said a detailed discussion took place between farmer leaders and the ministers.

"There was a detailed discussion on each issue," he said.

Mann said he raised with the Centre the issue of suspension of internet services in certain areas in Sangrur, Patiala and Fatehgarh Sahib, and that of Haryana security personnel using a drone to drop tear gas shells on protesters inside Punjab's territory.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said a detailed discussion was held on their demands, including a legal guarantee for MSP and a debt waiver.

"They (Union ministers) said they need time," said Pandher.

"We want that there should be a positive result and any confrontation should be avoided. Otherwise, our programme to go to Delhi stands," he said.

Responding to a question on whether farmers will stay put at the Punjab-Haryana borders, Pandher said, "Yes". During the meeting with the Union ministers, the farmer leaders took exception to the suspension of the social media accounts of various leaders.

Pandher said they also raised the issue of tear gas shelling by the paramilitary forces on farmers at the Shambhu and Khanuri borders.

He said they showed the shells to the ministers during the meeting. *(PTI)*

BJP, Shiv Sena (UBT) workers clash

MUMBAI, Feb 16: An unidentified person hurled stones at former MP Nilesh Rane's car when he was on his way to a public event in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district on Friday, triggering a clash between workers of his party and Shiv Sena (UBT), police said.

The incident occurred near Patpanhale College in Guhagar taluka in the afternoon, an official said.

Supporters of Rane and Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Bhaskar Jadhav clashed with each other, prompting the police to fire tear gas to disperse the mob, the official from Guhagar police said.

Someone allegedly pelted stones at former MP Rane's car when he was on his way to attend a public meeting, he said. BJP workers assembled at the scene, and workers from both parties started pelting stones at each other, the official said. While a few cars were damaged in the clash, the police are gathering information about injuries to people, he said. *(PTI)*

Budget: K'taka CM strongly defends guarantee schemes, attacks Centre for 'anti-people' decisions

BENGALURU, Feb 16: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday strongly defended his government's guarantee schemes, asserting that they are not "election gimmicks", while strongly criticising the Centre for its "anti-people" decisions.

Presenting the state budget for 2024-25 in the Legislative Assembly, he said the tax slabs for Indian Made Liquor (IML) and beer are proposed to be revised, in order to rationalise them and make them competitive with neighbouring states.

This was Siddaramaiah's record 15th budget as Finance Minister of Karnataka, and the second under the present Congress regime.

He said his government is marching ahead towards setting a new example of Karnataka Model of Development founded on the principles of justice, equality and fraternity enshrined in our Constitution.

Claiming that the UPA Government during its tenure at the Centre, had taken up people-centric schemes and legislations to provide food security, healthcare, education, employment, Siddaramaiah said, "however, the anti-people decisions of the Central Government for the last 10 years have led to alarming developments such as widening inequality, concentration of wealth in (a) few hands and crony capitalism."

"Therefore our State Government has undertaken the work left undone by the Central Government which has abdicated its responsibility. Our guarantee schemes are not just election gimmicks. They are the result of the feedback obtained during 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'," he said.

These schemes are earnest efforts to create jobs and enhance purchasing power of the people, he further said, adding that these programmes are aimed at creating a just and fair society by redistribution of wealth.

Siddarmaiah said through the five guarantee schemes, the government is putting ₹ 52,000 crore in the hands of crores of people during 2024-25. An average of ₹ 50,000 to ₹ 55,000 is transferred to each family every year through guarantee schemes, he said,

"The implementation of guarantee schemes has brought us admiration from the entire world. The positive economic and social impact of the guarantee schemes will become more clear with time. Many countries and international agencies are studying and appreciating our work."

The chief minister also hit out at opponents accusing them of making all efforts to lower the morale of his administration by negative propaganda that the government has gone bankrupt and economy has collapsed in the State due to guarantees, which they describe as freebies or "Bitti Bhagyas."

"Those who failed to respond to the distress call of the people are now criticising us to cover their faults. It is such an irony that the same people who criticised our Guarantee schemes have now stolen them and are trying to pass them off as their own. I need not argue with these critics," he said.

The government has given impetus to creating an ecosystem that promotes inclusive development and accelerated economic development in the coming future, Siddaramaiah said. "We will mobilise adequate resources for economic infrastructure such as expressways, excellent rural roads, world class airports and Urban Public Transport facilities."

"We will make even greater investment in the energy sector to take Karnataka numero uno in the country once again in energy production. Bengaluru will be transformed into a truly global city with world-class infrastructure," he said.

Noting that Karnataka is the second-highest source of GST collections in the country with 18 per cent increase in current financial year compared to the corresponding period in 2022-23, the CM also said a loss of ₹ 59,274 crore was incurred by the state due to unscientific implementation of GST in last seven years, by the Centre.

Alleging that the previous BJP government in the state failed to rectify the injustice meted out to the State due to the interim report of 15th Finance Commission, he said due to the lackadaisical attitude of the previous government, the state had to suffer severe losses in the final report of the 15th Finance Commission. *(PTI)*

Delhi factory fire: Death toll climbs to 11, four others injured

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: The death toll in an explosion and subsequent fire in a paint factory in outer Delhi's Alipur area has climbed to 11 with four more bodies recovered from the premises, police said on Friday.

Four people were injured in the fire that broke out on Thursday evening and are hospitalised, they said. The charred bodies of the 11 victims, 10 men and one woman, were recovered from the factory, which also houses chemical godowns, located in Alipur's Dayalpur market, a Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official said.

The fire was preceded by a blast and soon it spread to nearby buildings, including a drug rehabilitation centre and eight shops.

Police said the factory was being operated by Akhil Jain of Sonipat, Haryana. A case under section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 308 (Attempt to commit culpable homicide) of the IPC has been registered against the owner of the factory.

The DFS official said a call about the fire was received around 5:30 pm on Thursday and 22 fire tenders were pressed into service.

The blaze was brought under control by 9 pm, he said, adding that 11 charred bodies were recovered from the factory premises.

The bodies have been preserved at the Babu Jagjivan Ram Hospital and the process of identifying them is being carried out, police said

In a post on X, DFS chief Atul Garg said, "Despite best efforts by DFS, 11 labours died in paint factory fire in alipur area Delhi. Fire call was received @ 5.30 pm and 22 tenders were to the site but due to explosion building collapsed & workers trapped inside the factory and couldn't not be saved. Very very unfortunate day."

A police officer said it is suspected that the blast was caused by chemicals stored in the godowns. The four injured have been identified as Jyoti (42), Divya (20), Mohit Solanki (34), and police constable Karambir (35).

Deputy Commissioner of Police (outer-north) Ravi Kumar Singh said a police team at the spot saw that the fire had spread to a number of other buildings, including the neighbouring 'Nasha Mukti Kendra', where four-five people were trapped.

"Our constable Karambir posted at Alipur Police Station rushed to the terrace of the 'Nasha Mukti Kendra' putting his own life in danger and managed to rescue the trapped people. He sustained injuries, including burns and is now admitted to the Safdarjung Hospital," Singh said. The injured were first taken to Raja Harish Chandra Hospital from where three of them have been shifted to the LNJP Hospital. *(PTI)*

Tejashwi joins Rahul's 'Nyay Yatra' in Bihar

SASARAM (BIHAR), Feb 16: RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav joined Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', which resumed from Bihar's Sasaram district on Friday.

Gandhi, the Congress MP, began his yatra from the party's district office here this morning and is expected to enter Uttar Pradesh through Mohania in Kaimur district in the evening.

Yadav and Gandhi were seen sitting on the roof of a sports utility vehicle, which was slowly moving, and they waved at enthusiastic crowds that gathered along the main road of the town.

Locals queued up on both sides of the road and watched the procession.

Both leaders of the opposition 'Mahagathbandhan' will address a public meeting in Kaimur around 3 pm on Friday.

While addressing a rally in Bihar's Aurangabad district on Thursday, Gandhi came out in support of the protesting farmers, likening the cultivators to soldiers who fight on the country's borders to protect it.

The Congress leader was referring to the 'Delhi Chalo' protest march by farmers to put pressure on the Centre for their demands, including a law on minimum support price for crops and loan waivers.

The 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', which started in Manipur on January 14, is scheduled to cover 6,713 km in 67 days, passing through 110 districts in 15 states, before culminating in Mumbai on March 20. *(PTI)*

ISRO successfully brings down Cartosat-2 to Earth's atmosphere 17 years after its launch

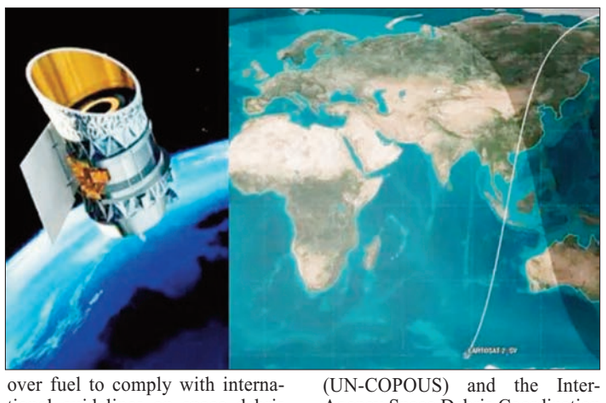
BENGALURU, Feb 16: Cartosat-2, ISRO's first satellite in the second generation of high-resolution imaging satellites launched 17 years ago, has been brought down from space to the earth's atmosphere, an official of the space agency said on Friday.

"The satellite entered the earth's atmosphere at 3.48 pm IST on February 14 over the Indian ocean. Either it would have burnt out or its leftovers might have fallen in the sea, which we may not be able to find," the official said.

According to ISRO, the satellite was launched on January 10, 2007. It weighed 680 kg at launch and operated in a sun-synchronous polar orbit at an altitude of 635 km.

Until 2019, it provided high-resolution imagery for urban planning, ISRO said in a statement.

"Initially, Cartosat-2 was expected to take about 30 years to naturally de-orbit. However, ISRO opted to lower its perigee using left-



over fuel to comply with international guidelines on space debris mitigation," it said.

"This exercise involved reducing collision risks and ensuring safe end-of-life disposal, following recommendations from organisations like the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UN-COPOUS) and the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC)," ISRO said.

ISRO said its System for Safe and Sustainable Space Operations (IS4OM) team at ISRO Telemetry Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC) predicted Cartosat-2's atmospheric re-entry for February 14.

"Electrical passivation was completed on February 14th, and tracking continued until re-entry. The final telemetry frames confirmed successful passivation, with the satellite reaching about 130 km altitude," ISRO said.

This exercise provided an opportunity to assess indigenous tracking capabilities, with the multi-object tracking radar at the spaceport of Sriharikota utilised for tracking.

"The final prediction placed Cartosat-2's re-entry over the Indian Ocean at 10:18 UTC / 3:48 pm IST on February 14, 2024. Analysis indicated that all major spacecraft components would demise (sic) during atmospheric re-entry," ISRO said.

According to the space agency, Cartosat-2's successful de-orbiting at its end-of-life represents a significant step for ISRO in ensuring the long-term sustainability of outer space activities. *(PTI)*

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Law Commission recommends comprehensive law to deal with NRIs, OCIs marrying Indian citizens

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Describing as a "worrisome trend" the "rising" cases of fraudulent marriages between NRIs and Indian citizens, the Law Commission has recommended a comprehensive law to deal with the situation and compulsory registration of such alliances.

While presenting the report "Law on Matrimonial Issues Relating to Non-Resident Indians and Overseas Citizens of India" to the law ministry, panel chairman Justice (Retd) Ritu Raj Awasthi said the Commission is of the opinion that the proposed central legislation should be comprehensive enough to cater to all facets involving marriages of NRIs as well as foreign citizens of Indian origin with that of Indian citizens.

"The rising occurrence of fraudulent marriages involving Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) marrying Indian partners is a worrisome trend. Several reports highlight an increasing pattern where these marriages turn out to be deceptive, putting Indian spouses, especially women, in precarious situations," Justice Awasthi said in his covering letter to Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Thursday.

Such a legislation, the panel said, should be made applicable not only to the NRIs but also to those individuals who come within the definition of 'Overseas Citizens of India' (OCIs) as laid down in the Citizenship Act, 1955.

"It is further recommended that all marriages between the NRIs/OCIs and Indian citizens should be made compulsorily registered in India," Justice Awasthi said.

He said the comprehensive central legislation should also include provisions on divorce, maintenance of spouse, custody and maintenance of children, serving of summons, warrants, or judicial documents on the NRIs and OCIs.

"Further, it is recommended that requisite amendments need to be introduced in the Passports Act, 1967 in order to mandate the declaration of marital status, the linking of a spouse's passport with the other and mentioning of the marriage registration number on the passports of both the spouses," he told the government.

The commission recalled that in order to deal with the emerging situation, the Registration of Marriage of Non-Resident Indians Bill, 2019, was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on February 11, 2019.

Initially, the 16th (previous) Lok Sabha referred the bill to the Committee on External Affairs. Subsequently, the same bill was again referred to the Committee on External Affairs after the 17th (present) Lok Sabha was constituted, for further examination.

As deliberations continued, the Law Commission received a reference on the NRI Bill, 2019 from the Ministry of External Affairs, conveyed through the Law Ministry in April last. *(PTI)*

Any instability in Afghanistan threat to whole region: Deputy NSA Vikram Misri

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: The Afghan territory should not be used for training and sheltering terrorists, including those belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), India's Deputy National Security Advisor Vikram Misri said on Friday, asserting that any instability in Afghanistan is a threat to the entire region. Misri's reference to the two Pakistan-based terrorist outfits in an address at a conclave in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, came against the backdrop of New Delhi's apprehensions over the possibility of the LeT and the JeM using Afghan soil to launch attacks on India.

India's immediate priorities for Afghanistan include providing humanitarian assistance, ensuring the formation of a truly inclusive and representative government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking and preserving the rights of women, children and the minorities, Misri said. India is yet to recognise the Taliban set up in Afghanistan and has been pitching for the formation of a truly inclusive government in Kabul.

Misri also invited the Central Asian countries to utilise the Chabahar port as well as the Shaheed Bahesti terminal at the port for maritime trade with India and other countries. He also called for the inclusion of the Chabahar port within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and making this a "reality".

The INSTC is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe. Misri said it is equally important to create economic opportunities, empower the people to be self-reliant and self-sufficient, and re-build Afghanistan's economy. *(PTI)*

Contd. from Page 1...

'Mission Basundhara 3.0' gets

of indigenous, landless people who have it under occupation already will be done, with the remaining land to be taken over by the government, the CM said.

He said the government is trying to rationalise rates for premium payment in urban and peripheral areas so that the people can go for periodical payments rather than annual payments.

For people living in 'tea grant land', the government will make a one-time exception and give them pattas after payment of a premium under Basundhara 3.0.

"If after this, anyone tries to sell tea grant land, they will face criminal charges and the land will also be confiscated," Sarma said. A similar arrangement will be worked out for 'devalaya' (temple) and 'satra' (Vaishnavite monastery) land which are not under active possession of these institutions.

"The district commissioners will carry out a survey and if indigenous people are settled on this land which is not in active possession of devalaya or satra, the people will get the land ownership. If required, compensation will be paid to devalaya or satra," the CM said.

He said another important component is the conversion of non-cadastral villages to cadastral land, which will ensure land ownership rights to a large chunk of the population for the first time.

"Survey for this purpose has already been conducted in about 300 villages and it will be done for the remaining areas soon," he added.

Among other measures under Basundhara 3.0 are partition of family land with consensus of all members in an amicable manner and converting land records to maps, he said.

A digital land record system is being started from a block in Darrang district, which will soon be expanded to the entire state, the CM said, urging people to go for e-registration of land under available options.

Mission Basundhara was launched on October 2, 2021, while the second phase was rolled out in November 2022. (With inputs from PTI)

Time for all to subscribe to 'economic nationalism', says Vice President

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday called upon Indian enterprises to desist from importing non-essential items and exporting raw material and become "nerve centres" for inculcating the spirit of economic nationalism, asserting that it was imperative for India's prosperity and sovereignty.

Speaking at an event here, he said, "we need to import only that item which is unavoidably essential", and drew India Inc's attention to the ill effects of export of raw material in terms of drain of foreign exchange and loss of potential job opportunities.

"Nationalism is important, paramount. We have to subscribe to it. Time for us to subscribe to economic nationalism as well. We need to be vocal for local," Dhankhar said.

The vice president emphasised that a fiscal benefit can never be the premise to compromise national interest or economic nationalism, observing that export of raw material needs to be "discouraged" and the discouragement has to emanate from sensitisation by trade, industry, commerce and business associations and chambers.

Highlighting that world over, trade and industry fuels and sustains research and development (R&D), Dhankhar said: "While it is good to give heavy financial assistance to universities outside, also bestow attention on local universities, focus on our academic institutions also", and urged the industry to accord priority to R&D.

Startups and MSMEs are the birthplace of groundbreaking ideas and technologies, pushing the boundaries of what is possible. By providing local solutions, creating jobs, and promoting regional development, they play a crucial role in empowering communities, the vice president said.

Let us all commit to supporting the growth of startups and MSMEs, to fostering an environment where innovation thrives, and to working together towards a future that is prosperous, sustainable, and equitable, he added.

The vice president was addressing PHDCCI's Bharat Startup & MSMEs Summit 2024 here. *(PTI)*

IIT Delhi student found hanging in hostel room

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: In a suspected case of suicide, an M.Tech student of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi was found hanging in his hostel room, police said on Friday. The matter came to light after the family of the student, Sanjay Nerkar (24), asked his hostel mates to check on him as he was not answering his phone, they said.

Nerkar (24) stayed in room number 757 at Dronacharya Hostel. He was a native of Nashik, Maharashtra, a police official said.

"Nerkar's family members called him on Thursday night. When he did not answer the phone, the family members asked his hostel mates to check on him," a police officer said.

When the other students went to his room, they found it locked from inside. They informed the hostel guard, who broke open the door. Nerkar's body was found hanging from the ceiling of the room, the officer said. *(PTI)*

Karbi Anglong comes to standstill

members fell victim to a violent mob at Kheroni Chariali and a total of 15 members were attacked.

Out of 15, five sustained severe injuries and were taken to the Diphu Medical College and Hospital.

Commenting on the same, Longbirsing Tisso, president of the Bokajan District Committee, recounted the terrifying ordeal, describing how their cars were attacked with bamboo and they were mercilessly beaten by the mob. "After we held a protest dharna at the ARO office, Dongkamukam, and were returning to Diphu, we were attacked by a large mob at Kheroni Chariali. They hit our cars and attacked us with bamboo. Out of fear, everyone ran for their lives. Four were severely beaten up, including Sarkiri Engti, president, and Jirsong Teron, secretary of the Balipathar KSA Branch, as well as Bikash Engti and Longri Engti," Tisso added.

Notably, the protest by KSA was held against the RNSS which had submitted a memorandum during the recent visit of the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, advocating for the inclusion of the Bhojpuri language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India and for the protection of land rights for settlers on VGR/PGR land in West Karbi Anglong.

Speaking on the incident, Jotson Bey, the former chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), demanded to arrest all the culprits.

"The KSA and ASDC Youth Front had a peaceful demonstration, but while returning to Diphu, they were attacked by a mob. Our first demand is that all the attackers should be arrested and sent to jail. Secondly, as it is Reserve Land, whoever settles there are encroachers and they should be immediately evicted," Bey added.

On the other hand, Mirjeng Kro, president of KSA–Inglongpho, condemned the violence and called for the swift arrest of the attackers, echoing the demand for peace and normalcy.

Meanwhile, the Karbi Anglong Bhojpuri Samaj denounced the attack and urged for the arrest of all involved parties.

In response to the escalating situation, MLA Dorsing Ronghang and executive members (EMs) of KAAC arrived at Kheroni Chariali for talks with the protesters.

The KSA continued its indefinite sit-in demonstration, demanding justice for the attacked activists and the eviction of encroachers from PGR/VGR land.

Workshop held for emerging women screenwriters

KOCHI, Feb 16: A five-day workshop on screenwriting, jointly organised by the US Consulate General in Chennai and the Global Media Makers (GMM), for ten emerging women scriptwriters from South India, concluded in Alappuzha.

The workshop was led by US and Indian filmmaker mentors, including Ruth Atkinson, Pamela Ribon and GMM Fellow Triparna Banerjee, as part of the 'screenwriting retreat' organised for the emerging women scriptwriters from February 10-14, the US Consulate General in Chennai said.

The Consulate, in a release said the programme offered the ten participants from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh with a greater knowledge about US

film industry's best practices.

Popular Indian filmmakers Mahesh Narayanan, Indu Lakshmi, Sudha Padmaja Francis and GMM Fellow Christo Tomy shared valuable insights from their personal experiences navigating the filmmaking landscape in India, a release said.

GMM is a cultural exchange programme designed to foster relationships between American and international film professionals, and it is supported through a public-private partnership between Los Angeles-based non-profit arts organisation Film Independent and the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).

Award-winning film editor Bina Paul, former artistic director of the International Film Festival of Kerala, collaborated with Film Independent to design the workshop and shortlist the participants.

The retreat was aimed to enhance script writing and cinematic storytelling with a special focus on gender sensitive issues, including portrayal of women in film.

Films are a powerful platform to sensitise audiences around the world on various issues, including women's socio-economic empowerment, Jennifer Bullock, the Public Affairs Officer and diplomat at US Consulate General Chennai, was quoted as saying in the release.

Bullock said this workshop was another step toward creating gender-sensitive scripts that will highlight women's issues to global audiences.

Paul said in a profession where few women get trained, the GMM workshop provided a secure space for young women scriptwriters to explore their ideas and learn the craft.

The mentors encouraged participants to explore their own artistic goals and access helpful resources that serve as professional filmmaker tools for success. *(PTI)*

Act East Policy spurs new era

that use of Chittagong and Mongla ports in Bangladesh will further strengthen waterways connectivity in the Northeast and mutually benefit both countries.

"The government of Assam is committed to transforming the state into an economic hub. Our policies are focused on creating a business-friendly environment, facilitating ease of doing business, and developing world-class infrastructure to attract domestic and international investors," the minister said.

Sectors such as agriculture, food processing, handicrafts, tourism, and information technology are ripe for investment, bolstered by a young, skilled workforce and supportive government policies, he added.

In its second edition, the roundtable serves as a platform for government officials, experts, practitioners and business leaders to explore the potential opportunities arising from the evolving connectivity among Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Assam.

Among others present at the inaugural session were assistant high commissioner of Bangladesh in Guwahati Ruhul Amin, ambassador of India to Kingdom of Bhutan Sudhakar Dalela and ambassador of India to Nepal Naveen Srivastava. During the daylong conference, various connectivity initiatives like the 58-km rail link between Gelephu in Bhutan and Kokrajhar in Assam, riverine linkages with Bangladesh, various road and railway projects connecting the neighbouring countries were highlighted. (PTI)

PM lays foundation stone of AIIMS in Haryana's Rewari

REWARI (HARYANA), Feb 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday laid the foundation stone of an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here.

He also dedicated to the nation and laid the foundation stone of multiple development projects related to urban transport, health, rail and tourism sector worth over ₹ 9,770 crore.

To be built at a cost of about ₹ 1,650 crore, the AIIMS-Rewari will be developed on 203 acres of land in Majra Bhalkhi village.

Officials said the citizens of Haryana and the adjoining states of Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh will greatly benefit from the affordable tertiary healthcare facilities to be provided at the AIIMS-Rewari.

It will have 720 beds, a medical college with 100 seats, a nursing college with 60 seats, an AYUSH block with 30 beds, residential accommodation for the faculty and staff, hostel accommodation for undergraduate and post-graduate students, a night shelter and a guesthouse etc.

Established under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY), the AIIMS-Rewari will provide comprehensive, quality and holistic tertiary-care health services to the people of Haryana.

Apart from AIIMS-Rewari, Modi also laid the foundation

stone of the 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 Moulsari Avenue station near Cyber City.

The project is an important step towards realising the prime minister's vision to provide citizens with world class environment-friendly mass rapid urban transport systems. Modi also inaugurated a newly built Anubhav Kendra Jyotisar, Kurukshetra. This experiential museum has been built at a cost of around 240 crore.

The museum spans over 17 acres, encompassing over 100,000 square feet of indoor space. It will vividly bring the epic narrative of the Mahabharata and the teachings of the Gita to life.

The museum also leverages cutting-edge technology, including Augmented Reality (AR), 3D laser, and projection mapping to enrich the experience of visitors.

Jyotisar, Kurukshetra is the sacred site where Lord Krishna imparted the eternal wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna. Rs 5,450 crore. The prime minister also laid the foundation stone and dedicated to the nation multiple railway projects.

The projects are doubling of Rewari-Kathuwas rail line (27.73 Km); doubling of Kathuwas-Narnaul rail line (24.12 Km); doubling of Bhiwani-Dobh Bhali rail line (42.30 Km); and doubling of Manheru-Bawani Khera rail line (31.50 Km).

Doubling of these railway lines will augment the rail infrastructure in the region and help in timely running of both passenger and freight trains.

Modi also dedicated to the nation the Rohtak-Meham-Hansi rail line (68 kms), which will reduce the travel time between Rohtak and Hisar.

He also flagged off train service in the Rohtak-Meham-Hansi section, which will improve rail connectivity in the region.

Giving details of the facilities that will be available at AIIMS-Rewari, officials said it will have patient-care services in 18 specialities and 17 super specialities, including cardiology, gastroenterology, nephrology, urology, neurology, neurosurgery, medical oncology, surgical oncology, endocrinology, burns and plastic surgery.

It will have 16 modular operation theatres, diagnostic laboratories and a blood bank.

The proposed AIIMS shall impart both undergraduate and post-graduate medical education, along with nursing and paramedical training.

The AIIMS-Rewari will provide quality medical education in super-speciality disciplines and promote healthcare inclusion in underserved areas. *(PTI)*

Situation tense, internet suspended after

a head constable of the district police was suspended after he was seen with gunmen in a purported video, an official said.

Security forces fired several rounds of tear gas shells and used "minimum lethal force" to disperse the agitators and bring the situation under control.

Locals claimed that one person died and as many as 30 people were injured in the clash.

Churachandpur-based Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) called for a shutdown in the district on Friday to protest the killing of one person.

Protesters demanded the reinstatement of the head constable in the service, alleging that his suspension was "unfair". State PWD minister Govindas Konthoujam, considered close to chief minister N Biren Singh, has condemned the statement of BJP MLA from Churachandpur, Paoleinlal Haokip, alleging that he had made a "hate campaign" in the wake of the mob violence there.

ITLF, in a statement, said, " The SP should immediately revoke the suspension order and leave the district within 24 hours." (PTI)

'Expedite Mission Basundhara 2.0

and 29th of February 2024 to eligible beneficiaries of Mission Basundhara 2.0 and the launch of VikasYatra across the state between1st to 10th of March 2024.

"These apart, there were also discussions on the updates regarding implementation of chief minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhiyaan and Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan," the statement added.

The chief minister is scheduled to visit several district across the state for the above two programmes. For VikasYatra, the Government of Assam has lined up projects worth a total of ₹ 25,311 crores that would either be inaugurated or foundation stone laid.

Addressing those present, the chief minister exuded confidence above two scheduled programmes would provide opportunity to engage the members of the general public in the development process of the state.

He also stressed upon the need to see that members of the general public are made to feel as being part of the growth story of the state.

"The projects lined up for VikasYatra had the potential to radically transform the state's public infrastructure landscape," the statement quoted Sarma as saying.

He further added that the DCs should make sure the VikasYatras in their respective districts are observed according to the guidelines that have been issued by the government.

The chief minister assured the DCs of financial help from the state government in order to meet the expenses for the VikasYatras.

Sarma also took stock of chief minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhiyaan and Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan and enquired about steps for their implementation at the ground level.

Ministers of the Assam Cabinet Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Dr Ranoj Pegu, Chandramohan Patowary, Ajanta Neog, Jayanta Mallabaruah, Keshab Mahanta, Jogen Mohan, UG Brahma, Sanjoy Kishan and Nandita Gorlosa, along with chief secretary Paban Kumar Borthakur were also present in the meeting.

Jaishankar, Blinken hold talks

two sides following Washington's allegations in December that it thwarted an alleged plot hatched by an Indian agent to kill Sikh separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun on American soil.

The US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta of working with an Indian government employee in the foiled plot.

India has already constituted a probe committee to investigate allegations. (PTI)

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Wanted to make 'Laapataa Ladies' accessible and fun: Kiran Rao

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: There is a lot of goodness in the world and it sometimes doesn't reflect on the big screen, says Kiran Rao who has done her bit to rectify that in her latest film "Laapataa Ladies", a comic take on two brides in rural India who accidently get swapped during a train journey.

The "Dhobi Ghat" filmmaker, who returns to direction after 14 years, said audiences have been conditioned to expect the worst, especially when it comes to women's safety. But her film, while realistic and grounded, doesn't go there.

"Honestly, this story could have gone in any direction. It could have been any other genre. When we were writing this, we were conscious that while we are touching upon several issues, the idea is to entertain and make it an accessible and a fun journey," Rao told PTI in an interview.

"I feel there's a lot of goodness in the world. When we look at our lives, we realise there are so many people around us who give us hope and love. We're surrounded by people we admire, and we don't see enough of them on screen," she added.

The director admits it was challenging to keep the touch light but she saw it as an opportunity to show flawed and familiar characters who are "lovable and real". "It was a bit of a balancing act to keep the realism while keeping the satire and humour... You feel like you know these people," she said.

Rao said she had been working on creating a script that would become her next film but "nothing quite clicked". Till ex-husband Aamir Khan returned from a screenwriting competition he was judging.

"Aamir came home and told me a one-liner, about two girls on a train and how they get swapped. And I was hooked. I knew that this was not just a great story but also a great opportunity for me. "Honestly, I could never have written a story like this myself. It's not naturally my kind of story when I write but I felt I could bring something of myself to it," she said. Eventually, the story by Biplab Goswami was developed into the film with Sneha Desai working on the screenplay and dialogues. Rao's Kindling Productions and Khan's Aamir Khan Productions have produced the film, slated to release on March 1. The ex-couple has been promoting the film together. The fact that the two enjoy a great friendship despite their divorce in 2021 surprises many. But then, as Rao said, they have always made their own rules.

"Perhaps we've not adhered to anything very strictly conventional in many ways. It wasn't anything we planned. We are friends, we enjoy each other's company. We've had a fulfilling marriage for almost 17 years. You can't sever ties because of some sort of annulment or like breaking up of a social contract," she said. Continuing to be friends and family came naturally to them, she said.

"We care deeply for each other and our families are still interwoven. The test of any friendship is to work together really because it is very hard. That actually will prove to people who think that we are acting. (So) It's proven that we still like to work together." The original story of "Laapata Ladies" was more in the drama genre but Rao said she felt it would work better if it was a bit more "humorous, funny and emotional". (PTI)

LALITAJI REMEMBERED WITH FONDNESS

Kavita Chaudhary of Lalitaji, 'Udaan' fame dies due to cardiac arrest

AMRITSAR, Feb 16: Actor Kavita Chaudhary, the canny, kind Lalitaji from 1980s ad for Surf detergent and star of the popular Doordarshan serial "Udaan", died in a hospital here following a cardiac arrest. She was 67.

Chaudhary - still remembered for the two roles, one a homemaker and the other an IPS officer, more than three decades ago - was admitted to hospital a few days ago and died on Thursday night.

"She passed away following cardiac arrest last night around 8.30 pm in Amritsar at the hospital. She was admitted to the hospital a few days ago due to low blood pressure. Her condition became critical later," her nephew Ajay Sayal told PTI.

The last rites were held here on Friday morning. The actor is survived by Sayal and her niece. A graduate of the National School of Drama, she acted, wrote and directed "Udaan", a progressive show about women empowerment centred around an IPS officer, Kalyani Singh. It ran on Doordarshan between 1989 and 1991.

The show, which also starred Shekhar Kapur and Vikram Gokhale, was inspired by the life of Chaudhary's elder sister and police officer Kanchan Chaudhary Bhattacharya. The critically-acclaimed show led to many women aspiring to join public service. It was brought back on Doordarshan for a re-run during the pandemic.

Her batchmate, actor Anang Desai, remembered Chaudhary with fondness.

"Kavita and we were classmates at the National School of Drama. Kavita, Anupam, myself, Satish and others, we were all in the same class so I know her since then. I also have many special memories with her. We were socially connected and have met in Mumbai several times. She is remembered for all that she has done. This is very sad news. It's been a couple of years since we met. Kapur also expressed his shock at the news of her death.

"She created #Udaan, one of the most inspirational series of her time. So many women now in high positions in Indian Civil Services come to me and say they were inspired by Udaan. She was an amazing director...," he said in a post on X.

"RIP Kavita Chaudhary, is baar aapne lambi udaan bhar li,Naman @CintaaOfficial @nsd_india," colleague and actor Amit Behl said. After "Udaan", Chaudhary produced two more Doordarshan shows "Your Honour" and "IPS Diaries". (PTI)

RIDLEY SCOTT IN NEGOTIATIONS TO DIRECT FILM ON THE BEE GEES

LOS ANGELES, Feb 16: Multiple Oscar winner Ridley Scott is in talks to direct an untitled movie revolving around the iconic pop group The Bee Gees.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the filmmaker will also produce the project alongside Graham King for GK Films, Stacey Snider, and Michael Pruss for Scott Free.

For the movie, Scott will reunite with his "Gladiator" writer John Logan, who will pen the script.

The Bee Gees -- comprising the British Australian trio of Gibb brothers Barry, Robin and Maurice -- rose to fame in the 1960s and '70s with hit songs such as "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart," "Too Much Heaven," "Nights on Broadway" and "Stayin Alive", which led to the creation of "Saturday Night Fever" soundtrack in 1977.

Barry Gibb, the only surviving brother, will executive produce the film. Paramount Pictures will distribute the movie, with Amblin and Sister having the right to co-finance.

Scott is currently in the post-production stage for "Gladiator 2" for Paramount. (PTI)

Hope writers make films with female characters that can do next level action: Nora Fatehi

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Being a dancer helped her learn stunts in the upcoming film "Crakk", says Nora Fatehi who wants to do "next level action" like co-stars Vidyut Jammwal and Arjun Rampal in her future projects.

Fatehi, who has featured in films such as "Street Dancer 3D" and "Bhuj: The Pride of India", said like dance, action is also set to choreography.

"As a dancer, you are like an athlete too. The level we take our bodies to physically is crazy. You do the same thing in the dance and action world. You have to follow a certain choreography when the action director is formulating a scene. (PTI)

Supporting this story important: Alia Bhatt on turning executive producer for 'Poacher'

MUMBAI, Feb 16: Actor-producer Alia Bhatt on Thursday said she decided to support the upcoming web-series Poacher as it uncovers an important true-life story that's told with a lot of genuineness. Bhatt is an executive producer on the Prime Video series that marks director Richie Mehta's return to streaming space with a show after the first season of critically-acclaimed Netflix show Delhi Crime.

An eight-part crime drama based on true events; Poacher uncovers the largest ivory poaching ring in Indian history. The show, starring Nimisha Sajaya, Roshan Mathew and Debyendu Bhattacharya in prominent roles, starts streaming on Prime Video from February 23.

"It really leaves an impact... Supporting a story like this, for us, as an audience is very important but I really thank Richie for putting this together... I think there is a lot of genuineness in it. There is a lot of heart in it and it comes across when you see the show," Bhatt said at the trailer launch of the series.

Bhatt said she met the Emmy-winning filmmaker in 2020 and discussed various topics, from parenting to cinema, art and Poacher. Mehta shared two episodes of the show and she was hooked.

Mehta said the story came to him while he was working on a documentary project with Google, "India in a day" in 2015.

He had invited videos from across the country for the crowd-sourced project and one of them was about ivory raiding in Delhi and it from the WildLife Trust of India.

"It was basically officers breaking down the door and finding this ivory in a flat and I was shocked. I couldn't believe in what I was seeing. I contacted the Wildlife Trust and asked, 'What is this?' They said, 'We did the biggest ivory raid in the history of India on your shoot day'." Mehta said he couldn't use the footage in the documentary but promised to do a project on that. He started researching and got to know about wildlife crime fighters.

"I did not think that job title existed. I was so enamoured by these people. Result of that is this series," he said, adding that the show is a fictionalised dramatisation of true events. "It is inspired by the biggest poaching case in India. Many characters are amalgamation of it and some of them are direct."

Mathew, who plays the role of a computer programmer, said he was thrilled to be part of the series after he learnt that it was to be directed by Mehta.

"This was one of the easiest yes that I've said, it checked all the boxes. The moment I was approached to audition (for this series), I was instantly excited as Richie Mehta was doing it. I knew him as a maker and I was supremely excited by his work, and I really wanted to collaborate with him.

"The audition happened, and luckily, I got the part, then I got the script. It was such an exciting script, it's all based on true events. It doesn't follow a set structure or formula that you are familiar with," he said, adding the character is completely different from who he is in real life. He also praised Sajaya, with whom he has worked on Oru Thekkan Thallu Case and Chera.

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Mathew said he feels honoured to collaborate with Bhatt again post their 2022 critically-acclaimed film, "Darlings", which also marked Bhatt's debut as a producer. He said he respects Bhatt as an actor and is amazed by her passion for cinema.

The last time when we were on a stage which was this big, it was for a project ('Darlings') that gave birth to Eternal Sunshine Productions (Bhatt's banner). It was a song launch, at that point Alia was my co-actor. It was one of the most memorable biggest projects in my career, I was very fortunate to be part of it." (PTI)

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After scaling Mount 500, Ashwin not aiming for Kumble's record

RAJKOT, Feb 16: R Ashwin is a content man after becoming only the second Indian to take 500 Test wickets and has no interest in chasing Anil Kumble's national record of 619 scalps. Ashwin dismissed England opener Zak Crawley in the final session on day two and became only the ninth bowler to scale 'Mount 500' in Test history. The 37-year-old Ashwin said he has no particular aim of pushing for more and try and get to Kumble's record.

"The very simple answer is 'no'… 120 wickets away. Every day is what I want to live for, and, I'm 37 years old. I don't know what's in store next," Ashwin told the media here after stumps on the second day.

"What's in store for the next two months? You play this series and then what lies ahead, you really don't know. "I don't want to really jump the gun. I've kept it this way for the last 4-5 years and it's been very simple and it's worked for me. Why change anything that's working for you?" Ashwin added.

Recalling his journey on one of the most memorable days of his career, Ashwin said he could only look back and say "not a bad achievement".

"It's been a very long journey. I don't exactly know where to begin because I was an accidental spinner. I wanted to be a batter all along. Life gave me a chance.

"When I walked into the CSK dressing room, Muttiah Muralitharan didn't want to bowl (with) the new ball and eventually I got tossed the new ball. "I had a reasonable first-class (cricket) start to my life. (The) first-class career was pretty good. But nevertheless, the stage in the IPL made me made me visible to a lot of people and I eventually got my Test debut. "People doubted me whether I could be a Test bowler and 10-13 years later… not bad, not a bad achievement. I'm pretty glad," he added. Ashwin did not appear being one for big celebrations given his focus on the ongoing Test.

"It's in a very innocuously placed time, the Test match, (the) second day… I think it's hanging in the balance. It's a good time to celebrate, probably go have dinner and then think about it (and) how far I've come in life," Ashwin added.

With Nathan Lyon also having completed his 500 Test wickets last December, Ashwin revealed getting congratulated by the Australian wicketkeeper.

"Nathan and I, to a large extent, have been very synonymous in our cricketing careers. We made (our) debut around the similar times," he said. "I remember his action from those days. I remember my action from those days. Mine has changed a few notches. His has changed a little bit. It's been a fair competition between both of us."

"It's been a delight to watch how he's gone about his business and that's what he also claims of me — and that's why I'm saying that about him. Being a finger spinner and having been a mainstay in your respective countries is not easy. He recently finished his 500 (wickets), (so) I congratulated him. He has just congratulated me," Ashwin added.

Ashwin said he has fought a battle of perception for a long time in his career but recent years have helped him be at ease. (PTI)

Saurashtra take 1st-innings lead against Manipur on day one

RAJKOT, Feb 16: Stand-in Saurashtra skipper Arpit Vasavada scored a composed half-century while opener Harvik Desai narrowly missed a 50 as the defending champions took a narrow first-innings lead on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy Group A match against Manipur here on Friday.

At stumps on day one, Saurashtra, replying to Manipur's first innings score of 142, had made 153 for three to lead by 11 runs.

On a day when India batter Cheteshwar Pujara pushed himself down the order and Vasavada led Saurashtra in place of regular skipper Jaydev Unadkat, the home team bowlers made optimum use of familiar conditions to bundle out the visitors for 142 in 45 overs.

Veteran Saurashtra left-arm spinner Dharmendrasinh Jadeja grabbed four wickets. Unadkat is not playing the game due to a niggle.

Manipur opener Al Bashid Muhammed (51) and captain Langlonyamba Keishangbam (61) were the only two visiting team players who made fine starts but the 33-year-old Jadeja accounted for both as the tourists slumped to another below-par total in the tournament.

While Jadeja had figures of 4/62, his left-arm pace-bowling India partner Chetan Sakariya also impressed with a three-wicket haul.

Saurashtra opener Harvik Desai (48) then steadied the innings following quick dismissals of opener Kevin Jivrajani (9) and the previous game's centurion Sheldon Jackson (20).

At 35/2, Saurashtra needed someone to shore up the innings and the dependable Desai and Vasavada strung together a 106-run stand as the defending champions reached 141/3.

Five overs later, stumps were drawn with Saurashtra taking a narrow lead.

With Saurashtra batting running deep and Pujara finding his touch following a shaky start to the season, the hosts would like to pile a sizeable total and then aim for an innings win.

Manipur looked hapless against a quality bowling attack with five of their batters getting dismissed for duck, while four others could not cross even 10 runs. Though captain Keishangbam and wicketkeeper-batter Al Bashid painstakingly scored half-centuries, their efforts were not complemented by teammates.

In Jamshedpur, all eyes were on whether the country's top-order batter Ishan Kishan would be in Jharkhand's playing XI following the BCCI's diktat that all India players, currently not in the national squad, should play the last round of Ranji matches to keep themselves match fit.

However, the wicketkeeper-batter is reportedly "working on certain technical aspects" of his game and therefore opted out of the match.

Jharkhand were dismissed for a paltry 188 on day one with Rajasthan scoring 79 for 2 in reply at stumps.

Brief scores:

In Rajkot: Manipur 142 in 45 overs (Al Bashid Muhammed 51, Langlonyamba Keishangbam 76; Dharmendrasinh Jadeja 4/62, Chetan Sakariya 3/29, Yuvrajsinh Dodiya 2/14) vs Saurashtra 153 for 3 in 43 overs (Harvik Desai 48, Arpit Vasavada batting 63; Lamabam Singh 2/34).

In Jamshedpur: Jharkhand 188 in 58.3 overs (Utkarsh Singh 43, Saurabh Tiwary 42; Khaleel Ahmed 3/40, Mahipal Lomror 3/8)vs Rajasthan 79 for 2 in 29 overs (Sumit Godara batting 37).

In Delhi: Maharashtra 225 in 79 overs (Ruturaj Gaikwad 96, Digvijay Patil 42; Arjun Sharma 5/59, Varun Choudhary 4/39) vs Services 27 for no loss 9 overs.

In Nagpur: Vidarbha 313 for 5 in 86 overs (Dhruv Shorey 78, Akshay Wadkar 62, Yash Rathod batting 68, Aditya Sarwate batting 74) vs Haryana. (PTI)

Adapting to different conditions will be key to retaining WPL title: Harmanpreet

MUMBAI, Feb 16: Mumbai Indians skipper Harmanpreet Kaur feels adapting to different conditions will be vital to defending the title in the upcoming Women's Premier League, which is scheduled to be played in Bengaluru and New Delhi from February 23 till March 17.

The inaugural edition last year was played in Mumbai and the hosts rode on familiar conditions and crowd support to clinch the title under Harmanpreet's leadership.

"The conditions in Bengaluru will be different than Mumbai. I don't have much experience of playing in Delhi, so I don't have any idea how the wickets will fare in Delhi," Harmanpreet told PTI TV on the sidelines of WPL's pre-season media conference.

"If we can just quickly adapt to these things, this will show how good we are as a team. These are the areas we have to keep in mind and accordingly change our game plan."

The skipper said that though MI had a strong squad, the call on the playing eleven for a particular match will be taken based on conditions.

"It is important for any team to have as many good players in the team as possible because then you can pick the best eleven. There is also competition for places among players.

"We will make our playing eleven according to conditions. Now our role is to read the conditions well and then take a call on the team," Harmanpreet said.

They might not be enjoying the home support this year, but MI hope to replicate their last season's performance.

"Improvement is an important part of our lives, everyday we have to keep improving, adding new things in our personal game as well as in the team. Our players have done really well in the last season. It was a complete team performance, we were not dependent on one or two players," Harmanpreet said.

"This year our goal will be the same and try to add some good things and play according to situations."

Besides captaincy, she is also looking to contribute with the bat at the crucial No.4 position.

"My contribution in batting will be very important because the entire team plays around the position I bat. It will be important for me to read the situations and bat accordingly," Harmanpreet said.

She also hopes the upcoming edition will give some new talent.

"This is such a tournament where you will see good-quality cricket. It is a great platform for our domestic players to show their talent. Last year we got so many good players and this year also we hope to get some good talent, new players we can think about." (PTI)

Indian women assured of historic medal after QF win over Hong Kong

SHAH ALAM (MALAYSIA), Feb 16: Indian women shuttlers assured themselves of a maiden Badminton Asia Team Championships medal by cruising to a 3-0 win over Hong Kong in the quarterfinals here on Friday. After stunning top seeds China to top the group stage, India blanked Hong Kong riding on wins from double Olympic-medallist PV Sindhu, Ashmita Chaliha and the doubles pair of Ashwini Ponappa and Tanisha Crasto.

India will now face the winner of the other quarterfinal between top seed Japan and China.

Returning from a long injury layoff, Sindhu registered a hard-fought 21-7, 16-21, 21-12 win against a lower-ranked Lo Sin Yan Happy. The women's doubles combination of Tanisha and Ponnappa then doubled the lead by getting the better of world no. 18 combination of Yeung Nga Ting and Yeung Pui Lam 21-10, 21-14 in 35 minutes. Ashmita then wrapped up the tie with a comfortable 21-12, 21-13 triumph over Yeung Sum Yee, assuring the team of at least a bronze. "It is a comfortable result for the women's team. I am very happy with their performance," former national coach Vimal Kumar, who is with the team, told PTI from Shah Alam.

"There was a little drift, so it was initially difficult to control the shuttle as it was going out. Sindhu was stretched a bit as it was tough from one end due to the drift but it is a good result, we are in the semifinals." Up against world no. 77 Lo, Sindhu zoomed to 11-1 in the opening game after her rival found the going tough. The Indian conceded six points after resumption before wrapping up the game.

It turned out to be a tight battle after the change of sides as Sindhu and Lo moved neck and neck till 10-10 before the Hong Kong player went into the break with a one-point lead with the help of a cross drop. Lo jumped to a 15-10 lead thereafter with Sindhu struggling to control the shuttle, hitting at the net and long. Lo too produced some good shots, including a body smash and Sindhu made few judgement errors at the backline. (PTI)

Real Madrid free to make another run for Mbappé after disappointment from several years ago

MADRID, Feb 16: Real Madrid and Kylian Mbappé may get a second chance to make it work.

Less than two years after what seemed to be a done deal fell apart, the Spanish powerhouse and the France star could have another opportunity to join forces.

Mbappé reportedly told Paris Saint-Germain on Thursday that he will leave the club at end of the season, opening the way for another run by Madrid to sign one of the world's best soccer players. There could be a bidding war among several clubs to sign the former World Cup winner, but Madrid is widely considered to be in the front seat.

Mbappé's arrival would give Madrid one of the top attacks in soccer, with Mbappé joining Jude Bellingham, Vinícius Júnior and Rodrygo. It would also give Europe's most successful club a great outlook for the future, as Mbappé would the oldest of the four at just 25 years old.

Madrid made a big push to sign Mbappé in 2022, with one of its offers rejected by PSG reportedly

reaching 200 million euros ($215 million).

Mbappé never hid his dream of one day playing for Madrid, but decided at the time that it was best to continue his "adventure" in Paris.

It would be a much cheaper deal for Madrid now, as Mbappé will be a free agent after seven years with PSG. He informed the French club last year that he would not trigger an extension to the contract he signed in 2022.

Madrid had failed to secure Mbappé even before that debacle a few years ago, when the player visited the club's facilities at age 14 but instead decided to join Monaco's youth academy.

The most-recent failure was a big blow to Madrid fans, who felt it was only a matter of time for the transfer to happen. The only doubts then were about where the young Frenchman would fit in the squad. Madrid supporters had even "welcomed" Mbappé by applauding him at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium when he played with PSG in a Champions League match. (AP)

Veer top Indian as five make cut in Malaysia, Sandhu shoots 64

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 16: Yuvraj Singh Sandhu fired six birdies on his second nine to shoot a terrific 7-under 64 that carried him inside top-20 in the Malaysian Open, here Friday.

Sandhu after being 1-under with 3-birdies and two bogeys on the back nine, holed six birdies in eight holes from the first to the eighth and ended the day with a par.

Sandhu was Tied-17th alongside compatriot SSP Chawrasia (69-65), who impressed with a bogey free 6-under 65.

The top Indian was still Veer Ahlawat, who recovered from a none-too-happy start from the 10th to finish with three birdies against no bogeys in the last eight holes on the front side of The Mines Resort and Golf Club.

Veer, who was the co-leader after the first round has shot 62-71 to be at 133 and 9-under in Tied-11th place.

S Chikkarangappa (69-66) is Tied-28th, while Honey Baisoya (70-66) is T-40 as five Indians made the cut.

Karandeep Kochhar (68-70), Ajeetesh Sandhu (68-72), Rashid Khan (71-70), Gaganjeet Bhullar (74-68) and Jeev Milkha Singh (72-71) missed the cut, which fell at 5-under 137.

Malaysian rookie Khavish Varadan continued his dream debut as he took a share of the halfway the lead with Australian Kevin Yuan.

Varadan, who only turned professional last month, fired a six-under-par 65 for a tournament total of 13-under, while Yuan returned a 64.

After the Asian Tour Qualifying School last month, this is the 23-year-old Varadan's first professional event.

American John Catlin is lying third one shot behind the co-leaders, Varadan and Yuan. Catlin shot a second straight 65 to be 12-under.

Korean Guntaek Koh (65), winner of last year's Shinhan Donghae Open in Korea, Filipino Miguel Tabuena (65), and England's Steve Lewton (66) are tied for fifth, on 11 under.

The event is part of The Open Qualifying Series and will see the leading three players, not otherwise exempt, qualify for The Open at Royal Troon Golf Club July 18-21. (PTI)

Jurel in the Crown: Journey of Kargil war veteran's son Dhruv

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: His Kargil war veteran dad was mourning the loss of his own father when a 14-year-old Dhruv Jurel had to leave unaccompanied from his Agra home to knock on the doors of a cricket academy in Noida.

The year was 2014 and Jurel's father Nem Chand had only recently come around to accepting his cricketing ambitions but had to stay put at home while his teenaged son began the difficult journey. The academy where Jurel landed belonged to Noida's most famous cricket coach Phool Chand, who was taken aback by the absence of any guardian with the boy. "Before I could ask anything, the boy said, 'Sir my name is Dhruv Jurel and please take me in your academy', he requested," the coach, who saw a quiet confidence in the teenager, recalled in an interview to PTI.

That afternoon seemed vividly etched in Phool Chand's mind as he basked in the glory of being the formative coach of India's newest Test cricketer, number 312 to be precise.

The 23-year-old also gave a good account of himself with a gritty 46 off 104 balls against England in the ongoing third Test in Rajkot.

"I didn't see any parent accompanying him. I thought may be he is a local boy from Noida but then he said, 'Sir, I have come all alone from Agra and the friend who had promised to arrange my accommodation at his house isn't picking up my call'," Phool Chand narrated.

His first instinct was to call Jurel's father, a retired Havildar in who fought in the Kargil war in 1999 before taking voluntary retirement from service in 2008.

"I wanted to know if the kid had run away from home to play cricket and I asked him to give his father's number.

"When his father picked up, he confirmed that he wanted to come but it was his grandfather's tehrvi (the ceremony conducted to mark the final day of mourning after a death) and the kid told his dad, 'don't worry I will take a train from

Agra to Delhi'.

"Seeing a 13-year-old travel alone, I knew this boy was special," said Phool Chand.

Jurel's progression to the senior team has been a gradual one. He played age group cricket for Uttar Pradesh, before becoming vice-captain of the India Under-19 team that finished runners-up in the 2020 World Cup in South Africa.

He was subsequently bought by Rajasthan Royals in the 2022 IPL auction and made his debut for the team last year.

On Thursday, as Jurel was handed his Test cap by Dinesh Karthik, Phool Chand found it hard to contain his emotions.

"For a teacher, can there be a bigger day than seeing his student excel? He is the first among my students who will play Test cricket and second after pacer Shivam Mavi to play international cricket," Phool Chand, who runs his academy in Sector 71, Noida, said.

With no place to live initially, Jurel was lodged in a hostel by Phool Chand.

"In my academy, if you have merit it won't matter if you are a rickshaw-puller's son or a minister's son, you will be given every opportunity to make the grade. Dhruv was very hardworking from an early age and also had talent.

"So it was not difficult for him to clear each level with his performances," the coach added.

It is never easy for boys coming from lower middle class families but for Jurel, his mother pawned her gold jewellery to get him his first cricket kit. But that was much before he came to Noida.

Once there, Jurel worked hard to develop a sound temperament and what helped in that was the sheer number of matches and tournaments that he played around Delhi NCR. "...the more he played, the better he got. I remember there was a tournament called Vaibhav Sharma Memorial and I had got a club slot for Dhruv but since he was young, they were playing him lower down the order.

"I went to the owner of the team and requested him to give one chance to Dhruv to bat up the order and he relented. Dhruv made 86 off 38 balls to win the final for his club." The coach is confident of Jurel's success at the highest level in the times to come.

"I had messaged him early in the morning that, 'Is din ko yaadgar banana' (make this day memorable), and he said, 'Main apna best dunga, sir' (I will give my best, sir)." Given the composure he showed, Jurel kept his word to the coach. (PTI)

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ENGLAND RACE TO 207/2 AT STUMPS ON DAY 2

Duckett hundred puts India under pressure

RAJKOT, Feb 16: Ben Duckett's power-packed hundred overshadowed R Ashwin's monumental feat as England thrived on their belligerent Bazball tactic to reach 207/2 at stumps on day two and put India under pressure in the third Test here on Friday.

Ashwin dismissed Zak Crawley (15) in the final session to join Anil Kumble as the second Indian, and ninth overall, to take 500 wickets in Test history.

But India's struggles to contain England's fearless and enterprising batters persisted as Duckett raced to his third Test hundred off only 88 balls.

England have already wiped off a chunk of their first innings deficit and trail India by 238 runs going into day three. India ended up with 445 in their first innings.

At one stage, Duckett even flirted briefly with the prospect of breaking Gilbert Jessop's record from 1902 for fastest Test ton (77 balls) for his country.

Duckett peppered the field with powerful strokes all around the ground, hitting 21 fours and two sixes to reach 133 not out from only 118 balls. Joe Root was at the other end on nine.

Ashwin struck immediately after his introduction into the attack to send Crawley packing, with the batter gift-wrapping his wicket to help the Indian spinner complete his milestone.

On an innocuous delivery from around the wicket, Crawley managed a connection that ballooned towards Rajat Patidar at short fine leg.

Patidar only had to make a few paces on his left to grab the ball over his shoulder as each of Ashwin's teammates rushed to celebrate the feat.

The diminutive England opener Duckett, who looked a tad tentative outside the off-stump before the tea break, came out all guns blazing to bring up his first fifty of the tour, in just 39 balls with 11 hits to the fence.

The introduction of spin did slow down Duckett's pace for a short while, but he hit the top gear quickly to keep the Indian bowlers under pressure.

A pivotal moment came in the 21st over from Bumrah in his second spell with the Indian spearhead nailing a perfect yorker.

With his front foot out of the way, it appeared on the first instance that the ball crashed into the wickets.

However, umpire Kumar Dharmasena was not as convinced as the bowler got his captain to ask for DRS intervention.

The replays showed Duckett had done incredibly well to connect with the ferocious yorker with the bottom of his bat.

Each of the three DRS reviews per innings would weigh in gold if the pitch continues to be as placid as it has been for the first two days, but this was a review which India would not have mind losing.

India took the second DRS against Ollie Pope when Mohammed Siraj, deployed on short-ball tactics, pitched a fuller one to hit the pads.

Umpire Joel Wilson was unmoved but he had to overturn his appeal with the replays confirming that the ball was hitting the leg stump, ending Pope's entertaining 39 off 55 balls (5 fours and 1 six).

Ashwin returned for the final over of the day to have one more crack. His fourth delivery turned sharply away from Duckett after pitching on leg and Rohit Sharma collected a catch believing there was an edge.

However, it culminated with replays showing the ball pitching outside leg and missing the bat completely, with India staring at a long third day in the field with only one DRS appeal left.

Earlier in the day, India's lower order did a fair job of collecting as many runs as possible before being bowled out for 445.

Debutant Dhruv Jurel (46) missed out on a fifty in his maiden outing. The highlight of his knock was an uppercut off Mark Wood's 146 kmph delivery, which sent the ball flying into the stands over a helpless slip cordon.

Jurel partnered with Ashwin (39) to add 77 runs for the eighth wicket which pushed India past the 400-run mark while also steadying the ship after centurion Ravindra Jadeja (112) and Kuldeep Yadav (4) fell early.

Bumrah (28) and Siraj (3) did their best in keeping England out on the park for longer with a quick 30-run stand from 42 balls.*(PTI)*

India handed five-run penalty after batters run along middle of pitch

RAJKOT, Feb 16: India were on Friday handed a five-run penalty for a second offence of their batters running on the middle of the pitch during the third Test against England here.

The penalty means England will start their first innings at 5/0 without even a ball being bowled.

India were penalised as a result of all-rounder Ravichandran Ashwin running along the middle of the pitch. Ashwin was reprimanded by on-field umpire Joel Wilson.

Wilson was seen having a word with Ashwin for running on the middle of the pitch after the third ball of the 102nd over of the India innings during the second day's play. Earlier, Ravindra Jadeja was also guilty of committing the same offence.

Ashwin gently worked the ball off Rehan Ahmed and immediately set off for a single without perhaps realising where he was running, but was eventually sent back by debutant Dhruv Jurel.

Ashwin ran on the middle of the pitch for a second offence from the Indian team as highlighted by the umpire, with Jadeja being warned on the first day of the Test here at the Niranjan Shah Stadium.

According to MCC's law 41.14.1, which comes under Unfair Play section, "It is unfair to cause deliberate or avoidable damage to the pitch. If the striker enters the protected area in playing or playing at the ball, he/she must move from it immediately thereafter. *(PTI)*

Ashwin powers to 500 Test wickets mark

RAJKOT, Feb 16: Senior off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin on Friday became the second Indian bowler after former skipper Anil Kumble to take 500 Test wickets during the third Test against England here.

Ashwin also became only the third off-spinner to achieve the feat and continues to be the second highest wicket-taker for India behind Kumble, who ended his career with 619 scalps.

The 37-year-old reached the milestone on day two of the ongoing Test. He needed just one wicket for the feat and that came in the way of opener Zak Crawley, who mis-timed a sweep which landed in the safe hands of Rajat Patidar at short fine leg.

This was after India were earlier bowled out for 445 in their first innings. The only other off-spinners who have touched the 500 wickets mark are retired Sri Lanka great Muttiah Muralidaran (800) and Australia's Nathan Lyon (517), who did it last year.

Overall, Ashwin is only the ninth bowler to take 500 wickets in the traditional format, scaling the landmark in his 97th Test.

Having made his Test debut in 2011, Ashwin has come a long way.

The engineering graduate from Chennai started out as a top-order batter and tried his hand at medium pace bowling before settling for the role of an off-spinner, a decision that was forced by a back injury during his teenage years.

Following the Kumble and Harbhajan Singh era, Ashwin had big shoes to fill and he has done that with remarkable consistency.

In his first 16 Tests, Ashwin snared nine five-wicket hauls and became the fastest to the 300 wickets club.

Ashwin has also proved his worth in the shorter formats, having played 116 ODIS for his 156 wickets in the format. He has 72 wickets in 65 T20 International appearances.*(PTI)*

Duckett played a skilful innings against good Indian attack: Mark Wood

RAJKOT, Feb 16: England pace bowler Mark Wood on Friday said opener Ben Duckett forced India to constantly change the field placement as he played a "skilful innings against a good attack" here on the second day of the third Test.

Duckett cracked 21 fours and two sixes, scoring an unbeaten 133 off 118 balls that helped England make a strong start in reply to India's first-innings total of 445.

England finished the day at a strong 207/2, having erased almost half of India's total and now trail by 238 runs.

"He played with real bravery. To be that far behind in the game and go out and play like that showed real bravery and skill," Wood told the media after the day's play when asked about Duckett's third Test century.

"The way India changed the field and then he'd hit it somewhere else, it was such a skilful innings against a good attack. He's a nightmare to bowl (to) at the nets; we try to get him to leave one but he never leaves any," he said.

"Maybe, he hasn't gotten the accolades that he would like with big scores, but this was his day and it was amazing to watch.

"It's a rapid outfield and we certainly felt it was tough to contain, and Ducky (Duckett) really took it on and played in an aggressive fashion to put the pressure back on India," Wood added.

The England quick revealed he was not aware of the rule where England were awarded five runs for Indian batters running on the pitch.

There were two instances where Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja ran on the pitch during India's innings and umpire Joel Wilson awarded England five runs.

"I was not aware, I was at deep-square on the boundary. When the umpire (signalled), I was like 'what is going on here?'" Wood said.

"I honestly didn't know the rule which is pretty shocking for an international cricketer, but I just assumed that when all the lads were looking at each other and giggling, that something had happened," he said. *(PTI)*

Kane Williamson leads the way as New Zealand beat South Africa by 7 wickets in 2nd Test

HAMILTON (NEW ZEALAND), Feb 16: Kane Williamson made 133 in an unbroken partnership of 152 with Will Young to lead New Zealand to a seven-wicket win over South Africa on the fourth day of the second test Friday and to its first-ever series win over the Proteas.

Williamson scored centuries in both innings of the first test which New Zealand won by 281 runs.

South Africa took a 31-run first innings lead in the second test and extended that to 267 when it made 235 in its second innings.

New Zealand reached 40-1 before stumps on day three, setting up a fourth day on which it needed a further 227 while South Africa needed nine wickets to win the match and save the series.

New Zealand's total of 269-3 was its fifth-highest in a successful fourth-innings run chase.

The South Africa team is considerably under-strength as most of its leading players remained at home to play in a domestic Twenty20 league. Six Proteas players including captain Neil Brand made their debuts in the first test and the second test lineup had only 51 tests in total compared to New Zealand's 436.

The South Africa bowlers made New Zealand grind its way to a victory. The winning runs finally came in the 95th over, about 20 minutes before the end of play on day four.

Williamson's played almost a lone hand at first as he built his 32nd test century from 203 deliveries. He put on 64 for the third wicket with Rachin Ravindra who made 20 from 72 balls.

He then found a resolute partner in Young who stayed with him and was 60 not out at the close.

New Zealand was under pressure when Young came out to join Williamson at the fall of Ravindra's wicket, still needing 150 to win. Runs came slowly for him at first as Williamson approached his century but then more freely and he reached his 50 from 118 balls.

Williamson is one of only two active players along with Australia's Steve Smith to reach 32 centuries and has done so faster, in 172 innings, than Smith, Ricky Ponting, Sachin Tendulkar, Younis Khan, Sunil Gavaskar, Kumar Sangakarra, Jacques Kallis or Brian Lara, among others.

He brought to bear all of his powers of concentration in difficult batting conditions Friday with the ball turning and bouncing, occasionally spitting off a length.

Williamson is the No. 1-ranked batter in tests and showed why with three centuries in four innings in the series and a total of 403 runs at an average of 134. He batted almost 18-1/2 hours in total in the series.

"Coming into today on a wearing surface we knew we were going to have to string partnerships together," Williamson said. "Credit to South Africa. Certainly for the first couple of days they outplayed us I thought.

"We had to fight hard to get out of that position and change momentum and with the partnerships and seeing off the new ball were able to give ourselves the chance."

South Africa played much better than had been expected from a side with so little test experience, whose captain Neil Brand made his debut in the first test.

A Proteas side made up of first-class veterans and others with a smattering of test experience kept both test matches alive until late on the fourth day.

"We're definitely more disappointed after this test match, especially as we were still in it at the end of day three," Brand said. "I think the session yesterday cost us, scoring 38 for six wickets.

"We were confident coming out this morning and to be fair to our bowlers, they left nothing out there."

New Zealand won the Tangiwai Shield, a trophy being played for for the first time in a test series between New Zealand and South Africa.

The Shield, carved by an indigenous Maori master carver, commemorates the Tangiwai rail disaster of Christmas Eve 1953 when the express train between Wellington and Auckland plunged off a bridge over the Tangiwai River which had been washed away by a volcanic lahar.

New Zealand and South Africa were playing a test at Johannesburg when the disaster occurred and the New Zealand fast bowler Bob Blair was informed his fiancee had died in the disaster. An announcement was made that he would not bat in the New Zealand second innings on Boxing Day.

But at the fall of the ninth wicket, Blair appeared and added 33 runs with Bert Sutcliffe to avoid the follow-on. *(AP)*

ISHAN KISHAN'S ABSENCE FROM RANJI TROPHY CONTINUES

JAMSHEDPUR, Feb 16: Ishan Kishan's absence from Ranji Trophy continued as the wicket-keeper-batter, who plays domestic cricket for Jharkhand, skipped the final round of matches that started on Friday, a move that will not go down well with BCCI.

Kishan's reluctance to play first-class cricket and focus only on the IPL forced the BCCI to make a minimum number of Ranji Trophy games mandatory for players in order to be eligible for the cash-rich league's lucrative auction pool.

Deepak Chahar and Shreyas Iyer are also missing in action in the ongoing final round of matches that started across venues. Iyer was, however, having issues with his lower back and groin.

These three players -- Kishan, Chahar and Iyer -- were specifically told to play for their respective state teams in first-class cricket.

In the absence of Kishan, Kumar Kushagra continued doing wicket-keeping duties for Jharkhand. Jharkhand, who have only one win and 10 points from six matches so far, are playing Rajasthan at home in their final round.

The manner in which Kishan has missed match after match since returning midway from the national's team South Africa tour citing "travel fatigue", hasn't gone down well with the men who matter in the Indian cricket establishment.

More so after it was found that he was training in Baroda with his new Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya while his state team languished near bottom of group A table in Ranji.

There is a general consensus that a strict policy needs to be adhered to so that a group of young players don't make "playing IPL to IPL" a habit. *(PTI)*

I will personally invite Bajrang, Vinesh and Sakshi for trials: Sanjay Singh

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: WFI President Sanjay Singh on Friday assured that the protesting wrestlers' trio of Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik would not face any discrimination and he would personally approach them for appearance in the Olympic Qualifiers trials, which will be held in Maharashtra.

World governing body UWW had lifted the provisional suspension imposed on the WFI with a rider that no wrestler should face discrimination.

Punia, Phogat and Malik had led a protest against former WFI President Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who they have accused of sexual exploitation of women wrestlers. The elite wresters are also against Sanjay Singh's election as WFI chief, saying that he is a Brij Bhushan loyalist and his election is a threat to women wrestlers.

"We have started planning to take Indian wrestling forward. We will soon organise trials for the Olympic Qualifying events in Maharashtra. The state has good infrastructure. I will ask Bajrang, Vinesh and Sakshi to forget everything and start preparing for trials and win medals for the country," Sanjay Singh told PTI.

Malik and Punia have even threatened to restart their protest, saying a federation led by Sanjay Singh is not acceptable. They have even written to the UWW seeking help.

"I will send all three wrestlers emails, whatsapp message and, if need be, I will call them. I will even ask Sakshi to reconsider her decision to retire and give it one more shot to win an Olympic medal. They will not face any discrimination," he added.

So far, India have locked Paris Olympics quota in women's 53kg category through Antim Panghal.

Indians can qualify in 17 more weight categories across men's freestyle, Greco-Roman and women's wrestling.

The wrestlers have two final chances to earn qualification through Asian Qualifying event in Bishkek from April 19-21 and World Qualifier in Istanbul from May 9-12.

"We told UWW that the suspension on WFI was imposed for not holding elections and now that the elections have been held, our status should be restored. We told them how the junior wrestlers are suffering and how India are going unrepresented in many weight categories at international events without a proper federation in place.

"They discussed the matter with the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and with the UWW Board on February 9. They agreed with our viewpoint and lifted the temporary suspension. Now there should not be any confusion who the wrestlers should approach," said Sanjay.

The WFI President also hinted that the national camp for both men and women could be moved to new venue.

Earlier, SAI centres in Sonepat (men) and Lucknow (women) were the venues for the camps.

"We feel Maharashtra has good infrastructure for men's national camp. Let's see if we can move it there. We will discuss it with the government. The SAI centres are under the government, so we need their permission if the camps have to held at SAI centres. If we do not get permission then other arrangements have to be made," the WFI President said.*(PTI)*

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