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# ডুমডুমাত বিকাশৰ নতুন জোৱাৰ



কপাই উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক বিদ্যালয় খেলপথাৰ

## নতুন প্রকল্পৰ উদ্বোধন আৰু শিলান্যাস স্থাপন

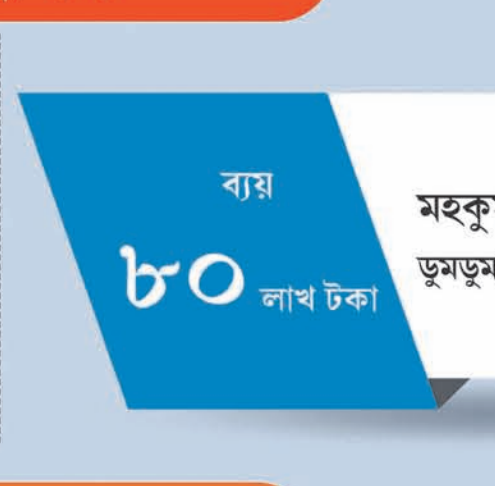


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মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, অসম

সন্মানীয় অতিথি

শ্রীপ্ৰদান বৰুৱা  
সাংসদ, লখিমপুৰশ্রীকপেশ গোৱালা  
বিধায়ক, ডুমডুমা বিধান সভা সমষ্টি

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ডুমডুমা নগৰ পানী  
যোগান আঁচনি

ব্যয়ঃ ১৭৫৮ লাখ টকা

কপাই উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক  
বিদ্যালয়, ডুমডুমা

ব্যয়ঃ ৩০৮ লাখ টকা

তথ্য আৰু জনসংযোগ সঞ্চালকালয়, অসমৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত

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## At ₹ 395, Paytm shares hit upper circuit for fourth straight session

**NEW DELHI, Feb 21:** Shares of One97 Communications which owns Paytm brand hit the upper circuit for the fourth consecutive session on Wednesday. The stock of the fintech major climbed 5 per cent each to ₹ 395.25 and ₹ 395.05 per piece -- its upper circuit limit -- on the BSE and NSE, respectively.

In the morning session, the 30-share BSE Sensex gained 27.95 points or 0.04 per cent to 73,085.35, while Nifty of the NSE slipped 15.75 points to 22,181.20. The Paytm scrip has rebounded since Friday and gained more than 21 per cent from Thursday's closing level of ₹ 325.

The rally in shares of One97 Communication came amid reports that the Directorate of Enforcement (ED), which has been probing crisis-hit fintech company's arm Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL), has not found any breaches of the foreign exchange rules so far.

However, the central agency has found certain lapses in Know-Your-Customer (KYC) norms as well as issues around generation of suspicious trans-

action report. Last week, ED had initiated a probe into overseas transactions by PPBL for allegedly flouting foreign exchange rules. Shares of One97 Communications surged 5 per cent on Tuesday, a day after hitting the upper circuit limit on Monday. On Friday, shares of Paytm rebounded after three consecutive days of fall amid the company coming under the regulatory scanner for various violations related to its payments bank business. One97 Communication stock has taken a beating on the exchanges this month after the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) action against the company's arm PPBL. As per the January 31 order, the RBI asked PPBL 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. Later, the central bank extended the deadline till March 15. One97 Communications holds a 49 per cent stake in PPBL but classifies it as an associate of the company and not as a subsidiary. (PTI)

## FM asks financial sector regulators to take more steps to curb unauthorised lending apps

*The objective is to remain proactive, maintain cyber security preparedness with constant vigilance*

**NEW DELHI, Feb 21:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday asked financial sector regulators, including the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), to take further measures to check spread of unauthorised lending through online apps.

Addressing the 28th meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) here, Sitharaman also asked regulators to maintain constant vigil and be proactive towards detecting emerging financial stability risks, given the domestic and global macro-financial situation.

The FSDC deliberated on issues related to macro financial stability and India's preparedness to deal with them, an official statement said after the meeting.

The ongoing inter-regulatory issues were also discussed to support GIFT IFSC in its strategic role to become one of the world's premier international financial centres and perform its envisioned role of facilitating foreign capital and financial services for the domestic economy, it said.

The FSDC discussed various issues related to the formulation of



strategy to implement the FSDC decisions and the Union Budget announcements.

These included prescribing uniform KYC norms, inter-usability of KYC records across the financial sector, and simplification and digitalisation of the KYC process; kickstarting fund-raising by social enterprises through social stock exchanges and to arrest the harmful effects of unauthorised lending through online apps and measures to curb their further spread.

The government in December informed Parliament that Google

has suspended or removed over 2,500 fraudulent loan apps from its Play Store between April 2021 and July 2022.

The objective is to remain proactive, maintain cyber security preparedness with constant vigilance, and take appropriate and timely action to mitigate any such vulnerabilities in the Indian financial system. Fraudulent loan apps have defrauded many gullible borrowers of their money, leading to distress in many cases.

The FSDC members also decided to strengthen inter-regulatory

coordination to further develop the financial sector so that it continues to provide the requisite financial resources for inclusive economic growth.

The FSDC also took note of the activities undertaken by the FSDC Sub-Committee chaired by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das and the action taken by members on the previous decisions of the FSDC.

Besides Das, Securities and Exchange Board of India Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch, Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) Chairman Debashish Panda, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) Chairman Ravi Mital, Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Chairman Deepak Mohanty, and International Financial Services Centres Authority Chairman K Rajaraman also attended the meeting.

Senior officials, including Finance Secretary T V Somanathan, Department of Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth, Department of Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi, and Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra also attended the meeting. (PTI)

## Liquidity deficit tightening financial conditions: CRISIL

**KOLKATA, Feb 21:** Financial conditions have tightened the economy with liquidity going into a deeper deficit putting upward pressure on short-term rates, according to a research report by CRISIL Market Intelligence and Analytics.

The report released during the month also said that foreign portfolio investors turned net sellers further aggravating the tight liquidity conditions. With tightening of the liquidity, the transmission of interest rates improved across lending and deposit rates in January. However, the cumulative rise in most deposit and lending rates remained lower than the 250 basis points of repo rate increase by the RBI since May 2022, the report said. This incomplete transmission of monetary policy prompted the Reserve Bank of India to keep the interest rates unchanged, the research body said in the report. "We believe that the central bank will be active in liquidity management and adopt regulatory measures to prevent excesses in credit growth. We foresee the RBI cutting rates from June 2024," it said.

According to the report, the deficit in domestic systemic liquidity almost doubled in January compared with December.

This has led to a net infusion of ₹ 2.07 lakh crore into the system, which is one per cent of net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) by the RBI. The report said that liquidity has been in deficit in the economy since September 2023. Due to a crunch in liquidity, money market rates are under pressure with the call money rate hovering above 6.75 per cent, the report said. (PTI)

## Zee Entertainment shares tumble 12 pc; hit lower circuit limit

**NEW DELHI, Feb 21:** Shares of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) tumbled 12 per cent in the mid-session trade on Wednesday amid reports that Sebi has found financial discrepancies in the accounts of the company.

The stock of the company nosedived 11.58 per cent to ₹ 170.65 apiece on the BSE. ZEEL shares plunged 11.39 per cent to ₹ 170.70 per piece on the NSE.

In the mid-session trade, the scrip also hit its lower circuit limit on the bourses. The 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark rose 90.17 points or 0.12 per cent to 73,147.57, while Nifty of the NSE rose 40.25 points to 22,237.20.

As per the reports, during Sebi's probe into Zee's founders, the regulator discovered that approximately ₹ 2,000 crore (equivalent to USD 241 million) may have been diverted from the company.

However, the company spokesperson clarified that the reports related to accounting issues are "incorrect and false".

The report suggested that the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has been in conversa-

tion with senior officials at Zee, including its founders Subhash Chandra and his son Punit Goenka, and some board members to explain their stance.

Further, the report noted that the amount found missing is not final and may change after Sebi reviews the responses from the company executives. A ZEEL spokesperson said, "The reports and rumours pertaining to accounting issues in the company are incorrect and false. Pursuant to the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) order, which granted relief to the current Key Managerial Personnel

(KMP), the company has been in the process of providing all the comments, information or explanation requested by SEBI, and has extended complete co-operation on all aspects."

On Tuesday, shares of ZEEL settled 8 per cent higher amid reports that Zee and Sony Pictures Networks (India) are working to salvage their USD 10-billion merger. ZEEL shares have seen a massive downfall after the collapse of its merger with Sony Group Corp's India unit. (PTI)



## Rupee rises 1 paisa to close at 82.96 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, Feb 21:** The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and appreciated 1 paisa to close at 82.96 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as the support from easing crude oil prices was negated by a weak trend in domestic equities.

Forex traders said the strength of the American currency in the overseas market and sustained foreign fund outflows weighed on the local unit.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at

82.90 against the greenback. It hit an intra-day high of 82.86 and a low of 82.97. It finally settled at 82.96 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 1 paisa from its previous close of 82.97.

"The Indian rupee erased opening gains along with the domestic equities amid global worries," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said.

He said that broadly, the USD-INR pair is expected to trade between 82.80 to 83.20 in the near-term. (PTI)

## Stock markets snap six-day rally; Sensex slumps over 400 points

**MUMBAI, Feb 21:** Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty broke their six-day winning run on Wednesday and settled with a steep fall amid a day-end selling triggered by a rush for profit booking and mixed global cues.

The 30-share benchmark Sensex stayed mostly firm during intraday but settled 434.31 points or 0.59 per cent lower at 72,623.09 points. It touched the intra-day low of 72,450.56, down 0.83 per cent from the previous closing level of 73,057.40 points.

Similarly, the broader Nifty also paired all its intraday gains before closing 141.90 points or 0.64 per cent down at 22,055.05 points.

The 50-share barometer had hit a lifetime peak of 22,196.95 points on Tuesday and remained mostly in the upward trajectory on Wednesday.

In the Sensex pack, 20 stocks ended in the red while 37 of the Nifty constituents closed the session with losses. NTPC was the biggest loser among the Sensex constituents, ending with a loss of 2.71 per cent. It was followed by PowerGrid, Wipro, HCLTech, L&T and Tech Mahindra.

In contrast, Tata Steel, SBI, JSW Steel and IndusInd Bank closed in the positive territory. Tata Steel gained 1.99 per cent and SBI ended 1.51 per cent higher.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said the Indian market is facing stiff resistance at higher levels and the valuation of a broader index is at a



significant premium, leading to an unfavourable risk reward, which influences investors to book profits. "Global markets treaded cautiously awaiting the US Federal Reserve (meeting) minutes while Chinese markets were buoyed by policy interventions."

"Concerns lingered since investors were heavily betting on a US Fed rate cut, which is put at risk by January's higher-than-expected inflation," he noted. The BSE Midcap index declined sharply by 1.27 per cent and Smallcap by 0.84 per cent. The fall in the large cap index was contained at 0.59 per cent.

Analysts attributed the steep decline in midcap and smallcap indices to investors' concern about volatility ahead of the release of US Fed minutes. Among sectoral indices, BSE Utilities fell the maximum by 2.10 per cent, followed by Oil & Gas at

a loss of 1.78 per cent and Power which went down by 1.66 per cent. Teck, services and capital goods were the other losers.

BSE Realty was the only defiant among all sectoral indices, closing with a gain of 1.96 per cent. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.68 per cent to USD 81.78 per barrel.

Asian stocks witnessed mixed trends while European markets were trading largely in the negative zone. The US stocks ended Tuesday's session with losses.

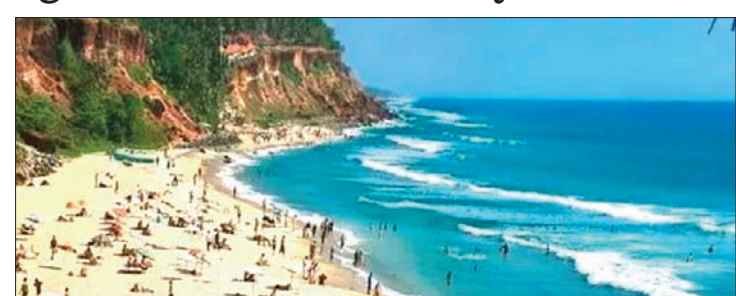
On Tuesday, Sensex continued its upward movement for the sixth straight session and jumped 349.24 points to close at 73,057.40 points while Nifty went up 74.70 points to end the day at 22,196.95 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers on Tuesday as they offloaded securities worth Rs 1,335.51 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

## Gold rises ₹ 150; silver climbs ₹ 100

**NEW DELHI, Feb 21:** Gold prices rose ₹ 150 to ₹ 62,850 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid strong global cues in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at ₹ 62,700 per 10 grams. Silver also climbed ₹ 100 to ₹ 75,700 per kilogram, while it had settled at ₹ 75,600 per kg in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 62,850 grams, up by ₹ 150, amid a bullish trend in overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. (PTI)

## Goa doesn't get quality tourists as it lacks infrastructure of global standards, says official



**PANAJI, Feb 21:** As the tourism infrastructure in Goa is not up to the world standards, no quality tourists visit the state, a senior official said on Wednesday.

Participating in a discussion during the ongoing 'India Climate and Development Partners Meet' hosted by the World Bank, state Environment Secretary Arun Kumar Mishra also said that the fly-by-night operators in the tourism industry indulge in violation of laws, including those related to the environment.

"Although Goa is small in size, the per kilometre population in the state is around 400 persons, which is the highest in the country," he said.

Four lakh persons arrive in the state every day, he said, adding that Goa's maximum population was concentrated in the coastal areas.

"The state with the coastline of 104 km holds one crore people and it is the biggest challenge for the policymakers," he said.

"The fly-by-night operators (in the sector) are responsible for violating all kind of laws, including environmental laws," he said.

That is why we need to come up with the sustainable tourism model so that the environment is not impacted. The challenge before the state government is to ensure that the flood gates are not opened for these fly-by-night operators, Mishra added.

"The tourism infrastructure in Goa is good, but it is not up to the world standards, due to which we don't get quality tourists," he said.

Tourism sector accounts for 30 to 35 per cent of the state GDP, he said.

At the event, policymakers, financial institutions, businesses and community representatives have come together to discuss opportunities for leveraging finance for adaptation, replicating successful state-driven climate solutions, and mainstreaming climate considerations in government investments and budgets. Innovation in climate financing, leveraging technology for climate action, sustainable cooling, community-led resilience, and coastal resilience are some of the areas of deliberation and mutual collaboration at the conference. (PTI)

## IIT-Madras granted record number of patents in 2023, doubles previous year's tally

**NEW DELHI, Feb 21:** The number of patents granted to the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras doubled in 2023 from the previous year, reaching a record high of 300, officials said on Wednesday.

In addition, the number of international patents filed, including those granted under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT), also recorded a significant increase, rising to 105 during 2023 from 58 in 2022, they said.

Additionally, 226 patents have already been filed during the current fiscal (as of December), including 163 Indian patents and 63 international patents applications (including PCT). Since the inception of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Madras, a total of about 2,550 intellectual property (IP), including patent, applications have been filed, both in India (1,800) and abroad (750) so far, of which about 1,100 are registered IPs or granted patents (about 900 Indian and 200 international).

"It is a matter of pride for IIT-Madras that it had started filing patent applications as early as January 1975 (granted in May 1977). The total number of IP applica-



tions filed crossed 1,000 in 2016, 2,000 in 2022 and 2,500 in 2023. As we march towards our 100th year of Independence, for Bharat to become a superpower it is very important to protect our ideas," said IIT-Madras Director V Kamakoti. He explained that researchers at IIT-Madras are proactively generating IP in domains such as wireless networks, advanced materials, robotics, additive manufacturing technology, engine advancements, assistive devices, advanced sensor applications, clean energy, aerospace applications, polymer material and thin films, catalysts, and biomedical applications,

among many other emerging technologies.

The Office of Industrial Consultancy and Sponsored Research (ICSR) at IIT-Madras coordinates the different aspects related to IP and technology transfer. The centre collaborates with faculty, researchers and students and also has a dedicated legal cell.

"The institute has made it easy for inventors to access existing patent information through an online AI-based patent search tools. This facility has helped the inventors not only to quickly evaluate the invention by themselves but

also to improve their ideas and claims. The emphasis is also equally on the quality of the work being translated as IP. This is only possible because of the collaborative effort of our inventors and the IP team," said IIT-Madras Dean Manu Santhanam. There are three aspects of IP enabling at IIT-Madras -- clarifying, simplifying and demystifying IP filing; providing support for quick filing and follow-up without the faculty losing time or worrying about procedures; and facilitating technology transfer and monetisation of IP.

IIT-Madras Professor T Pradeep, a Padma Shri awardee, said, "When my first patent was filed about 20 years ago, there was no efficient mechanism to do it. I did almost everything, including patent drafting filing, responding to examination reports, commercialisation, etc." "Over the years, we have built a robust system for filing and commercialisation. I have filed patents even within three days using this system and reached out to potential partners for commercialisation. About 25 of my IPs have been commercialised in one way or the other," he added. (PTI)



## Motilal Oswal secures ₹ 1,250cr in first close for new AIF real estate fund

**KOLKATA, Feb 21:** Motilal Oswal Alternates (MO Alts), the alternative investments arm of Motilal Oswal Financial Services, on Wednesday said it has successfully closed the first tranche of its sixth real estate fund, India Realty Excellence Fund VI (IREF VI) and has secured commitments of approximately ₹ 1,250 crore in this first close.

The company said it is a significant milestone for MO Alts, achieving the largest and fastest first close for any of their real estate funds to date.

The fund will scout for opportunities in real estate in Kolkata and seven other top cities of India including Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Pune, Bangalore and Chennai.

IREF VI strategically focuses on early-stage investments, primarily targeting mid-income/affordable residential projects across India's top eight cities.

"This successful fundraising, even amidst a buoyant equity market, underscores the unwavering trust our investors have placed in our capabilities," MO Alts, MD & CEO, Vishal Tulsyan said.

MO Alts said it boasts a strong track record, having invested in over 150 real estate projects, funding ₹ 7,500 crore across 50 developers, and successfully exited over 85 investments with an impressive return exceeding 20 per cent over pre-approval bets.

The fund, structured as an Alter-

native Investment Fund (AIF Category-II) the first close (which is commonly referred to as an initial offer) saw participation from high net-worth individuals, non-resident Indians, and family offices/corporates. With the proposal to quash the Urban Land Ceiling Act by the West Bengal government, the investment opportunities in the state will jump significantly, realtors said.

Saurabh Rath, Co-Head (Real Estate) at MO Alts said, "The Indian real estate market has shown remarkable resilience and growth in recent years."

The residential sector is witnessing decadal high demand, and the office market is experiencing strong absorption, nearing pre-pandemic peaks. With indicators suggesting continued momentum, the demand for early-stage capital is increasing significantly." (PTI)

**PROVISION OF INDIVIDUAL WATER TANKS**

E-Tender Notice No. TSK/Engg/14 of 2024 Dtd. 19-02-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of Item:** Provision of Individual water tanks at Railway quarters of Mariani Jn. and Simluluguri Jn. under the jurisdiction of DEN/1 Tinsukia (List of quarters as per Annexure A & B). **Tender Value:** ₹1,38,69,632/- **Earnest Money:** ₹2,19,400/- **Date & Time of closing of tender:** 15.00 hrs. on 12-03-2024 & opening at 16.00 hrs. of 12-03-2024. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 12-03-2024 in the website [www.irops.gov.in](http://www.irops.gov.in)

DRM (W), Tinsukia

**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
Serving Customers With A Smile

**CORRIGENDUM - 01**

The following changes have been made in Tender No. EL-CON-NFR-OHE-D-K-01 published vide E-Tender Notice No. EL-CON-NFR-OHE-D-K-01; Dated: 31-01-2024. Please read as: Closing of tender:- 20-03-2024, 15:00 hrs.; Physical submission of document listed in clause no 2.11.2:- 25-03-2024 upto 15:00 hrs. Opening of tender:- 27-03-2024, 15:00 hrs.; Advertised value:- ₹68,90,43,992.18; Last date for receiving queries:- 27-02-2024 upto 1800 hrs. IST; Prebid conference date: 28-02-2024 at 11:00 hrs. IST; Name of the Work: "Engineering, Procurement, Construction and commissioning of 25 KV, 50 Hz, Single Phase, AC, Electrification work including FOCS and ROCS" in Dhansiri - Pherima New single line Section in connection with New Line Project of Dimapur - Kohima Project of N.F. Railway, including works of Supply, erection, modification, testing and commissioning of TSS, SCADA for the section and electrical gear work of CLS (44 RKM/57 TKM)". • Draft EPC agreement document uploaded. • ESP of Dhansiri, Dhansiripar, Shokhuvi, Molvom & Pherima uploaded. • L Sections from Km 0 to 45 (07 files). Other terms & conditions of tender will remain same.

Chief Electrical Engineer/Con-II, Maligaon, Guwahati-11

**Northeast Frontier Railway**  
(Construction Organisation)

**"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"**



6
WORLD



- PPP, PML-N strike power-sharing deal in Pak; Shehbaz to be PM, Zardari President

8
NORTHEAST



- Tripura govt focusing on promotion of multilingual edu system: CM
- Manipur records dip in number of candidates for class 12 board exams



Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Hamara Sankalp  
Viksit Bharat

Modern farming, Prosperous farmers

3.5 fold increase in fertilizer subsidy in last 10 years; Increase from ₹ 71 thousand crore in 2014 to over ₹ 2.5 lakh crore now



## Govt proposes law to ban 'magical healing'

**GUWAHATI, Feb 21:** The Assam government on Wednesday introduced a new legislation in the assembly aimed at eliminating non-scientific healing practices. The proposed law seeks to criminalise "magical healing", conducted by individuals with malicious intent, making it a cognisable and non-bailable offence punishable by up to five years of imprisonment and a fine of up to ₹ 1 lakh.

The 'Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024' was introduced in the House by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika on behalf of the home and political departments held by the chief minister. The Bill aims to bring social awakening in society and to create a healthy, science-based knowledge and safe environment to protect human health against the evil and sinister practices of ignorance.

According to the 'statement of objects and reasons' of the Bill, no person shall take any part in healing practices and magical healing propagation for treatment of any diseases, disorder or any condition relating to the health of a person, directly or indirectly, giving a false impression of (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

# Uproar over 'failure' of Gorukhuti project



**GUWAHATI, Feb 21:** Opposition MLAs in Assam on Wednesday staged a walkout from the assembly after expressing dissatisfaction over the state agriculture minister's reply regarding Gorukhuti project as they claimed that the initiative was running into heavy losses and demanded the reinstatement of farmers evicted from the area by the government.

Opposition legislators maintained that

agriculture in Gorukhuti in Darrang district was profitable under the farmers who were cultivating at their own expense, before the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led government carried out an eviction drive in the area in 2021 and initiated a government project.

The matter was raised during Question Hour by AIUDF legislator Aminul Islam, who wanted to know the investment and in-

## Opposition stages walkout from House

### Reinstatement of evicted farmers demanded

come from the Gorukhuti Multipurpose Agriculture Project so far. In his reply, agriculture minister Atul Bora said the project has so far received ₹ 17,67,93,348 from the government under various heads.

Of this amount, ₹ 9,52,93,348 was allotted when the project was run by the Darrang district commissioner's office, and ₹ 8.15 crore after it came under a managing committee.

The project was run by the district commissioner's office, with the support of the local agriculture office, till July 21, 2022. After that, it was handed over to a managing committee as per a Cabinet decision, he added. In the same reply, Bora also said that ₹ 3,30,48,993 has been spent since project initiation on agriculture-related purposes such as procurement of seeds and related inputs, farm machinery and tractor hiring. Against this, ₹ 2,79,76,624 has been earned by selling various agricultural products, with another additional income of approximately ₹ 1.58 crore expected, he said. As the minister maintained that there was no question of loss, the AIUDF legislator countered him by pointing out that (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Steps on to eradicate child marriage: ASCPCR chief



**GUWAHATI, Feb 21:** Assam has grappled with gender discrimination concerning the rights and education of the girl child, presenting numerous challenges, including the issue of child marriage, said Shyamal Prasad Saikia, chairperson of the Assam State Committee for Protection of Child Rights (ASCPCR).

"In societies plagued by illiteracy, poverty, and gender bias, the persistence of child marriage remains a significant challenge," said Saikia on Tuesday during a state-level consultation organised by ASCPCR to strategise the eradication of child marriage.

Saikia emphasised the impor-

ance of monitoring agencies such as ASCPCR in overseeing the implementation of various laws and schemes aimed at combating child marriages by the relevant agencies.

The Assam government, recognised for its proactive stance against child marriage, is intensifying efforts to combat this social issue, according to Saikia.

ASCPCR, in collaboration with Child Marriage Free India and supported by its coalition partner Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) organised the consultation to discuss strategies to make Assam free from child marriage by 2030. Dhananjay (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## KAAC orders AROs to take necessary eviction actions amid land encroachment concerns

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Feb 21:** The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) has issued orders to the respective Assistant Revenue Officers (AROs) of Dongkamukam and Phuloni revenue circles to take necessary eviction actions, according to an official notification.

In the notice, KAAC informed that the assistant revenue officer of Donka revenue circle submitted a report on February 17 regarding encroachments and the construction of temporary and permanent structures on Professional Grazing Reserved (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserved (VGR) lands under Donka revenue circle.

KAAC further cited a Supreme Court (SC) directive in the case of Jagpal Singh & others v. State of Punjab, where the apex court directed all states to take necessary steps for the eviction of illegal or unauthorised occupants of Gram

Sabha or Gram Panchayat lands, emphasising that the land must be kept for the common use of villagers.

"Whereas, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the case of Jagpal Singh & others v. State of Punjab issued a directive to all the States to take necessary steps for the eviction of illegal/unauthorised occupants of Gram Sabha/Gram Panchayat lands, emphasizing that the land must be kept for the common use of villagers. In exercise of the power conferred under Paragraph 3(1)(a) of the 6th Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council enacted the Karbi Anglong (Land & Revenue) Act, 1953, by which the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation 1886, along with the Rules, are adopted. KAAC Settlement Rule 18 empowers the authority to evict unauthorised occupants from Government as

well as Grazing lands," the order dated 20th February read.

"Therefore, taking into account the unauthorized possession of PGR/VGR land by the encroachers, the authority of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council directs the assistant revenue officer, Donka Revenue Circle, to take the necessary steps for eviction of unauthorised occupants," it added.

The KAAC also issued the same directive to the assistant revenue officer, Phuloni Revenue Circle, to take the necessary steps for eviction of unauthorised occupants.

Additionally, the council has terminated a total of 10 Sarkari Goanburas (SGBs) from their posts, citing "dereliction" of duty in West Karbi Anglong and Karbi Anglong districts. The SGBs who have been terminated in West Karbi Anglong for failing to report on encroachments of PGR (Hawapur) land under (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

well as Grazing lands," the order dated 20th February read.

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**AIZAWL, Feb 21:** A civil society group in Mizoram on Wednesday staged a peaceful demonstration here to protest the Centre's proposal to fence the India-Myanmar border and end the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with the neighbouring country.

The event, organised by the NGO Coordination Committee (NGOCC) in front of Vanapa Hall in the heart of Aizawl, was attended by lone Mizoram Rajya Sabha member K Vanlalvena and a host of legislators from the ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) and opposition parties, who stepped out of the assembly during the recess of the on-going budget session.

Nay Lin Aung, an exiled MP from Myanmar's Mindat and other leaders from the neighbouring country, who took refuge in the northeastern state, were also seen among the protesters.

NGOCC is a conglomerate of

five major civil society organisations and student bodies headed by the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA).

Addressing the rally, NGOCC chairman and CYMA president Lalmachhuana said Mizo people are strongly opposed to the move to construct a fence along the India-Myanmar border, especially along the Mizoram section, and scrap the FMR, which enables ethnic kin on either side of the border to travel 16 km into each other's territory without a visa. "The proposed border fencing alone will not solve the problems of arms smuggling, drug trafficking and infiltration... the India-Bangladesh border is an example of that," Lalmachhuana said, while urging the Centre to find an alternative solution.

He alleged that the idea to fence the India-Myanmar border and scrap the FMR stemmed out of an appeal by Manipur chief minister N

Biren Singh, who, he said, linked the ongoing ethnic strife in his state to "illegal immigration" from neighbouring Myanmar.

"Should the Centre fulfill the aspiration of one person or respond to the cries of a larger section (of people)? Going by the aspiration of a single man is against the democratic principle of the country," the NGOCC chairman stated.

Lalmachhuana said they have no issue if the Manipur government agrees to the fencing of its state's section of the India-Myanmar border. "But scrapping the FMR and fencing the Mizoram section is not acceptable as it is against the principle of India's Act East policy," he claimed.

Earlier, the NGOCC had sent a memorandum to Union home minister Amit Shah urging him to reconsider the decision to scrap the FMR and fence the India-Myanmar border. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Stop insulting Lord Ram devotees: BJP to Rahul Gandhi

**NEW DELHI, Feb 21:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his remarks on youths in Uttar Pradesh and Ram temple consecration ceremony invitees, saying he should stop using such arrogant language and insulting Lord Ram and his devotees.

BJP's criticism came in response to Gandhi's veiled jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, when he said he saw people in Varanasi lying on the road drunk on alcohol. Varanasi is PM Modi's Lok Sabha constituency.

"He said the youth of Uttar Pradesh are drunk. Is this the language he should use to talk about the region which was ruled by his family? And for so many years, he and his mother were MPs from?" former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

The BJP leader said Gandhi made the remarks against people of the region which drew the "highest investment." "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invested thousands of crores of capital (in Uttar Pradesh). Job opportunities are coming," (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Biotechnology. "With the Department of Biotechnology, we are just about to announce the joint funding proposal opportunity for people to be able to work together in the areas of Bioeconomy and Bio-manufacturing," he said.

"This is in line with President Biden's executive order not too long ago on Bioeconomy and Bio-manufacturing. There's a similar interest in India. Therefore, bringing the two sides together, and the research groups together to work on that is truly a great opportunity," he said.

During the interview, Panchanathan also said, "In the last 10 years, I've seen a marked, sort of, intentional intensity, if I can put it that way, in wanting to make sure that science and technology innovations are inspired at scale everywhere. It's also that the entrepreneurial outcomes from that are being made possible everywhere across India. I see it." Panchanathan, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## 'The Ministry of Information Technology met with us' India, the US looking into exciting joint science & technology projects: American scientist

**WASHINGTON, Feb 21:** India and the US are looking into exciting joint science and technology projects to further expand their relationship under the guidance of the top leadership of the two countries, according to a top American scientist.

Describing the US-India Partnership as a very important one for the Biden-Harris administration and also in Congress,

Dr Sethuraman Panchanathan, director of the National Science Foundation said there's total bipartisan support for a strong partnership between two great democracies, the US and India.

Last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked off his visit to Washington DC, for the historic State Visit, with a trip to the National Science Foundation headquarters in Alexandria wherein he interacted with the scientific community and the young scientist minds. "Now, in terms of the National Science Foundation (NSF),



we have started to work with India in the science and technology front with threads of partnerships, as I call them," Panchanathan told PTI Videos in an interview.

NSF started first with the Department of Science and Technology. Working together, they have already had two rounds of funding.

"We had started with 35 projects that we funded with the six digital technology hubs. This was in 2022," he said. They are now looking into various exciting joint pro-

posals between US and Indian researchers, many of whom are going to be funded.

"The Ministry of Information Technology met with us. They signed an implementation agreement last summer, and we already have put out a call for proposals. We are in the final stages of deciding on the specific projects that will be funded," he said, describing it as the second thread.

The third thread is establishing a partnership with the Department of

## Gogoi urges PM to take action to combat narcotics smuggling from Myanmar

**GUWAHATI, Feb 21:** Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi, has called upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take "decisive action" to address the widespread smuggling of narcotics from Myanmar into India.

Gogoi emphasised that this illicit activity not only poses a threat to national security but also presents severe health risks to citizens.

Recent media coverage has shed light on the alarming frequency of truck entries at Merapani border in Assam, indicating that smuggled Myanmar-origin areca nuts, colloquially known as Burmese supari, are making their way to our country through the porous India-Myanmar border in Mizoram and Manipur, the Assam MP said in a letter to the Prime Minister on Tuesday.

Subsequently, these smuggled areca nuts find their way to Nagaland from where they are distributed to gutka industries in Kanpur, Lucknow and West Bengal and these activities are conducted with blatant disregard for

customs duties and regulations, he added.

Other drugs such as heroin, opium, Yaba tablets, morphine, methamphetamine tablets, along with a huge number of foreign currencies are also being smuggled from the neighbouring country allegedly by using oil tankers as a means of transportation, the Congress MP said.

"The implications of this illegal trade are manifold, leading to significant revenue loss for the government, posing threat to public health and it is also alleged that there is political involvement in this illegal activity," Gogoi said.

He urged the PM to take decisive action to combat this smuggling effectively by 'strengthening border security, enhancing surveillance measures and cracking down on smuggling networks'.

Additionally, strict enforcement of customs regulations and penalties for those involved in smuggling activities are imperative to deter future illicit trade, Gogoi added. (PTI)



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders.  
-Lao Tzu

## Another agrarian unrest

The resumption of the Punjab farmers' march towards Delhi has not only reignited tensions but has also taken on a fresh political dimension, drawing serious national concern. As farmers clash with security forces at the Shambhu border in Haryana, the situation has escalated into a battlefield, marked by teargas shells, barricades, and a show of force on both sides. Despite the central government's estimation of around 14,000 farmers at the Shambhu border, along with a significant number of vehicles and tractors, the farmers' demands, chiefly the legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all crops, remain unmet. The rejection of the Centre's offer of MSP on five crops for five years during recent talks underscores the depth of the impasse. The call to march on Delhi originated from the Samyukta Kisan Morcha and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, with the support of over 200 other farmers' unions, including those that led the historic 2020-21 protests. However, the protest has now morphed into a broader movement, with farmers from various states converging on Delhi's borders.

The response from the Haryana and Uttar Pradesh governments, both ruled by the BJP, has been to thwart the farmers' progress, leading to clashes and chaotic scenes at border points. The Punjab government, led by AAP, finds itself in a challenging position, torn between supporting the farmers' cause and maintaining law and order. The Punjab and Haryana High Court's criticism of the protesting farmers for using tractor-trolleys on highways highlights the legal complexities of the situation. However, the farmers remain undeterred, bolstered by their determination to press on peacefully despite the obstacles. The deployment of heavy security in Delhi reflects the government's apprehension about the potential escalation of the protests. Reports of clashes and disruptions to traffic underscore the volatile nature of the situation, with tensions flaring at multiple border points. In the face of appeals from the BJP to call off the march, the farmers remain steadfast in their demand for a concrete solution, particularly the legal guarantee of MSP. The opposition parties, including the Congress, have thrown their weight behind the farmers, further complicating the political landscape.

As tensions simmer across several states, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha has announced a meeting on February 22 to chart the future course of the agitation. Their grievances stem not only from the failure to secure MSP but also from perceived betrayals by the Modi government, despite the repeal of the contentious farm laws. The farmers' march has evolved into more than a protest against specific policies; it is now emblematic of broader discontent and demands for agrarian reform. The Modi government's reluctance to accede to the farmers' demands threatens to prolong the standoff, with no resolution in sight. The ongoing farmers' march represents a critical juncture in India's political landscape, underscoring the deep-seated grievances within the agricultural community. As tensions escalate and negotiations falter, the need for a swift and equitable resolution grows ever more urgent. The fate of millions of farmers hangs in the balance, and the nation watches anxiously as events unfold. Amidst escalating tensions, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha's meeting on February 22 holds immense significance, poised to shape the trajectory of the farmers' agitation. With grievances unresolved and distrust lingering, the outcome of this pivotal gathering could determine the course of India's agrarian unrest.

## For Novak Djokovic, the game is on, it is not the 'beginning of the end'



By: Tirthankar Mitra

The verdict was passed when 36-year-old Novak Djokovic, a colossus in the world of tennis lost to 22-year Jannik Sinner at the semi-final of Australian Open recently. It confirmed the judgement of the crowd which passed the "beginning of the end" verdict when Carlos Alcaraz (19) blew him off the Wimbledon turf last year.

Post Australian Open reverse, instant decision making fans are of the view that the greatest ever tennis player is past his prime. The 20-something Gen-next had caught up; it is curtains for the Djokovic era. But then stadiums are kangaroo courts infamous for their hasty judgments. Yet it can be stated to be a divided verdict if a veteran's take is anything to go by.

"When you get older, the bad days get worse," Martina Navratilova, an ageless champion said. Reverting to cold logic, be it a tennis champ or a 9 to 5 executive, who does not have a bad day at work?

Ageing superstars are tetchy especially after defeat to an younger opponent. Asked if age was catching up after the Australian Open defeat, Djokovic neither fumed nor came up with a smart snub. The Serb, father to a 9 year old did not make a headline reply. He said, "I hope not, but I don't know, time will tell"

One wonders whether this was the shadow of the Father Time falling on him or was it Djokovic trying to buy time with one of his clever mind games? In his 30s, Djokovic is

playing tennis like no other player before him. He could not care less if some crystal ball gazers are writing him off.

Sports fans are instant decision makers. They assume the role of the judge and the jury. It is upto Djokovic to confront the age question. No bystander can do it. Subtle changes are perceptible in Djokovic even as another school is of opinion that it is too early and unwise to declare him to be a player in decline. He is no longer his "bitter" and "driven" self as number three tennis player in the world vying to reach the top spot. He does not smash rackets any more. Nor does he fight with umpires. Djokovic is friends with his young rivals these days. He is the darling of the crowd as the ageing champion.

Unforeseen emergencies being a part of Djokovic's growing up at Belgrade when erstwhile Yugoslavia was in violent disintegration in the 1990s. Ethnic cleansing led to mass migration and deaths. Those have steeled him in a way no other rival can recall. His coach would second-guess the bombing target to decide which court young Novak would train even as NATO fighter screamed overhead.

Asked after his Wimbledon defeat "Is he cranky?" his coach Goran Ivanisevic replied "At training, he is always cranky" Within months Djokovic would beat Alcaraz at Cincinnati Masters; somewhere in the world the cranky Djokovic and wide old Ivanisevic must be chalking out a plan to defeat Sinner. (IPA Service)

## Myanmar: A struggle for democracy amidst repression and uncertainty

In its third year of governance, the Myanmar military, known as the Tatmadaw, continues to hold power in the South-east Asian nation, the most impoverished in the region. February 2021 marked the ousting of the Government of National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, in a silent coup orchestrated by the junta.

Myanmar, formerly Burma, has a history marred by military rule, repressive regimes, and prolonged economic stagnation. While Suu Kyi's leadership from 2015 brought improvements, the return of military control has plunged the country back into uncertainty, with the populace enduring ongoing hardships and a faltering junta.

The erosion of democracy is evident as the Opposition grapples with fragmentation amid persistent military suppression. The youth are grappling with profound frustration in the face of ongoing chaos within the country. Concerns about the future of Myanmar are escalating among investors, particularly those from the West and advanced nations. With the exception of China, all other investors, including major players from South-east Asian nations, are adopting a wait-and-see approach, anticipating a shift in the military's stance. Notably, during Suu Kyi's leadership, Beijing swiftly forged new

connections and opened avenues for engagement, making it evident that the military takeover in Naypyitaw has directly hindered significant projects initiated by Beijing during the NLD Government's tenure.

Suu Kyi finds herself confined under house arrest, while her NLD party grapples with internal disarray. Many of its top leaders are in hiding, persistently navigating challenges in their quest to reclaim power. The ongoing prosecution and impending conviction of Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint following the junta takeover serve as a display of strength and frustration. Tom Andrews, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, aptly highlighted by the close of 2021 that Suu Kyi and Win Myint are more akin to "hostages, not criminals" until proven guilty of the charges levied by the military. Despite this, these prominent leaders have been unable to voice their concerns to international media and other outlets. The military's preference for closed-door courtroom proceedings stands as a significant barrier, hindering global media access to their perspectives.

The rise of ethnic militias and regional factions taking charge in parts of northwest China is a concerning development for the military. It's apparent



that the junta is struggling to exert complete dominance over the country. In

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

contrast to previous instances, the current situation sees the military faltering in its efforts to quell the widespread resistance forces that are gaining momentum across the nation.

Is there a prospect of a fresh beginning with the anti-junta forces and entities like the National Unity Government (NUG), or is the restoration of democracy in Myanmar solely dependent on ethnic rebels and breakout factions from the junta? While the NUG and other anti-junta factions continue their efforts, the immediate removal of the junta from power appears challenging. Ethnic rebels may exert influence in certain border provinces, but it might not be sufficient to deter military operations.

The dynamics at play suggest a complex road ahead for those aspiring for democratic change in Myanmar.

The military Chief, Min Aung Hlaing, made a grave miscalculation in 2021 by forcibly removing the NLD Government from power. Despite the semblance of an elected government, the military and its elites maintain a decisive edge over civilian administration across Myanmar. Enshrined in the amended 2008 Constitution, the military secures 25 percent of parliamentary seats, and crucial ministries like Home, Border, and Defence Affairs are helmed by active military officers. Additionally, the military retains the authority to appoint one of the two Vice-Presidents. These constitutional provisions underscore the limited power and influence of Suu Kyi's civilian government within the nation's security framework.

Article 59 (f) further bars Suu Kyi from the presidency due to her perceived "allegiance to a

foreign power" resulting from her marriage to a British citizen and her children's British citizenship. The military's sway is further accentuated by Article 436, granting them the power to veto parliamentary decisions. Unless these articles undergo amendment, Suu Kyi's ascent to the highest constitutional office remains unattainable. Constitutional changes necessitate the support of 75 percent of Parliament members and approval through a national referendum. The generals' concerns stemmed from Suu Kyi's rising popularity and her resounding electoral mandate in the 2020 general election. This prompted the military to allege election fraud, vehemently denied by the country's election commission operating under Suu Kyi's government. Fearing the potential strengthening of Suu Kyi's mandate in another general election, the generals, adept at power dynamics, acted cohesively and preemptively in unison.

Myanmar's history is marred by a turbulent past, marked by conflicts, disorder, and periods of military rule. The journey forward for protesters, ethnic rebels, and the military is fraught with challenges, casting a shadow of uncertainty over the nation's future. In the absence of external intervention, the junta appears steadfast and unwilling to relinquish control.

The military's seizure of power in 2021 has dimmed the aspirations for democracy, prompting unsettling inquiries into the trajectory of Myanmar's destiny.

At the core of the matter is a pivotal question: Can Myanmar persist in its current state indefinitely? The indications suggest so, as the Tatmadaw demonstrates unwavering resolve and a resistance to embrace change. The military's structure and strategies remain largely impervious to the influence of public outcry.

The rallying cry of "unite in solidarity" can serve as a guiding principle for all anti-junta factions striving to restore democracy in Myanmar. Overcoming the military's actions presents immediate challenges given its dual sources of power - civilian and military. Additionally, the process of Opposition groups shifting dynamics and taking control of peripheral territories may demand more time before compelling the Tatmadaw to surrender its hold on power.

The Generals' singular focus appears to be "repression," with a blatant disregard for calls advocating peace, negotiation, or dialogue. General Hlaing should no longer test the patience of the people. Additionally, the escalating threat posed by ethnic rebels should no longer be ignored. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

## Austrian Communists surging ahead in opinion polls for regional elections in 2024 end

By: Magdalena Berger

Barely five years ago, the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) found itself mired in a crisis with no end in sight. Things had started to go wrong in May 2019, when the press obtained hidden-camera footage of FPÖ chairman and federal vice-chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache apparently drunk and high on cocaine during a vacation in Ibiza. He was shown promising political favours to a Russian heiress (actually an actress involved in a sting operation) if she bought Austria's biggest tabloid and turned it into a mouthpiece for his party. Within twenty-four hours of the video being released, it had brought down the federal government - a coalition between the FPÖ and the center-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) - and forced Strache's resignation from all political functions.

One pandemic and one massive inflationary wave later, the FPÖ's self-inflicted crisis feels like ancient history. In 2024, Salzburg (population 155,000) and Innsbruck (population 130,000), Austria's fourth- and fifth-largest cities respectively, are set to hold elections, as are the states of Styria (population 1.25 million) and Vorarlberg (population 400,000). On top of all that, there will also be two national elections - in June for the European Union (EU) parliament, and likely in September for Austria's national parliament. Particularly on the national level, the FPÖ's prospects couldn't be better as Austria heads into its mega election year.

For months, FPÖ chairman Herbert Kickl has stood atop all polls, which have only varied on how wide his margin of victory will be. Though he may lack the charisma of a Strache or a Jörg Haider, the New Right pioneer who transformed the FPÖ from a "national liberal" to an ethno-nationalist party back in the 1980s, Kickl's party currently hovers around 30 percent nationally. In contrast, the ÖVP and the center-left Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) struggle to break out of the low 20s, while the left-liberal Greens and the libertarian NEOS sit at about 10 percent.

Although the election of the left-wing firebrand Andreas Babler as SPÖ chairman kindled hope that the party would recover in the polls, so far this hasn't been the case. His momentum has been stymied, at least in part, by hostile elements within his party. Meanwhile, the Greens have destroyed much of their credibility since replacing the

FPÖ as junior partners in Austria's ÖVP-led coalition government, effectively becoming executors of the ÖVP's right-wing agenda.

If there is a glimmer of hope for the Left in the Alpine Republic, it is to be found in the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), which is experiencing an upsurge after decades on the margins. In Styria, the Communists are poised to make inroads. Following the 2021 election of Elke Kahr as mayor of the Styrian capital Graz (population 300,000), Austria's second-biggest city, Kahr's comrade Kay-Michael Dankl appears to have a shot at winning the mayor's office in Salzburg. This fall, the KPÖ might even clear the 4 percent threshold required to make it into Austrian parliament.

Heading into 2024, the KPÖ stands to benefit from the fact that elections will occur in the states where it has been successful in recent years. First among these is Styria, where the party has been represented in state parliament since as far back as 2005. A recent poll put the Styrian Communists at 14 percent; more than double its result in the 2019 state election. While polls should be taken with a pinch of salt, it is safe to assume that the party will achieve significant gains in its traditional stronghold.

Thus far, Graz's mayor Elke Kahr has not disappointed. She was in fact named world's best mayor for 2023 thanks to her "selfless dedication to her city and its people." Meanwhile, attempts by political opponents in Graz to attack the KPÖ by targeting the party's positions on foreign policy have had little effect.

Neither the Communists' refusal to "avow their support" for the EU's sanctions against Russia when the staunchly Atlanticist NEOS challenged them to do so, nor the fact that they were the only party to vote against flying the Israeli flag at city hall after October 7, 2023, has hurt their support. Though Werner Murgg, a KPÖ member of the Styrian state parliament, has single-handedly brought the party a steady stream of negative press for his trips to Donbas in 2019 and Belarus in 2021, he will not again stand for election in 2024.

In its state strongholds in Styria and Salzburg, the KPÖ has proven to be an effective antidote to political disaffection. Voting pattern analyses of the 2021 Graz mayoral election reveal that the Communists won votes from all parties but performed especially well among previous nonvoters. Analyses of the April 2023



Salzburg state election, which saw the thirty-four-year-old historian and museum tour guide Kay-Michael Dankl lead the KPÖ to an unprecedented 11.7 percent, tell a similar story. Since that election, Dankl has only become more popular.

According to a poll from December, he enjoys the highest approval rating of any politician in Salzburg state parliament by far. Dankl is now running for mayor of Salzburg city and stands a decent chance of winning the election on March 10. Similarly to last year's state election, his campaign is largely focused on housing, a hot-button issue in Austria's second-most expensive city in terms of rent.

Following a tradition started decades ago by the KPÖ in Styria, its newly elected members of the Salzburg state parliament have decided to cap their own salaries at €2,400 a month - about what an average tradesperson earns - and give the rest to people in need. In this way, Salzburg's Communists raised a total of €45,626.60 for constituents in 2023 alone, adding to the €3.2 million collected by the Styrian party organization since 1998.

Wherever it has held elected office, this practice has helped the party establish credibility, helping it to enter the mayor's office in Graz and making it a serious contender to do so in Salzburg.

Led by the thirty-five-year-old social worker Pia Tomedi, the KPÖ is also looking to establish a foothold in Innsbruck, the capital of the state of Tyrol. In Tyrol, the party is still in the early stages of a building phase and is currently collecting signatures to get on the ballot in the Innsbruck city elections in April. Yet it is not unlikely that the recipe from Graz and Salzburg will find success here as well. Innsbruck has the most expensive rent prices of any city in Austria, and in Tyrol, the SPÖ has traditionally been weak. Like Kahr and Dankl, Tomedi has placed particular emphasis on the issue of housing. If

she is elected to the Innsbruck city council, this may well lead to KPÖ gains elsewhere in the Tyrol as well: in both Styria and Salzburg state, the Communists' successes began when they won seats on the city councils of their respective capitals.

Heading into the fall, these elections could give the KPÖ the momentum it needs to make its spectacular entrance into the Austrian parliament, where it last held seats in 1959. Unfortunately, however, this is hardly sufficient cause for left-wing jubilation, for across the country, the KPÖ's potential success is more than overshadowed by the bullish prognoses for the FPÖ.

There is a high probability that the FPÖ will be one of the parties making up Austria's next government, in all likelihood with the ÖVP's support. Although everyone in the ÖVP from chairman and Austrian chancellor Karl Nehammer downwards has claimed that a coalition with an FPÖ led by Herbert Kickl is out of the question, this vague promise that should not be taken seriously - setting aside the fact that the FPÖ is an extreme right party whether or not it is helmed by Kickl. Many suspect that the ÖVP might even be willing to give the chancellor's office to the FPÖ as part of a coalition agreement.

Unlike in Germany, collaboration with right-wing extremists has long ceased to be a breach of taboo in Austria. In addition to the ÖVP and the SPÖ, the so-called Drittes Lager (Third Camp) has been a fixture of the country's postwar order. 1949 saw the foundation of the FPÖ's predecessor party, the Federation of Independents (VdU). Ostensibly libertarian in orientation, it opened its doors to pan-Germans and ex-Nazis who had been blacklisted from by two major parties, reintegrating them into national politics. Starting in the 1980s, Jörg Haider transformed the FPÖ into the prototype of what most media outlets now refer to as a "right-wing populist" party. Twenty years before the Alternative for Germany

(AfD) had even been founded; the FPÖ had already earned as much as 22 percent of the vote in a national election.

For years, politicians in Austria dealt with the FPÖ in exactly the same manner as they are doing today in Germany: conservatives and social democrats distanced themselves from the right-wing extremists and made campaign promises that there would be no coalition with them. Then, in 1999, a dramatic reversal occurred: ÖVP chairman Wolfgang Schüssel announced a national coalition government with the FPÖ. The "firewall" against the far right, to which so many Germans continue to cling today, was torn down in Austria back in the 1990s.

Particularly since shifting to the right under Sebastian Kurz, the ÖVP has become much closer ideologically to the FPÖ than to the Greens or the SPÖ. In the current national government with the Greens, the conservatives have been forced to take up issues they would personally rather ignore, such as the Greens' longtime demand for a new comprehensive climate law. With the FPÖ, in contrast, they would be able to reach swift agreements on key points: less climate legislation, even more racist immigration laws, and a "leaner state."

In the FPÖ's most recent economic platform, which was drafted in 2017, the party demanded tax breaks for the wealthy and for businesses, along with cuts to social spending. If such policies sound like they could just as well come from the ÖVP, this should hardly come as a surprise - both parties primarily serve the interests of the ruling class.

Most national polls have Babler in second place. To beat Kickl, he will need to reawaken the spirit of the SPÖ primary. He must stand decisively behind his demands - regardless of whether he draws criticism from his opponents in the SPÖ's state organizations. He needs to show that he has his party under control and will not cave to heckling from Döskozil and his ilk.

A respectable performance for the SPÖ and a regional upswing for the KPÖ on the scale currently being forecasted will not be enough to stop the worst-case scenario of an FPÖ chancellorship this year. Yet developments in Styria and Salzburg fuel hope for better times. After all, such left-wing "islands of resistance," as Graz Mayor Elke Kahr once referred to them, prove that a politics beyond economic callousness and racist agitation is possible. (IPA Service)



# Atlantic is headed for a tipping point – once melting glaciers shut down Gulf Stream, we would see extreme climate change within decades, study shows

By: Rene van Westen,  
Henk A Dijkstra &  
Michael Kliphuis

Superstorms, abrupt climate shifts and New York City frozen in ice. That's how the blockbuster Hollywood movie "The Day After Tomorrow" depicted an abrupt shutdown of the Atlantic Ocean's circulation and the catastrophic consequences.

While Hollywood's vision was over the top, the 2004 movie raised a serious question: If global warming shuts down the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation, which is crucial for carrying heat from the tropics to the northern latitudes, how abrupt and severe would the climate changes be?

Twenty years after the movie's release, we know a lot more about the Atlantic Ocean's circulation. Instruments deployed in the ocean starting in 2004 show that the Atlantic Ocean circulation has observably slowed over the past two decades, possibly to its weakest state in almost a millennium. Studies also suggest that the circulation has reached a dangerous tipping

point in the past that sent it into a precipitous, unstoppable decline, and that it could hit that tipping point again as the planet warms and glaciers and ice sheets melt.

In a new study using the latest generation of Earth's climate models, we simulated the flow of fresh water until the ocean circulation reached that tipping point.

The results showed that the circulation could fully shut down within a century of hitting the tipping point, and that it's headed in that direction. If that happened, average temperatures would drop by several degrees in North America, parts of Asia and Europe, and people would see severe and cascading consequences around the world.

We also discovered a physics-based early warning signal that can alert the world when the Atlantic Ocean circulation is nearing its tipping point.

**The ocean's conveyor belt**  
Ocean currents are driven by winds, tides and water density differences. In the Atlantic Ocean circulation, the relatively warm and salty surface water near the equator flows



toward Greenland. During its journey it crosses the Caribbean Sea, loops up into the Gulf of Mexico, and then flows along the US East Coast before crossing the Atlantic.

This current, also known as the Gulf Stream, brings heat to Europe. As it flows northward and cools, the water mass becomes heavier. By the time it reaches Greenland, it starts to sink and flow southward. The sinking of water near Greenland pulls water from elsewhere in the Atlantic Ocean and the cycle repeats, like a conveyor belt.

Too much fresh water from melting glaciers and the Greenland ice sheet can dilute the saltiness of the water, preventing it from sinking, and weaken this ocean conveyor

belt. A weaker conveyor belt transports less heat northward and also enables less heavy water to reach Greenland, which further weakens the conveyor belt's strength. Once it reaches the tipping point, it shuts down quickly.

**What happens to the climate at the tipping point?**

The existence of a tipping point was first noticed in an overly simplified model of the Atlantic Ocean circulation in the early 1960s. Today's more detailed climate models indicate a continued slowing of the conveyor belt's strength under climate change. However, an abrupt shutdown of the Atlantic Ocean circulation appeared to be absent in these climate models.

**How the ocean conveyor**

**belt works?**

This is where our study comes in. We performed an experiment with a detailed climate model to find the tipping point for an abrupt shutdown by slowly increasing the input of fresh water.

We found that once it reaches the tipping point, the conveyor belt shuts down within 100 years. The heat transport toward the north is strongly reduced, leading to abrupt climate shifts.

**The result: Dangerous cold in the North**

Regions that are influenced by the Gulf Stream receive substantially less heat when the circulation stops. This cools the North American and European continents by a few degrees.

The European climate is much more influenced by the Gulf Stream than other regions. In our experiment, that meant parts of the continent changed at more than 5 degrees Fahrenheit (3 degrees Celsius) per decade — far faster than today's global warming of about 0.36 F (0.2 C) per decade. We found that parts of Norway would experience temperature drops of

more than 36 F (20 C). On the other hand, regions in the Southern Hemisphere would warm by a few degrees.

These temperature changes develop over about 100 years. That might seem like a long time, but on typical climate time scales, it is abrupt.

The conveyor belt shutting down would also affect sea level and precipitation patterns, which can push other ecosystems closer to their tipping points. For example, the Amazon rainforest is vulnerable to declining precipitation. If its forest ecosystem turned to grassland, the transition would release carbon to the atmosphere and result in the loss of a valuable carbon sink, further accelerating climate change.

The Atlantic circulation has slowed significantly in the distant past. During glacial periods when ice sheets that covered large parts of the planet were melting, the influx of fresh water slowed the Atlantic circulation, triggering huge climate fluctuations.

**So, when will we see this tipping point?**

The big question — when will the Atlantic circulation

reach a tipping point — remains unanswered. Observations don't go back far enough to provide a clear result. While a recent study suggested that the conveyor belt is rapidly approaching its tipping point, possibly within a few years, these statistical analyses made several assumptions that give rise to uncertainty.

Instead, we were able to develop a physics-based and observable early warning signal involving the salinity transport at the southern boundary of the Atlantic Ocean. Once a threshold is reached, the tipping point is likely to follow in one to four decades.

The climate impacts from our study underline the severity of such an abrupt conveyor belt collapse. The temperature, sea level and precipitation changes will severely affect society, and the climate shifts are unstoppable on human time scales.

It might seem counterintuitive to worry about extreme cold as the planet warms, but if the main Atlantic Ocean circulation shuts down from too much meltwater pouring in, that's the risk ahead. (Courtesy: *Down To Earth*)

## Global Plastics Treaty: India's alignment with petro-chemical interests undermines crucial pact

By: Satvarupa Shekhar

“Humanity has exceeded a planetary boundary related to environmental pollutants including plastics” — announced an international team of researchers in 2022. The scientists who assessed the impact of the cocktail of synthetic chemicals and other “novel entities” flooding the environment on the stability of the Earth system concluded that plastics were “out of control”.

**The science is clear**

Plastics epitomise the novel entities planetary boundary crisis, characterised by their enduring presence, mobile nature and pervasive environmental impact. Chemicals and plastics have negative effects on planetary health, from mining, fracking and the extraction of raw materials, to production and waste management, stretching from the Arctic to Antarctica.

The multifaceted nature of plastic pollution compounds the challenge, with interactions among different substances yielding unforeseen and often synergistic effects on physical and ecological systems.

Recognising the urgency of the situation, there was a unanimous decision by 175 United Nations member states to negotiate a global and legally binding treaty that would tackle the entire life-cycle of plastic. Originally proposed by Peru and Rwanda, the Global Plastics Treaty, slated for finalisation by the end of 2024, would be the first ever instrument to address plastic pollution, and presents a critical opportunity for coordinated action on a global scale.

**What are planetary boundaries?**

The concept of planetary boundaries, pioneered in 2009, provides a science-based framework for understanding the delicate balance of Earth's systems. Defined by nine critical processes, these boundaries delineate the safe operating space for humanity.

The relentless proliferation of novel entities poses an increasingly dire threat to the planet, transcending geographical boundaries and socioeconomic disparities.

Despite efforts at remediation, contaminated sites multiply, exacerbating the planetary burden and underscoring the inadequacy of current management strategies.

The treaty's ambit is vast, encompassing key aspects such as the extraction of fossil fuels, the design of plastics, their production, consumption, and associated waste management. By targeting each stage of the plastic life cycle, it acknowledges that merely addressing downstream waste management is insufficient and that meaningful progress requires systemic changes that tackle the root causes of plastic pollution, namely polymer production.

However, formidable challenges persist, exacerbated by the divergent interests of nations and industries vested in the status quo. The government of India has aligned with nations such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, the USA and Iran, all with significant plastic-petrochemical interests.

Together, they insist that the Treaty should focus on downstream waste management. This reflects a blatant disregard for the scientific evidence surrounding climate change, plastic pollution and destabilised Earth systems.

**Indian submission**  
India's submissions to the United Nations Environment Programme Secretariat reflect a perpetuation of a narrative that prioritises corporate profits and economic considerations over environmental sustainability and public health.

One of the primary arguments raised by India pertains to the perceived conflict between the proposed treaty's provisions and World Trade Organization rules. While legitimate concerns regarding trade implications exist, India's emphasis on this aspect risks overshadowing the urgent need for comprehensive

and effective measures to address plastic pollution at its source.

India's invocation of the economic interests of poor and developing countries within the BRICS bloc serves to deflect attention from the broader imperative of combating plastic pollution on a global scale. Concurrently, India has announced a massive expansion of its petrochemical industry, and it aims to become a top exporter — even to countries that have expressed the desire for an ambitious and effective plastics treaty.

The market dynamics, driven by profit motives and short-term gains, incentivise continued reliance on fossil fuels and cheap plastic production. Technological inertia, stemming from decades of investment in petrochemical infrastructure, is now also diversifying into plastic polymer production.

By framing the treaty's objectives as potentially detrimental to economic growth, India disregards the science, undermines the urgency of the environmental crisis and sidesteps accountability for its own contributions to plastic pollution.

Rather than align with the precautionary and polluter pays principles, India has adopted common but differentiated responsibilities as its main principle.

By advocating for a reliance on National Action Plans and National Implementation Plans, India is sidestepping the need for collective, co-ordinated action on a global scale, perpetuating a fragmented approach that undermines the treaty's efficacy. It has gone as far as to submit that “design standards for various products should be dependent on national circumstances and should not be harmonised at global level”.

**Plastics pollution in India**

The plastic crisis in India is not just an environmental issue but also a socioeconomic and justice concern. It is well known that in India approximately 70% of the polymers produced is used by the packaging sector and 70% of plastic products

become waste in a short span.

The staggering statistics highlight the magnitude of the plastic pollution crisis facing the country. Despite this alarming reality, the measures taken to address this issue thus far have been insufficient, with only a mere fraction — estimated at 2%-3% — of single-use plastics being banned. The prevailing narrative, in which plastics, such as sachets, are often touted as both pro-poor and pro-climate due to their affordability and purported environmental benefits, perpetuates a dangerous misconception. This narrative ignores the underlying reality: the true cost of plastics, both in terms of environmental degradation and socioeconomic inequality.

Behind the facade of affordability lies a web of subsidies and incentives that artificially prop up the plastic industry. The heavily subsidised production of petrochemicals contribute to the illusion of cheap plastics.

Communities worldwide bear the brunt of this crisis, with marginalised populations disproportionately affected. Those most affected by the plastic crisis, such as fishers, farmers, and Indigenous Peoples, are often those with the least power to influence change. Despite the mounting evidence linking plastics to climate change, health hazards, and social injustice, awareness remains low, particularly among vulnerable groups lacking access to information and resources.

Ultimately, India's position in the United Nations Plastics Treaty negotiations reflects a prioritisation of short-term economic interests over long-term environmental sustainability and public health. To truly address the interconnected challenges of climate change, plastic pollution and destabilised Earth systems, India must reassess its stance and commit to ambitious, science-based measures that prioritise the well-being of both current and future generations. (Courtesy: *Scroll.in*)

## From Chikankari to Kalamkari: How 'slow fashion' contributes to sustainability

By: Privanka Chhapparia

Within the dynamic realm of Indian fashion, a subtle revolution is taking place — one that advocates for the principles of deliberate and conscientious fashion. Grounded in India's abundant legacy of textiles and crafts, this movement offers a sustainable alternative to the rapid and mass-produced fashion industry.

**The Core of Slow Fashion**

Slow fashion in India is not merely a passing fad but a reconnection with traditional values and practices. This is about exploring the exquisite patterns of Banarasi sarees, the delicate needlework of Chikankari, or the vibrant designs of Kalamkari. The ancient processes, which have been inherited over generations, encapsulate an enduring quality that rapid fashion can never imitate. The principle of slow fashion is closely intertwined with conscientious consumption. It concerns being conscientious of the ecological consequences and the societal ramifications of our fashion decisions. In India, this entails endorsing local artisans and weavers, guaranteeing equitable labour standards, and conserving the environment.

**The Urgent Need for Environmental Action**

The fashion industry significantly impacts the environment and is considered one of the leading contributors to pollution worldwide. The rapid

production and disposable nature of fast fashion greatly exacerbates this situation. Indian slow fashion, in contrast, prioritises the use of sustainable materials such as organic cotton, silk, and jute, which significantly reduce environmental impact.

Furthermore, methods such as natural dyeing, hand weaving, and block printing have a positive impact on the environment and impart a distinctive allure to the clothing. Every artwork conveys a distinct tale, capturing the essence of the terrain, the inhabitants, and their cultural heritage.

**Enabling and supporting artisans and weavers**

The potential of slow fashion in India to empower several artisans and weavers across the country is one of its most enticing qualities. These artisans serve as the guardians of India's abundant textile legacy. Nevertheless, the emergence of fast fashion and the entry of more affordable, mechanised alternatives have threatened their means of living.

Consumers can significantly impact revitalising traditional arts by opting for slow and conscientious fashion. By directly collaborating with craftsmen, brands offer equitable remuneration and acknowledgement for their craftsmanship, so fostering a sustainable ecosystem that is advantageous to all parties involved.

**The Consumer Shift**

Indian consumers are growing more aware of

the consequences of their fashion decisions. This trend is apparent in the increasing popularity of brands prioritising sustainability, ethical manufacturing, and transparency in their supply chain. There is an increasing recognition of the excellence, skill, and narrative associated with every piece of clothing.

The industry is also being propelled by customer awareness, which is fostering innovation. Designers are currently exploring using repurposed materials, zero-waste patterns, and eco-friendly procedures to expand the possibilities of sustainable fashion.

India's slow and responsible fashion movement goes beyond just a mere opposition to fast fashion. It serves as a commemoration of India's rich and varied cultural past, a dedication to sustainability, and a stride towards a fashion industry that is more ethical and fair. As individuals who consume, design, and have a vested interest in this dynamic system, the decisions we make at present will have a profound impact on the future of the fashion industry in India and beyond.

By adopting slow fashion principles, we don garments and embody narratives, principles, and a heritage that respects the environment and the individuals responsible for creating our clothing. It is a progression towards a more environmentally friendly and aesthetically pleasing world, achieved gradually and methodically. (Courtesy: *Youth Ki Awaaz*)

## Silence of the wolves: How human landscapes alter howling behaviour

By: Sneha Mahale



In landscapes modified by human activity, the Indian wolf may be adapting by suppressing their iconic howl, finds a 2023 study from Maharashtra. Initially intended to look into the frequency and timing of wolf howls to use acoustics as a tool for population surveys, the results took the researchers by surprise.

“However, early patterns guided us down an unforeseen path. The striking and frankly worrying revelation that emerged was that in heavily human-altered landscapes, wolves might be adapting by suppressing their howl,” explains Sougata Sadhukhan, one of the study authors and an assistant professor at the Institute of Environment Education and Research, Bharati Vidyapeeth University, Pune.

The Indian wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*) occupies a distinctive position in the evolutionary history of the wolf. Recent scientific studies (Hennelly et al. and Wang et al.) highlight how it could be a frontrunner for the title of the oldest surviving wolf lineage. A silent custodian of the grasslands, it regulates herbivore populations to prevent overgrazing.

A scientific population estimate in the country, conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and published in 2022, reveals that only 3,100 Indian wolves currently remain in the wild. Though classified under Schedule I of the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972, the wolves continue to confront challenges such as habitat loss, hybridisation with domestic dogs, accidents on high-speed roads, diseases and persecution by humans.

“Historically labelled as ‘wastelands’, grasslands (where wolves reside) pose conservation challenges, including encroachment and illegal activities. Wolves also lack the glamour of charismatic megafauna like the elephant or tiger. Lastly, limited research on Indian wolf populations hinders effective conservation strategies,” says Mahesh Singh, an independent researcher, not associated with the study. Singh has partnered with the Madhya Pradesh forest department in the past for wolf conservation efforts. In this context, behavioural changes of the Indian wolf, induced by human activities, including its howls, emerge as a valuable tool for studying its long-term survival.

**Studying wolf howls in Maharashtra**

According to the 2022 WII population estimate, wolf populations are most concentrated in Madhya Pradesh (772), followed by Rajasthan (532), Gujarat (494), Maharashtra (396) and Chhattisgarh (320).

The team now studying the wolf howling behaviour, consisting of researchers from Bharati Vidyapeeth and WII, selected Maharashtra for its unique landscape and challenges that are crucial for understanding wolf ecology, behaviour and conservation needs.

In the grasslands of western Maharashtra, for instance, wolves face constant threats from habitat encroachment and fragmentation owing to agricultural expansion and infrastructure development, the study found. “Studying their resilience and coexistence strategies in this dynamic environment is essential for informing conservation efforts,” says Sadhukhan.

On the other hand, in the tiger buffer zones of eastern Maharashtra, wolves

demonstrate another level of adaptability, having developed nuanced spatial organisational skills and resource use patterns from coexisting with apex predators.

The team focused on howls used for maintaining territories, intra-pack communication and social bonding. Beyond indicating their physical presence, howls play a crucial role in instilling fear and influencing foraging behaviour among the lower cascade.

Through playback surveys, where the team plays simulated howls, the study uncovered a disparity in their howl response based on the distance to villages. In areas of eastern Maharashtra that were relatively less disturbed by human activity, wolves largely avoided responding to howling surveys within 1200 metres of villages but responded to those conducted farther away (more than 1200 metres). In areas of western Maharashtra that were highly occupied by human settlements, wolves exhibited a high response rate within 1200 m from villages, but the rate decreased within 500 m of the villages to perhaps avoid easy detection of the wolves.

Data obtained from collared wolves demonstrated significantly high response rates in their home-range core, but decreased if the core area was close to a village. The researchers concluded that howling too close to a village was disadvantageous, despite the increase in their tolerance for responding to surveys in human-dominated landscapes.

“This finding, while surprising, isn't entirely shocking. Human disturbance can impact animal behaviour and howling can draw unwanted attention, potentially increasing conflict and risk. However, the lack of response in the home range core is surprising, as the core is close to the village,” says Sadhukhan.

The researchers also noted that as villages expand due to further development, wolves may find fewer areas to defend territory with their long-range howls. This behavioural adaptation to a human-modified landscape, while potentially helping conserve wolf populations, could have adverse repercussions on their behaviour and habitat.

**Pondering the impacts of behavioural changes**

The actual impact, however, remains elusive. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Wilson et al. (2020), show strong evidence that human activity can trigger ecological changes through various mechanisms. “These cascading effects can influence predator-prey dynamics, competition and nutrient cycling,” says Singh.

Sadhukhan agrees. “Behavioural changes can cause enduring impacts on individual fitness, population growth, and species persistence. They have the potential to reshape community composition, resource utilisation and overall ecosystem stability.”

While ecologists conventionally prioritise studying species extinction, this research sheds light on the vulnerability of a keystone species undergoing human-induced contemporary evolution. “It is crucial to grasp these intricate changes, not solely to preserve wolves but also to safeguard their ecological melody and the wild symphony they contribute to. Only through such understanding can we protect their future, transcending mere survival, in our ever-changing world,” says Sadhukhan. (Courtesy: *The Wire*)



The PML-N won 75 seats, PPP won 54 seats & MQM-P has agreed to support them with thier has 17 seats

## PPP, PML-N strike power-sharing deal in Pakistan; Shehbaz to be PM, Zardari President

**ISLAMABAD, Feb 21:** In a breakthrough that could end the political uncertainty in Pakistan, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party have agreed on a power-sharing deal to form a new coalition government after intense negotiations following a fractured poll verdict.

In a joint news conference late Tuesday night at Zardari House here, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari announced that Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shehbaz Sharif, 72, will assume the role of the prime minister once again.

Similarly, PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, 68, will be the joint candidate for the president's office.

"The PPP and PML-N have achieved the required number, and (now) we are in a position to form the government," Bilawal told reporters without revealing the number of lawmakers they have in the National Assembly after the February 8 elections.

To form a government, a party must win 133 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly or the lower house of Parliament.

He said former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party-backed independent candidates and Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) failed to achieve a



simple majority in Parliament to form a government in the Centre.

Bilawal hoped that the news of the political alliance with the PML-N to form a coalition government would lead to a positive market response as the cash-strapped country faced a hung Parliament after the elections.

Last week, the PML-N in a surprise move announced that the party supremo and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif nominated his younger brother Shehbaz as a candidate for the slot of prime minister. Nawaz, 74, was earlier confident to secure a record fourth term. However, his party failed to win enough seats to form a government on its own.

Independent candidates - a majority backed by 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party -- won 93 National Assembly seats.

The PML-N won 75 seats while the PPP came third with 54 seats.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) has 17 seats.

Speaking at the press conference, Shehbaz asserted that his party now has the "required numbers" with the PPP to be in a position to form the next government as he thanked the leadership of the two parties for the positive conclusion to the talks.

The former prime minister emphasised the unity between the two parties, noting that they were well-positioned to form the government at the Centre.

Shehbaz, who led a coalition government for 16 months before the elections, also said that he had asked the PTI-backed winning candidates to prove their majority and form the government, but they didn't have sufficient numbers.

The PML-N stalwart also thanked Bilawal and Zardari for their cooperation. Shehbaz said that both parties decided that Zardari would be fielded as the joint candidate for the post of president.

Responding to a question about whether the PPP was getting any portfolios, Shehbaz said that the Bilawal-led party has not demanded any ministry from the first day. The News International reported.

"Parleys take place between two parties and issues are resolved through (mutual consultation). It doesn't mean that we accept their demands or they accept ours; they have their views but reaching a middle point is the real political success," he said.

The former prime minister added that the decisions on the "offices" would be made mutually later under the guidance of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif and the PPP's top leadership, the report said.

Shehbaz also thanked the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan, Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party, and the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid, who will be part of the next government. He vowed the upcoming coalition government would restore the country's economy and fight against the menace of terrorism.

The PML-N leader said that the alliance would bring economic progress and development to the country. He said they would take measures to increase agricultural and industrial production in the country.

Shehbaz stressed that the previous ally forged during the 16-

month government paved the way for their current collaboration, united in their commitment to addressing the concerns of the Pakistani people.

"We will not disappoint the people of Pakistan," the president of the PML-N said.

The details were not provided but sources said that PPP was still reluctant to be part of the government as it agreed to have its president, chairman senate, and governors in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and chief minister in Balochistan.

The PML-N would have complete charge of the federal government with the prime minister and speaker. It will also get governors in the Sindh and Balochistan provinces.

The two also agreed to form a coalition government in Balochistan with an equal share in the cabinet.

Meanwhile, in a post on X, 71-year-old Khan's party hit out at the newly cemented PPP, PML-N alliance as "PDM 2.0" "PDM 2.0 = #MandateThieves."

The announcement of the alliance came a day after the latest round of talks between the top leaders of the two parties ended inconclusively on Monday as both sides failed to reach a consensus on a power-sharing formula to form a coalition government. (PTI)

## Putin says Russia has no intention of putting nuclear weapons in space, denying US claims

**MOSCOW, Feb 21:** Russian President Vladimir Putin declared on Tuesday that Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space, claiming that the country has only developed space capabilities similar to those of the U.S.

Putin's statement follows the White House confirmation last week that Russia has obtained a "troubling" anti-satellite weapon capability, although such a weapon is not operational yet. White House national security spokesman John Kirby said it would violate the international Outer Space Treaty, but declined to comment on whether the weapon is nuclear-capable.

The treaty signed by more than 130 countries, including Russia, prohibits the deployment of "nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction" in orbit or the stationing of "weapons in outer space in any other manner." The White House said it would look to engage the Russians directly on the concerns.

"Our position is quite clear and transparent: we have always been and remain categorically opposed to the deployment of nuclear weapons in space," Putin said. "Just the opposite, we are urging everyone to adhere to all the agreements that

exist in this sphere."

Speaking during a meeting with his defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, Putin noted that Russia has only developed space capabilities that "other nations, including the U.S. have."

"And they know it," he added.

"We haven't deployed any nuclear weapons in space or any elements of them to use against satellites or to create fields where satellites can't work efficiently," Shoigu said.

Shoigu alleged that the White House could have made the allegations of a new Russian space capability in order to force Congress to support aid for Ukraine and also encourage Moscow to reenter nuclear arms control talks that Russia has suspended amid the tensions with the U.S. over Ukraine.

Putin didn't rule out possible future contacts with the U.S., but reaffirmed his view that Washington's push for Russia's defeat in Ukraine makes them impossible for now.

"The U.S. and the West, for one thing, are calling for Russia's strategic defeat, while, on the other hand, they would like to have a dialogue on strategic stability, pretending that those things aren't connected," he said. "It won't work." (AP)

## Iran accuses Israel of sabotage attack that saw explosions strike natural gas pipeline

**DUBAI, Feb 21:** An Israeli sabotage attack on an Iranian natural gas pipeline caused the multiple explosions that struck it a week ago, Iran's oil minister alleged on Wednesday, further raising tensions between the regional archenemies amid Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The comments by Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji come as Israel has been blamed for a series of attacks targeting Tehran's nuclear programme.

The "explosion of the gas pipeline was an Israeli plot," Owji said, according to Iran's state-run IRNA news agency. "The enemy intended to disturb gas service in the provinces and put people's gas distribution at risk."

He added: "The evil action and plot by the enemy was properly managed." Owji provided no evidence to support his claims.

Israel has not acknowledged carrying out the attack, though it rarely claims its espionage missions abroad. The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a longtime foe of Iran, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The blasts on February 14 hit a natural gas pipeline running from Iran's western Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province up north to cities on the Caspian Sea. The roughly 1,270-kilometre pipeline begins in Asaluyeh, a hub for Iran's offshore South Pars gas field. Owji earlier compared the attack to a series of mysterious and unclaimed assaults on gas pipelines in 2011 — including around the anniversary of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Tehran marked the 45th anniversary of the revolution just days before the pipeline blasts.

Israel has carried out attacks in Iran that have predominantly targeted its nuclear programme. Last week, the head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog warned that Iran is "not entirely transparent" regarding its atomic programme, particularly after an official who once led Tehran's programme announced the Islamic Republic has all the pieces for a weapon "in our hands."

Tensions over Iran's nuclear program comes as groups that Tehran is arming in the region — Lebanon's militant group Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels — have launched attacks targeting Israel over the war in Gaza. The Houthis continue to attack commercial shipping in the region, sparking repeated airstrikes from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Despite a month of US-led airstrikes, the Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks. This week, they seriously damaged a ship in a crucial strait and downed an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, a suspected Israeli strike hit a neighbourhood in Syria's capital, Damascus, where other likely Israeli strikes have targeted members of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. (AP)

## The United States tells Rwanda and Congo they must 'walk back from the brink of war'

**UNITED NATIONS, Feb 21:** The United States told Rwanda and Congo that they "must walk back from the brink of war," the sharpest warning yet of a looming conflict between the African neighbours.

US deputy ambassador Robert Wood delivered the warning at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council called by France as violence has worsened in Congo's mineral-rich east which borders Rwanda.

Wood said Rwanda and Congo, along with "regional actors," should immediately resume diplomatic talks. "These regional diplomatic efforts, not military conflict, are the only path toward a negotiated solution and sustainable peace," he stressed.

The US warning follows the Rwandan Foreign Ministry's rejection on Monday of US calls for the withdrawal of its troops and surface-to-air missile systems from eastern Congo.

The US State Department on Saturday also criticised the worsening violence caused by M23, a "Rwanda-backed" armed group.

The Rwanda ministry's statement said its troops are defending Rwandan territory as Congo carries out a "dramatic military build-up" near the border.

The ministry spoke of threats to Rwandan national security stemming from the presence in Congo of an

armed group whose members include alleged perpetrators of the 1994 genocide in which more than 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them were killed.

The rebel group, known by its initials FDLR, "is fully integrated into" the Congolese army, the statement said. Although Rwanda has long cited a threat posed by FDLR, authorities there had never admitted to a military presence in eastern Congo.

Congolese authorities accuse the central African country of actively supporting M23.

Congo's UN Ambassador Zenon Ngoy Mukongu urged the Security Council to demand that Rwanda withdraw its troops from the country without pre-conditions, and halt all support for M23.

He accused Rwanda's army of illegally occupying part of the eastern province of North Kivu, and of providing support to M23 to destabilize Congo and "to pillage our riches, our wealth in ore and minerals" in the east.

Mukongu told the council that no attack by the FDLR from Congolese territory has been recorded against Rwanda for more than two decades. As for Rwanda's fears of genocide, he said its minority Tutsis hold power over the majority Hutus, and that will never happen in Congo which he said has hundreds of tribes, "and we live together." (AP)

## Syria says an Israeli strike that hit a Damascus residential area killed 2 people

**DAMASCUS, Feb 21:** Israeli strikes hit a neighbourhood of the Syrian capital on Wednesday morning, killing two people and causing material damage, Syria's state TV said.

There was no confirmation of the strikes from Israel.

The Syrian state TV reported that several missiles hit the western neighbourhood of Kfar Sousseh but did not elaborate or say who were the people killed. The pro-government Sham FM radio station said the strike hit a building near an Iranian school.

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based opposition war monitor, said the two killed were inside an apartment but did not give any clues about their identities.

He added that the strike was similar to last month's killing in Beirut of Saleh Aroui, a top official with the militant Palestinian Hamas group.

The strike damaged the fourth floor of a 10-story building, shattered window glass on nearby buildings and also damaged dozens of cars parked in the area. An empty parked bus for the nearby Al-Bawader Private School was also damaged and people were seen rushing to the school to take their children.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled parts of war-torn Syria in recent years.

Israel rarely acknowledges its actions in Syria, but it has said that it targets bases of Iran-allied militant groups, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has sent thousands of fighters to support Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

Last month, an Israeli strike on the Syrian capital's western neighbourhood of Mazzeah destroyed a building used by the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, killing at least five Iranians.

In December, an Israeli airstrike on a suburb of Damascus killed Iranian general Seyyed Razi Mousavi, a longtime adviser of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard in Syria. Israel has also targeted Palestinian and Lebanese operatives in Syria over the past years. (AP)

## South Africa sets May 29 elections that could be the most pivotal since apartheid ended

**CAPE TOWN, Feb 21:** South Africa will hold pivotal national elections May 29 as polls show the ruling African National Congress could lose its majority for the first time since it came to power with the fall of apartheid 30 years ago.

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the date on Tuesday as Africa's most developed economy faces a myriad of problems under his ANC party. They include record unemployment, an electricity crisis that's led to crippling blackouts for homes and businesses, and widespread voter mistrust following a stream of corruption allegations over the years.

Several polls predict that the party once widely admired across the world and led by Nelson Mandela will slip below 50% of the vote for the first time since it won South Africa's first all-race election in 1994 to herald a new democracy following the end of white minority rule.

If it loses its majority, the ANC would need to enter into a coalition to remain in government and keep Ramaphosa — a political protégé of Mandela — as president for a second and final five-year term. South Africa has never had a coalition at national level because of the ANC's dominance.

South Africans vote for a party and not a presidential candidate in a general election. Parties are then allocated places in the



400-seat Parliament according to their share of the vote, and lawmakers elect the president.

The president has always been from the ANC because of its parliamentary majority. The ANC is still expected to win the largest share of the vote, but one poll has it falling dramatically to less than 40%.

South Africa's main opposition party, the centrist Democratic Alliance, is in talks over forming a coalition of opposition parties aimed at forcing the ANC out of government completely, although all those parties would have to increase their share of the vote considerably to collectively get over 50%.

The third biggest party, the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters, is not involved in that opposition coalition but has drawn more support away from the ANC and was the only one of the three main parties to in-

crease its share in the last general election.

Democratic Alliance leader John Steenhuisen said the election date announcement began "a countdown to a historic moment where South Africa has the opportunity to rescue itself from 30 years of ANC failure, corruption, and state capture."

The EFF said the election is "an opportunity for all South Africans to put an end to the misery we have suffered as a nation under the incompetent, corrupt and misguided governance of the ruling party, the ANC."

The vote will be the seventh fully democratic election in South Africa. Before 1994, Black people were not allowed to vote. Ramaphosa announced the election date in a statement from his office.

"Beyond the fulfilment of our constitutional obligation, these upcoming elections are also a celebration of our democratic journey and a determination of the future that we all desire," he said.

"I call on all South Africans to exercise their democratic right to vote and for those who will be campaigning to do so peacefully, within the full observance of the law."

The ANC has won every national election since 1994 by a clear majority, but its support has gradually waned in the last 20 years. (AP)

## South Korea orders striking doctors to return to work as their walkouts burden hospital operations

**SEOUL, Feb 21:** South Korea on Wednesday officially ordered thousands of striking doctors to return to work immediately, a step that could lead to legal punishments if the doctors don't end their walkouts, which have caused numerous cancellations of surgeries and other treatments at hospitals.

About 7,800 medical interns and residents in South Korea have walked off their jobs this week to protest the

government's push to recruit more medical students.

Officials say they want to increase the nationwide medical school admissions cap by 2,000 from next year to brace for South Korea's rapidly aging population.

But doctors' groups have refuted the plan, saying universities aren't ready to offer quality education to that many students. They also say the government's plan would lead to increased public medical

expenses since it lacks measures for how to raise low medical fees in some key professions. The 2,000 additional admissions "is a nonsensical figure," the Korean Intern Residents Association said in a statement Tuesday.

"We hope the government will rethink its plan and formulate a policy that reflects the voices of trainee doctors." Junior doctors typically support senior doctors during surgeries and treat patients in

hospitals. Their joint walkouts have burdened hospital operations.

The Health Ministry said Wednesday that authorities have received 58 public complaints over the walkouts, mostly regarding indefinite delays of surgeries and cancellations of other medical treatments. The government on Wednesday accused the trainee doctors of putting their rights before the lives of patients. (AP)

A judge has set a prison sentence of up to 60 years for parenting advice blogger Ruby Franke

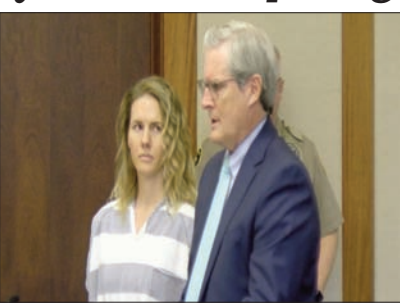
## YouTube mom Ruby Franke apologizes at sentencing in child abuse case

**SALT LAKE CITY, Feb 21:** Ruby Franke, a Utah mother of six who gave parenting advice to millions via a once-popular YouTube channel, shared a tearful apology to her children for physically and emotionally abusing them before a judge delivered a sentence that could put her in prison for years, if not decades.

Franke also claimed that she had been "manipulated" by her fellow YouTube and business partner.

Franke told the judge that she would not argue for a shorter sentence before she stood to thank local police officers, doctors and social workers for being the "angels" who saved her children from her at a time when she says she was under the influence of her business partner, Jodi Hildebrandt. The Utah mental health counselor, who had been hired to work with Franke's youngest son before going into business with her, also received four consecutive prison sentences of one to 15 years.

However, the women will only serve up to 30 years in prison due to a Utah state law that caps the sentence duration for consecutive penalties. The Utah Board of Pardons and Parole will consider their behaviour while incarcerated and determine how



much of that time each will spend behind bars.

"I'll never stop crying for hurting your tender souls," Franke said to her children, who were not present at the sentencing hearing in St. George. "My willingness to sacrifice all for you was masterfully manipulated into something very ugly. I took from you all that was soft and safe and good." Franke, 42, and Hildebrandt, 54, had each pleaded guilty to four counts of aggravated child abuse for trying to convince Franke's two youngest children that they were evil, possessed and needed to be punished to repent. The women were arrested at Hildebrandt's house in the southern Utah city of Ivins last August after Franke's 12-

year-old son escaped through a window and asked a neighbor to call the police, according to a 911 call released by the St. George Police Department.

The boy was thin, covered in wounds and had duct tape around his ankles and wrists. He told investigators that Hildebrandt had put ropes on his limbs and used cayenne pepper and honey to dress his cuts, according to a search warrant.

State prosecuting attorney Eric Clarke described the environment in which Franke and Hildebrandt had kept the kids as "a concentration camp-like setting," a term most strongly associated with the camps established by the Nazis to starve, overwork and execute Jewish people and other minorities across Europe during the Holocaust. While Franke has shown remorse and cooperated with attorneys, Clarke said, Hildebrandt has not and continues to place blame on the children. Hildebrandt's attorney, Douglas Terry, said during the livestreamed hearing that his client is not the remorseless woman she has been portrayed to be and accepts responsibility for her actions.

In a brief statement, Hildebrandt stopped short of apologizing but said she loves the

children and wants them to heal. She reminded Judge John J. Walton that she accepted her plea deal instead of going to trial because she did not want the children to have to relive their trauma by testifying.

The mental health counselor pleaded guilty in December to four of her six counts of aggravated child abuse, and two counts were dismissed as part of her plea deal. Franke also pleaded guilty to four of her six charges and not guilty to two.

Franke and her husband, Kevin Franke, launched "8 Passengers" on YouTube in 2015 and amassed a large following as they documented their experiences raising six children. She later began working with Hildebrandt's counseling company, ConneXions Classroom, offering parenting seminars, launching another YouTube channel and publishing content on their shared Instagram account, "Moms of Truth." Franke admitted in her plea deal to kicking her son while wearing boots, holding his head under water and closing off his mouth and nose with her hands. She and Hildebrandt said they also forced him into hours of physical labor in the summer heat without much food or water, causing dehydration and blistering sunburns. (AP)



# International Mother Language Day celebrated with enthusiasm

Events underscore significance of mother tongues, promoting cultural heritage and multilingualism

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 21:** On the occasion of International Mother Language Day, observed on February 21 every year, Oxford University Press (OUP), a department of the University of Oxford, announced the launch of a bilingual English-Assamese Dictionary. International Mother Language Day, known as Matribhasha Diwas in India, is observed every year to promote the preservation and protection of linguistic and cultural diversity across the world.

An invaluable tool for bilingual learning, the Oxford English-Assamese Dictionary incorporates 34,000 words, phrases, idioms, phrasal verbs, and derivatives along with their detailed translations in Assamese. It also contains over 1,100 synonyms and antonyms and 2,000 keywords to facilitate fluency and vocabulary building in English. The design and presentation of the dictionary illustrate the rich cultural heritage, art, and linguistic identity of the state of Assam, with the cover, designed by experienced illustrator Boski Jain, featuring Assamese embroidery, a traditional craft showcasing the skill and creativity of local artisans.

The Oxford English-Assamese Dictionary has been co-authored by Jyotiprakash Tamuli, retired professor and head, department of Linguistics, Gauhati

University, and Mouchumi Handique, a doctoral research scholar in the department of Linguistics, Gauhati University, where she also teaches postgraduate courses as a guest faculty. The authors are experts in lexicography and word collocations in Assamese language usage.

Launching the new Assamese dictionary, Sumanta Datta, managing director, Oxford University Press India, said, "Investing in lexical content, providing authoritative dictionaries, and continually monitoring language evolution are integral to OUP's mission. The Oxford English-Assamese Dictionary has been launched through evidence-based lexical research initiatives. Our lexicographers scrutinise authentic word usage to ascertain definitions, spellings, and grammatical nuances, offering guidance based on this meticulous research. The updated Oxford English-Assamese Dictionary extensively covers words related to Covid-19, geographical names, and notes on spelling and grammar, aiding students in mastering English words through the support of their mother tongue."

**Our Hojai correspondent adds:** The department of Assamese at Rabindranath Tagore University, located in Hojai, observed International Mother Language Day on Wednesday. International Mother Language Day is an annual celebration



held on February 21 every year since 2000, following UNESCO's guidelines to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and advocate for multilingualism. The students along with the faculty members of the department of Assamese at RTU observed the day in a befitting manner. The significance of the day was briefly described by Akhil Kumar Bora, guest lecturer, who also moderated the entire event. The program was presided over by Devoraj Mili, as-

sistant professor.

Speaking on the occasion, Mili emphasised the importance of knowing one's mother tongue and using it in day-to-day life to preserve it. He stated, "Languages bridge the communication gap. We should endeavour to learn new languages and understand other communities' culture and traditions, as this helps in promoting brotherhood, peace, tranquility, and happiness."

In the program, assistant professor

Manisha Saika, Dr Mallika Deka, and Sayanika Bora (department of Economics) were also present. Teachers along with students recited poems, performed dances, and sang songs, which the audience found interesting. The program concluded with the rendition of the state song 'O mur apunar desh'.

**Our Tezpur correspondent adds:**

"Language is not just a tool for communication but it is one's identity," said Dr Ananda Bormudoi, noted Assamese writer and former head of the department of English at Dibrugarh University, while attending as an invited speaker at Tezpur University on Wednesday. He spoke in a program jointly organised by the departments of Assamese and Hindi to respect the spirit of mother language on International Mother Language Day.

Delivering his insightful lecture, Dr Bormudoi further stated that the mother tongue plays a crucial role in shaping and nurturing an individual's holistic personality. It provides a deep connection to one's cultural and familial roots. Language is intertwined with cultural values and traditions, and therefore, the mother language is crucial in developing a holistic and well-rounded personality, he added.

Inaugurating the day-long program, Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, vice-chancellor of Tezpur University, highlighted the challenge of cultural diversity and pluralism in the age of globalisation. He elaborated that only in democracy is it possible to coexist with pluralism and cultural diversity. He further said that one should not impose any language on others but maintain respect for all languages and cultures. Speaking on the growing influence of English in India, the vice-chancellor said that English should be seen as a window of knowledge. However, one should develop their language by putting extra effort into creating a good literature and knowledge base.

Attending the occasion, Dr Joram Yalam Nabam, assistant professor in the department of Hindi at Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, emphasised that preserving tribal languages is crucial for cultural and linguistic diversity as these languages carry traditional knowledge and unique customs. She stated that preserving tribal languages goes beyond safeguarding words as it is about preserving identity and connection to the land.

During the program, the department of Assamese also launched their e-magazine 'Kisholoy', and a book titled 'Xorise Xorok Akou Fulibo', written by Luit Kiran Das, a student of the department of Assamese, was released.

## Amendment bills regarding VDOs, municipal cadres introduced in Assam assembly

**GUWAHATI, Feb 21:** The state government on Wednesday introduced a new legislation aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of village defence organisations (VDO) to address the evolving socio-economic and demographic challenges.

The Assam Village Defence Organisation (Amendment) Bill, 2024 seeks to amend relevant sections of the original Act of 1966 pertaining to definition, duties and functions of the VDOs.

The Bill was introduced by Parliamentary Affairs minister Pijush Hazarika, on behalf of chief minister Himanta Biswa



Sarma who also holds the home and political departments.

The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill said it seeks

to re-orient the VDOs to make them "responsive to the current changing scenario and to keep pace with new challenges faced by socio-economic and

demographic changes".

The Assam Municipal (Amendment) Bill, 2024 was also introduced in the House by Housing and Urban Affairs minister Ashok Singhal.

It seeks to amend the original Act of 1956 for defining the roles and responsibilities of the three state municipal cadres.

The proposed amendment will broadly address the power of municipalities for appointment of staff, power of the state government over the municipal employees and roles and responsibilities of the Urban Engineering Service and Urban Financial Service, among others. (PTI)

### OBITUARY

**O**ctogenarian Akanmai Devi (Mahanta), a retired BDO, writer, and noted social and cultural activist of the Milanpur area in Nagaon, passed away on Tuesday night at her residence due to age-related ailments. She was 82.

Born in 1942 at Batadroba Shoulguri Satra in Nagaon district, she began her career as a district women welfare officer in Jorhat in 1976 and served in various capacities. She retired from her position as a block development officer of Pub Kaliabor Development Block in 2000. Unfortunately, despite her retirement, she did not receive any benefits such as pension or gratuity from the government to date due to some issues with her service book.

Akanmai Devi (Mahanta) was actively associated with several socio-cultural and literary organisations until her passing.

She is survived by two sons, daughters-in-law, and a host of relatives.

Several organisations and dignitaries of the small town expressed grief over her demise and paid tributes to her.

Akanmai Devi (Mahanta) was the mother of senior police official and noted Assamese novelist cum storyteller SP Mugdhajyoti Mahanta and social activist and businessman Minku Mahanta.

## AGVB to join nationwide cease work protest

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 21:** Assam Gramin Vikash Bank (AGVB) is set to stage a cease-work protest on Friday in opposition to the privatisation of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and in support of the formation of the National Rural Bank of India (NRBI) through the amalgamation of all RRBs nationwide.

The All India Regional Rural Bank Employees Association (AIRRBEA) has called for a nationwide bank strike on the same day.

The AIRRBEA, as the apex union body of RRBs, is demanding proper manpower planning, amendments to service rules, regularisation of part-time workers, and the correct implementation of pension parity and computer increment.

Both the Assam Gramin Vikash Bank Officers' Association (AGVBOA) and the Assam Gramin Vikash Bank Employees Association (AGVBEA), as constituents of AIRRBEA, have decided to participate in the strike.

Consequently, all offices and branches of the Assam Gramin Vikash Bank will remain closed on Friday.

This announcement was made in a press release by AGVBOA general secretary Nupur Borah and AGVBEA general secretary Samiran Medhi.

### OBITUARY



**B**enudhor Gogoi, a resident of Bora Chook, Nagsankar, and junior inspector at the Office of the Deputy Registrar of Co-operative Societies (DRCS) under Biswanath district, breathed his last on Wednesday due to prolonged illness at a hospital in Guwahati while undergoing treatment. He was 54. Gogoi was the founder headmaster of Nagsankar Adarsha Girls' HS. He had served in the school for long and left the school as he got a government job in the department of Co-operative Societies. He was closely associated with many socio-cultural organisations of the greater Nagsankar area. His untimely demise has cast a pall of gloom in the area. Organisations and individuals paid rich tributes in front of the mortal remains. He leaves behind his wife, a daughter along with a host of relatives.

## Tezpur University hosts landmark national workshop for academic leaders

Collaboration with NIEPA brings together academic leaders from across NE India

HT Correspondent

**TEZPUR, Feb 21:** "The proliferation of higher education in our country is a sheer indicator of progress and development. Quality higher education, apart from other gains, may yield economic gains," Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, vice chancellor of Tezpur University, stated while inaugurating the day-long national workshop on 'Leadership Development for Deans of Faculty and Heads of Departments of Universities in North-East India' on Wednesday. The workshop was organised by Tezpur University in collaboration with the Department of Higher and Professional Education, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi.

The workshop, the first of its kind in North East India, was organised by the department of Education at the Conference Hall, department of Education. Prof Sudhanshu Bhushan, programme director and head of the department of Higher and Professional Education, NIEPA, New Delhi, and Prof Debabrata Das, vice-chancellor of Assam Rajiv Gandhi University of Cooperative Management, were present on the occasion as resource persons.

In his inaugural speech, Prof Singh emphasised that the importance of higher education has been globally acknowledged, and higher educational institutions must offer

education through principles of access, equity, and quality.

Applauding the initiative of Tezpur University, Prof Sudhanshu Bhushan said that the workshop has brought together distinguished domain experts and academicians to share insights, experiences, and best practices in academic leadership. He remarked, "The objective of the workshop is to empower the academic leadership of North-Eastern universities, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the challenges and opportunities in the dynamic landscape of higher education." He further emphasised that with the arrival of NEP, the role of deans and heads of educational institutions in implementing the policy will be crucial.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof Debabrata Das pointed out that the number of universities and colleges is increasing in India. However, the proliferation is done with certain goals and transformation. He cautioned that without quality, educational institutions will only produce mediocrity. Prof Das further added that the structure of higher education will go through changes in the near future. Around 35 academic leaders from different states of the north-east, such as Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, and Manipur, are participating in this workshop, reflecting true representation.

## BTR Trade Facilitation Fair kickstarts

Event aims to empower local communities & promote innovative renewable energy



HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 21:** The two-day Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Trade Facilitation Fair for Sustainable Energy and Livelihood Technologies began on Wednesday at the Green Field, Bodofa Nwgrw in Kokrajhar. The event, organised by the Bodoland Territorial Council in collaboration with Atal Incubation Centre (AIC)-

SELCO Foundation, showcased over 35 sustainable energy driven livelihood enterprises by small and micro-enterprises, demonstrating how these solutions enhance livelihood resilience, diversify incomes, and mitigate climate change.

Remarkably, the event aims to empower local communities through sustainable energy solutions, featuring innovative, decen-

tralised renewable energy solutions during the two-day event.

BTR executive member, Wilson Hasda, emphasised the mobilisation of over 10,000 participants from across the districts of the Bodoland region.

"It's a joyous occasion to inaugurate and attend the 'Bodoland Territorial Region Trade Facilitation Fair' for sustainable development goals, for sustainable energy and livelihood technologies at Green field, Kokrajhar. This event, under the leadership and guidance of CEM Pramod Boro, aims to empower local communities through sustainable energy solutions. Over the course of two days, we'll showcase innovative, decentralised renewable energy solutions," said Hasda.

Among others, BTR executive members Reoreoa Narzihary, Arup Kumar Dey, Kokrajhar Municipality Board chairperson Pratibha Brahma, SELCO Foundation chief executive officer Harish Hande, Padmashree Sarbeswar Basumatary were prominent attendees at the event.

ASSAM RIFLES PUBLIC SCHOOL (HIGH). DIPHU (ASSAM) (CBSE AFFILIATED SCHOOL) VACANCY FOR TEACHERS/NON-TEACHING STAFF		
1. Welk interview will be conducted on 28 <sup>th</sup> and 29 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2024 at ARTC&S. Diphu to fill up the following vacancies in Assam Rifles Public School (High), Diphu, Assam.-		
POST	VACANCIES	QUALIFICATION
Principal	01	(i) Post Graduate from recognized university (ii) M.Ed/ B.Ed (iii) 05 Years Teaching Experience
TGT (Science/Bio)	01	(i) Graduate in respective subject ( Post Graduate will be preferred)
TGT (Science/ Phy & Chem)		(ii) B.Ed from recognized university will be preferred.
TGT (Hindi)	01	
TGT (English)	01	
TGT (Maths)	01	
TGT (Social Science)	01	
TGT Computer	01	(i) B.Sc Computer Science/ BCA/ Bachelor of Information Technology OR Graduate Degree in any subject with mathematics as a subject and 3 years Diploma in Computer Engineering/ IT from an Institution recognized by AICTE/ University OR Graduate Degree in any subject with mathematics as a subject and one year Diploma in Computer Engineering/ IT from an Institution recognized by AICTE/ University OR 'A' level from DOEACC AND (ii) Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) from an institute recognized by NCTE will be preferred.
PRT	08	(i) Graduation. (ii) B.Ed/JBT/ETT/Similar Qualification.
PRT (Computer)	01	(i) Graduation. (ii) PG Diploma/Diploma in Computers.
Art Teacher	01	(i) Higher Secondary/ Intermediate /Senior Secondary examination with minimum 4 years full time diploma in painting/ fine arts from a recognized institute OR (ii) Graduate with Drawing and painting/ Art/ Fine Art with minimum two years full time diploma from a recognized institute (iii) M A in Drawing and Painting/ Fine Art from a recognized University
Music Teacher	01	(i) Graduate in with Music from a recognized university OR (ii) The New Diploma/ Degrees awarded by the concerned agencies institutions
PT Teacher	01	(i) Bachelor of Physical Education (B.P.Ed) Four Years Degree Course OR (ii) Three Years Gradation+ One Year B.P. Ed Diploma OR (iii) B Sc Physical Education, Health Education & Sports + One Year B.P.Ed Diploma
Counselor	01	(i) Graduate/Post Graduate in psychology OR (ii) Post Graduate in Child Development OR (iii) Graduate/Post Graduate with Diploma in Career Guidance and Counseling
Clerk	01	(i) Graduate or 1 year experience in a clerical work /minimum 1 year in Computer diploma (ii) Typing with minimum speed of 40 WPM (iii) Knowledge of Computer MS Office (speed 8000 key depression per hour) (iv) Basic knowledge of tally work
Maid	04	(i) VIII th Pass
Peon Cum Gardener	01	(i) VIII th Pass.
2. Candidates who are willing to work in Assam Rifles Public School (High), Diphu only to apply. Application with mobile number of the candidates and copy of Aadhar card must be submitted by hand on or before 28 and 29 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2024 at the following address - OIC Assam Rifles Public School (High), Diphu ARTC&S Karbi Anglong, Assam, PIN 782460		
3. For any queries, please contact 9678756126/ 9394601209 (School NCO) or email at principalhighschool@diphu@gmail.com		
4. All expenses will be borne by the candidates themselves.		
5. Pay and perks will be as per prevailing scales in comparable institutions.		
Note: All candidates are required to carry PAN Card /UID or any other valid Identity Card & original certificate for educational qualification.		



## Veterinary hospital to be set up in Upper Shillong

**SHILLONG, Feb 21:** Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma has informed that a state veterinary hospital will be set up at Upper Shillong.

"We have already sent a proposal of ₹ 30 crore under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DeVINE)," Sangma said in his reply on Tuesday.

Earlier leader of opposition Ronnie V Lyngdoh had requested the state minister in-charge of animal husbandry and veterinary, AL Hek to take up with the Prime Minister for setting up of veterinary hospitals in the state since he is also a senior BJP leader from Meghalaya.

He said that the purpose of the government to help the farmers by distribution of piglets will be defeated if measures are not taken to prevent deaths of pigs in the state.

Congress legislator from Mawhati, Charles Marmgar also requested the state government to consider giving compensation to farmers, who have lost their pigs.

To this, Hek said that no compensation is being provided to the farmers since they can claim insurance at ₹ 4,000 per pig. (NNN)

*Mother tongues of all the ethnic tribes of Tripura should be promoted, says chief minister*

## Tripura govt focusing on promotion of multilingual edu system: CM

**AGARTALA, Feb 21:** Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Wednesday said his government is focusing on the development of a multilingual education system in accordance with the NEP-2020.

He also stressed on the need to promote the mother tongue of all the ethnic tribes of the northeastern state.

Students now have an opportunity to study in eight tribal languages, including Kokborok in schools.

"The National Education Policy 2020 has laid emphasis on the promotion of a multilingual education system in the country. Taking a cue from the Prime Minister's focus points, the BJP-IPFT government is working on the same theme by adopting various steps", Saha said during a programme organised on the occasion of the International Mother



Language Day at Rabindra Bhavan in Agartala.

The government is committed to honour all languages, the chief minister said.

"Now, kokborok, one of the major languages in the northeastern state, has been introduced in 1,296 primary schools, 115 Madhyamik (secondary) schools and

65 higher secondary schools," he said.

The Chakma language has also been introduced in 123 schools, and besides, the students can also study in several other languages like Halam, Kuki, Mizo, Manipuri and Garo at the school level, he said.

"In Tripura, education in Kokborok and Mizo languages is available in schools up to the 12th standard. Job aspirants can write their papers in the Kokborok in competitive exams, like Teachers' Eligibility Test (TET) and Tripura Judicial Service," he said.

Earlier, a colourful rally was organised in the city to mark the International Mother Language Day.

The International Mother Language Day is observed every year on February 21 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. (PTI)

## Manipur records dip in number of candidates for class 12 board exams

**IMPHAL, Feb 21:** Amid ethnic violence, the number of students appearing for Class 12 state board examinations in Manipur this year has dropped by around 5,000 to over 31,000, an official said on Wednesday. Last year, more than 36,000 students appeared for the Council of Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate Exams (COHSEM) across 120 centres in the state, he said.



"The number of students and examination centres has decreased this year as compared to last year due to the prevailing law and order situation," COHSEM chairman T Ojit Singh said.

Around 31,000 students are appearing for the council's examinations from Wednesday across 111 centres, he said.

"This year's examinations were originally scheduled to be conducted at 114 centres but three schools - one each in Kakching, Imphal East and Chakpikarong have been removed from the list as a result of the prevailing situation in outlying areas of hills and valley districts," he said.

"Students who were supposed to appear for the exams in the three schools have been asked to report at other centres," the official said.

Of the 111 centres, 75 are in six valley districts and the remaining 36 are in the hills, Singh said.

The number of students appearing for the exams in the science stream is 22, 631 and that of arts stream is 8,100.

Altogether 70 flying squads have been instituted to check the use of unfair means during the exams, he added. (PTI)

## Japanese agency extends ₹ 564 cr for Kohima medical college hospital

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Feb 21:** The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has extended an official development assistance (ODA) loan of approximately ₹ 564 crore (10,008 million Japanese Yen) to support the establishment of the medical college hospital (MCH) at the Nagaland Institute of Medical Sciences and Research in Kohima.

The ODA loan agreement was signed by Vikas Sheel, additional secretary of the department of economic affairs, Union ministry of finance and chief representative of JICA India, SAITO Mitsunori. The loan was approved underscoring Japan's commitment to promoting healthcare infrastructure and medical education in India.

Speaking on this occasion, Mitsunori said, "This project holds immense significance in addressing the healthcare needs of Nagaland. It is a dedicated step to further JICA's commitment to supporting India's healthcare sector and promoting universal access to quality healthcare services across the country."

The project, with a cooperation period from February 2024 to October 2035, will



be executed in close collaboration with the Nagaland Institute of Medical Sciences and Research and other relevant stakeholders.

The project aims to address the pressing healthcare challenges faced by Nagaland, a state with a population of approximately 1.98 million. Nagaland currently ranks low in terms of healthcare access and quality, with limited medical infrastructure and a shortage of trained medical personnel.

The project endeavours to achieve the establishment of tertiary health services, enhancement of medical education and access to healthcare for all.

The project will develop a 400-bed MCH in Kohima to provide tertiary-level medical services to the residents of the state.

Through clinical-based education, including the

training of physicians and specialists, it will help strengthen the medical human resource development system, thereby contributing to the promotion of universal health coverage (UHC) in the region. Further, by establishing the MCH in the state capital, the project seeks to improve access to quality healthcare services, particularly for underserved populations in Nagaland.

The project aligns with the central government's priority to reduce regional disparities and promote socio-economic development in the Northeast by improving healthcare infrastructure and medical education. It also aligns with Japan's assistance policy for the country, which emphasises enhancing connectivity and supporting sustainable and inclusive growth.

## Meghalaya govt to examine minimum support price of areca nut

**SHILLONG, Feb 21:** Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma has assured that the government will examine the proposal for coming up with a minimum support price for areca nut.

Sangma however, said that the value of processed areca nut is almost 10 times the

price. Therefore, value addition is the only way to move forward.

He said this while replying to a question raised by UDP legislator from Amilarem, Lakhmen Rymbui, who on Tuesday requested the state government to consider a minimum support price for areca-nut. (NNN)

## Manipur lawyers protest against security forces using force on women

**IMPHAL, Feb 21:** Manipur lawyers on Wednesday staged a sit-in in front of the Cheirap court complex in Imphal West district to protest against the alleged excessive use of force on women protesters by security personnel there a day ago.

On Tuesday, security forces had allegedly fired tear gas shells inside the Cheirap court complex on a large number of women protesting against the arrest of six persons in connection with an arms looting case. The police had brought the accused to the court to seek further remand.

"We strongly condemn the excessive use of force by RAF against women protesters by using electric baton sticks and other lethal weapons," the president of All Manipur Bar Association, Puyam Tomcha, told reporters.

As a mark of protest, people abstained from discharging their duties in courts today," he said.

We appeal to all, including the security forces, to respect the sanctity of the court and not to indulge in violence, Puyam added.

The protesting lawyers of the Manipur High Court and local courts also demanded an inquiry into the incident headed by a retired judge. (PTI)

## Khelo India mascot takes tour

**KOHIMA, Feb 21:** In the light of Khelo India University Games 2023, and as part of the city activation and pre-event awareness for the wrestling to be held at IG stadium Kohima from February 22 to 26, the mascot toured at various sites starting from Merima to Thizama village.

The Mascot Tour will continue at different location within the Kohima on February 21. (NNN)

## DRF-800 installed at RIMS

**IMPHAL, Feb 21:** "Multipurpose Digital Radiography Fluoroscopy System (DRF-800)" was installed recently at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal.

The DRF-800 installed at the department of Radiodiagnosis of the Centrally-run institute was inaugurated with a simple ceremony held at the institute's complex in Imphal's Lamphelpat.

Talking to the reporters, head of department of Radiodiagnosis, RIMS, Dr Soibam Subhaschandra said that this an advanced machine.

He said that the newly installed machine will broadly assist in radiological related investigation and this would provide three-dimensional X-ray on different parts of human body while predicting any medical issue in liver, pancreas and fertility test in gynaecology.

Furthermore, it will facilitate specialized procedures such as Barium swallow, Barium meal, Barium enema, urology and gynaecological investigations, Myelography, as well as interventional procedures like Endoscopy, Catheter Placement, Biopsy, Lumbar Puncture, among others, he added.

The machine will surely assist in providing results of complicated medical problems which in turn will help a lot in



saving precious lives, he hoped.

Addressing the gathering after formally inaugurating the new state-in-art, RIMS director Prof G Sunil Kumar Sharma said that it was a pride moment for the institute for being the pioneer in installing such advanced facilities in the government sector of the country.

He said that the cutting-edge system, equipped with artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities, offers automatic positioning and image generation, making it highly efficient and user-friendly.

The machine is capable of conducting radiography for the entire leg spine and processing three-dimensional X-rays for various body positions, he added.

This multipurpose functionality ma-

chine allows a wide range of investigations to be conducted simultaneously, while also significantly reducing radiation emissions and exposure, he added.

The director hoped that the introduction of the advanced state-of-art with AI positioning will greatly benefit the public, ensuring precise and efficient diagnostic procedures.

He remarked that the installation of the Multipurpose Digital Radiography Fluoroscopy System (DRF-800) marked a proud moment for the RIMS.

It will add another feather in the commitment of RIMS hospital making a more patient-friendly and technologically advanced healthcare sector in the region. (NNN)

## Meghalaya Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2024 rejected



**SHILLONG, Feb 21:** The Meghalaya Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2024 introduced by the opposition Voice of the People Party (VPP) legislator from North Shillong Adelbert Nongrum was rejected through voice vote in the Assembly recently.

"The Nos it, the motion is not carried and leave to introduce the Bill is not granted. The Bill is therefore rejected by the House," Assembly Speaker Thomas A Sangma said after the Bill was put to vote.

Earlier while introducing the Bill, Nongrum said that the amendment to the Lokayukta Act, 2021 has diluted the effective functioning of Lokayukta in the state, by making radical changes to the strength of Lokayukta members and composition of judicial benches that it no longer bears resemblance to what was originally in the principal enactment.

"By allowing option of a single member body of just the chairperson alone, and without the mandatory appointment of judicial member(s) in what is a statutorily a judicial body, and to hear and decide cases of corruption by a single member bench, the Amendment Act of 2021 has practically weakened the role of the Lokayukta in the state," he said.

He further alleged that the present Meghalaya Lokayukta Act has been robbed of the essential provisions which flowed from the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act of Parliament, and mirrored not just the objective but the provisions as well.

Nongrum said that the Private Members' Bill seek to protect and strengthen the institution of Lokayukta in the state, so as to effectively deal with rising cases of corruption by public functionaries, to re-enact the essential provisions of the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, that were deleted and substituted by the Amendment Act of 2021 and to amend the existing Meghalaya Lokayukta Act for giving it more teeth and more effectiveness that it deserves.

"Therefore, I seek to introduce my Private Members' Bill namely the Meghalaya Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2024. What the people of the state are expecting from this august house today, is a voice in support of Lokayukta, and a voice against the virus of corruption," he said. (NNN)

## Focused on making Arunachal an attractive investment destination: Rijiju

**ITANAGAR, Feb 21:** Union earth sciences minister Kiren Rijiju has emphasised his commitment to making Arunachal Pradesh an appealing investment destination in the coming years.

Participating in a Deevan Lekhan Abhiyaan (wall painting) programme in Itanagar on Tuesday, the Union minister expressed his determination to double development activities and work towards increasing the GDP of the state.

The event was organised by the BJP capital unit at Nyokum Lapang area here.

The minister, who drew a lotus, the party's symbol as a part of the national campaign, said the state government led by chief minister Pema Khandu is working for the all-round development of the state with the blessings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

BJP state secretary and convener of the programme, Taring Tiri said the initiative aimed to encourage party karyakartas for a collective commitment to the party's goals.

He said the wall painting programme is inclusive in nature.

Tiri suggested that individuals who are not proficient in painting could still contribute by creating lotus symbols and inscribing slogans at various locations.

The main objective of this initiative is to energise party workers and cultivate a sense of unity in anticipation of the forthcoming electoral challenges.

Several party leaders including Itanagar MLA Techhi Kaso and BJP spokesperson Techhi Necha, attended the event among others, a party communique informed here on Wednesday. (PTI)



## Arunachal body promoting mountaineering conferred State Awards

*Arunachal Governor conferred State Awards, Chief Minister's Award for excellence in public administration to individuals, organizations, government departments*

**ITANAGAR, Feb 21:** A body promoting mountaineering and a destitute shelter home were among several organisations of Arunachal Pradesh that were conferred the State Awards on Wednesday.

The state health and family welfare department was also awarded for supplying medicines via drones in inaccessible areas of the hilly northeastern state during a function held at Raj Bhavan in Itanagar.

Oju Welfare Association chairperson, Ratan Anya also received the award for her philanthropic services to orphans and destitute people in the state through her organisation.

Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik conferred the State Awards and Chief Minister's Award for excellence in public administration to individuals, organisations and government departments.

Chief minister Pema Khandu, assembly speaker Pasang Dorjee Sona and other dignitaries attended the event.

The Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (AR-SRLM), Rama Krishna Mission, Deepak Nabam Living



Home, the National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sports (NIMAS) and Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya Arunachal Pradesh Trust were the organisations that were awarded with the State Gold Medals.

NIMAS has started the 'Har Shikhar Tiranga' mission, an endeavour of its Director Col Ranveer Singh Jamwal, in which a team of the institute scales the highest peaks of all 28 states of the country and hoists the national flag at each summit.

Border affairs secretary Rajeev Takur, senior medical of-

ficer of Arunachal Bhavan in New Delhi, S K Singh and chairperson of Oju Welfare Association, Ratan Anya were among the individuals who also got the gold medal.

In the Chief Minister's Award for excellence in public administration, the awardees include the state rural development department for the rural livelihood mission, the state water resources department for its multipurpose water conservation project and the deputy commissioner's office of Lower Dibang Valley district for improving maternal and child health.

As many as 18 individuals including a women's organisation, were among the State Silver Medal awardees for the year 2023.

The Governor congratulated the awardees and conveyed his good wishes to them. He said that the deeds of the awardees will inspire their peers and other citizens in the state.

"Honoured to be among the achievers today who were awarded with the State Gold and Silver medals including Chief Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration," Pema Khandu said in a post on X. (PTI)

No. GDB/Cat/99/2021-22/3065

### SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Date- 21/02/2024

The Block Development Officer, Goreswar Development Block, Dist-Tamulpur, BTC, Assam invites bid affixing non-refundable Court fee Stamp of Rs.8.25(Rupees Eight and Twenty Five Paise) only from the approved and eligible contractor/ Firm (Class I, Class II or Class III category) registered with Assam PWD (R&B/Irrigation) for the following work of Cultural Affairs Deptt., BTC Kokrajhar under SOPD fund for the year 2023-24. Tender Box will be available for dropping tender in the office of the Block Development Officer, Goreswar Development Block up to 2.00 PM on 15/03/2024 (if any holidays or Bandh falls then the subsequent day) and the tender box will be opened at the same day on 3.00 PM in same office.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Tender value (In Lakh)	Time of Completion	Tender Cost & Earnest Money & Date of Tender
1	Construction of Jwirlao Nileswar Brahma Jousang at Khwtdwnguri Bathou Thansali, Gurnow, Goreswar	10.00	180 days from the date of issue of final work order.	1.Tender cost @ 0.03% of A/A amount to be pledged by Bank draft in favour of Principal Secretary, BTC. 2.Earnest money @2% (In case of Reserved category 1%) of estimated value to be pledged by demand draft/FDR in favour of B.D.O Goreswar Development Block

Details NIT may be seen at Office of The Block Development Officer, Goreswar Development Block, Goreswar, Dist- Tamulpur.

Sd/-

Block Development Officer  
Goreswar Development Block,  
Goreswar

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1440



# PM Modi to visit Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh today

**NEW DELHI, Feb 21:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh on February 22 and 23 during which he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 61,000 crore in the two states.

While Modi will inaugurate, lay the foundation stone and initiate work commencement of multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 48,000 crore in Gujarat, he will also launch and inaugurate projects worth over ₹ 13,000 crore for transforming Varanasi and its adjoining areas, according to a statement released by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on Wednesday.

On February 22 (Thursday), at around 10.45 am in Ahmedabad, Modi will participate in the golden jubilee celebration of the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF).

At around 12.45 pm, the prime minister will reach Mahesana and perform 'pooja' and 'darshan' at the Valinath Mahadev Temple. Around 1 pm, he will participate in a public function in Tarabh, Mahesana, where he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 8,350 crore.

At around 4.15 pm, the prime minister will reach Navsari, where he will inaugurate, lay the foundation stone and initiate work commencement of multiple development projects worth about ₹ 17,500 crore.

At around 6.15 pm, Modi will visit the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station and dedicate to the nation two new Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs).

On February 23 (Friday), Modi will participate in a programme for prize distribution to the winners of



Sansad Sanskrit Pratiyogita at Swatantra Sabhagar, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

At 11.15 am, the prime minister will perform 'pooja' and 'darshan' at Sant Guru Ravidas Janmasthan. At 11.30 am, the prime minister will attend a public function commemorating the 647th birth anniversary of Sant Guru Ravidas.

In the afternoon, Prime Minister Modi will attend a public function where he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 13,000 crore in Varanasi.

At the two public functions in Gujarat's Mahesana and Navsari, the prime minister will dedicate to nation and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects that will encompass important sectors such as road, rail, energy, health, Internet connectivity, urban development, water supply and tourism, among others, in districts such as Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad, Banaskantha, Anand, Mahesana, Kachchh, Kheda, Bharuch, Tapi, Vadodra, Surat, Navsari, Panchmahal, Valsad, and Narmada.

At a public function in Tarabh,

Mahesana, the prime minister will dedicate to the nation important projects, including Bharat Net Phase-II - Gujarat Fibre Grid Network Limited, which will provide high-speed Internet to more than 8,000 gram panchayats, multiple projects for rail line doubling, gauge conversion, new broad-gauge line in Mahesana and Banaskantha districts, and multiple road projects.

The PMO statement also said that since 2014, Modi has focused on transforming Varanasi and its adjoining areas by initiating a number of development projects catering to important sectors such as road, rail, aviation, tourism, education, health, drinking water, urban development and sanitation.

Taking another step in this direction, the prime minister will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 13,000 crore in Varanasi.

To further enhance Varanasi's road connectivity, Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple road projects, including four-laning of the Ghargra-Bridge-Varanasi section of National Highway

233 and four-laning of the Sultanpur-Varanasi section of National Highway 56.

To provide impetus to industrial development in the region, the prime minister will also inaugurate an HPCL LPG bottling plant in Sewapuri, Banas Kashi Sankul milk processing unit at UPSIDA Agro Park Karkhiyaon, various infrastructure work at the UPSIDA Agro Park, Karkhiyaon, and silk fabric printing common facility centre for weavers.

Providing impetus to the famous textile sector of Varanasi, Modi will lay the foundation stone of a National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIIFT) in Varanasi. The new institute will strengthen the education and training infrastructure of the textile sector, the statement said.

Augmenting the health infrastructure in Varanasi, the prime minister will lay the foundation stone of a new medical college. He will also lay the foundation stone of the National Centre of Ageing at Banaras Hindu University. The prime minister will also inaugurate the Siga Sports Stadium Phase-I and District Rifle Shooting Range, a step towards strengthening the sports infrastructure in the city.

At the Sant Guru Ravidas Janmasthan temple at Seer Govardhanpur near the Banaras Hindu University, the prime minister will inaugurate a newly-installed statue of Sant Ravidas in adjoining Ravidas Park.

He will inaugurate various development works around Sant Ravidas Janmasthan, worth about ₹ 32 crore, and lay the foundation stone for Sant Ravidas Museum and beautification of the park, worth about ₹ 62 crore. (PTI)

## 'Cryogenic engine for Gaganyaan missions now human-rated'

**BENGALURU, Feb 21:** ISRO has accomplished a major milestone in the human rating of its CE20 cryogenic engine that powers the cryogenic stage of the human-rated LVM3 launch vehicle for Gaganyaan human spaceflight missions, with the completion of the final round of ground qualification tests. "ISRO's CE20 cryogenic engine is now human-rated for Gaganyaan missions," the space agency said on "X" on Wednesday.

Rigorous testing demonstrates the engine's mettle, it said, adding the CE20 engine identified for the first uncrewed flight LVM3 G1 also went through acceptance tests.

The February 13 final test was the seventh of a series of vacuum ignition tests carried out at the High Altitude Test Facility at ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri, to simulate flight conditions, it said. The ground qualification tests for the human rating of the CE20 engine involved life demonstration tests, endurance tests and performance assessment under nominal operating conditions as well as off-nominal conditions with respect to thrust, mixture ratio and propellant tank pressure, it said.

All the ground qualification tests of the CE20 engine for the Gaganyaan programme have been successfully completed, ISRO said. In order to qualify the CE20 engine for human rating standards, four engines have undergone 39 hot firing tests under different operating conditions for a cumulative duration of 8,810 seconds against the minimum human rating qualification standard requirement of 6,350 seconds, according to ISRO. (PTI)

was rejected because of a slight Gujarati accent.

The tryst with fame came a few years later. In 1952, then information and broadcasting minister B V Keskar banned Hindi film songs from AIR.

Around that time, Radio Ceylon, which was founded by the British, started becoming popular for its programmes in English, Tamil and Hindi. Broadcast from Colombo, Radio Ceylon began its journey in 1949.

American businessman Daniel Molina saw an opportunity there and established his company, Radio Advertising Services in Mumbai. He hired Sayani's elder brother, former AIR broadcaster Hamid Sayani, to run Radio Ceylon's production arm. Hamid Sayani and Molina were keen to produce a programme on Hindi film songs and the elder Sayani zeroed in on his young brother.

The rest, as they say, is history. Sayani became a radio presenter in Hindi with Binaca Geetmala, a programme of Hindi film songs sponsored by the toothpaste brand, in December 1952 and never looked back.

The first of its kind show, it ran for 42 years to massive popularity. Millions in different parts of India would tune in on Wednesday to listen to Sayani in his inimitable voice introducing songs from Hindi cinema.

AIR tried to counter the programmes popularity by introducing Vividh Bharti in 1957 but Sayani's loyal fanbase remained intact through change in stations and sponsors. (PTI)



bond with his listeners. Saddened by his passing away, Condolences to his family, admirers and all radio lovers. May his soul rest in peace," the PM posted on X.

Sayani's death was also mourned by politicians like TMC leader Derek O'Brien and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh.

"Ameen Sayani left us today to join The Great Broadcaster in The Sky," O'Brien posted on X.

Ramesh said Sayani's voice was a part of his childhood, teen and youth years.

"Ameen Sayani, an iconic radio personality, belonged to a distinguished family of nationalists who epitomised the values of an India that seems to be fast vanishing," Ramesh posted.

Sayani had a creative flair since childhood and started writing for his mother's fortnightly journal Rehbar when he was just 13, which was when he became a proficient broadcaster in English and started participating in children's programmes on the English service of All India Radio Bombay.

He later left Bombay to study in Gwalior. When he returned to Bombay post Independence, he auditioned for AIR's Hindi service but

## Radio's most recognised voice Ameen Sayani dies in Mumbai

**MUMBAI, Feb 21:** Ameen Sayani, radio's most recognised voice for millions of Indians who tuned into Binaca Geetmala every week, has died. He was 91.

Sayani suffered a heart attack Tuesday evening and was taken to a hospital in south Mumbai but could not be saved, his son Rajil told PTI. "He passed away last night of a heart attack at the H N Reliance hospital. He was rushed to the hospital last evening around 6 pm after he complained of chest pain. They tried to revive him but he passed away around 7 pm," Rajil said.

The last rites will be held on Thursday.

"Namaste behno aur bhaiyo, main aapka dost Ameen Sayani bol raha hoon". The familiar greeting and the instantly identifiable voice coasted on airwaves into countless homes every Wednesday on Radio Ceylon from 1952 to 1988, still evoking strong nostalgia amongst listeners. After 1988, Binaca Geetmala moved to All India Radio's Vividh Bharti where it ruled the charts till 1994.

Sayani, who was born in Mumbai in a multilingual family on December 21, 1932, compered, presented and voiced over 50,000 shows in 42 years. Condoling Sayani's death, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the iconic radio presenter "nurtured a very special bond with his listeners".

"Shri Ameen Sayani Ji's golden voice on the airwaves had a charm and warmth that endeared him to people across generations. Through his work, he played an important role in revolutionising Indian broadcasting and nurtured a very special

## No fund crunch in South Asian University, will open new campuses in SAARC countries: SAU president

**NEW DELHI, Feb 21:** The South Asian University has started receiving funds from the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), a step that will help the varsity to bounce back from its financial crisis, SAU president KK Aggarwal said.

In an interview with PTI, Aggarwal said that the university, under his tenure, will focus on controlling the expenditure by attracting more students without scholarships and designing a rational salary structure for teachers.

"The university is supposed to be funded by all the member countries. Others were not paying their share for quite some time. I have spoken to all of them and by and large, their response is that now that things have started improving we are ready to pay," Aggarwal said.

The SAU had been functioning without a regular president for nearly four years and the post was filled in December last year.

In the absence of a regular man-

agement and lack of funding by the seven SAARC countries other than India, the university was facing extreme financial constraints, Aggarwal said.

"If an institute remains headless for that much time it's obvious that it will suffer," Aggarwal said while stating that the governments of all the representative countries are now determined to run the university in a proper manner.

"We will work on limiting the number of fellowships and scholarships instead of everybody getting it. So a combination of some such things will help us to come to realistic budgets. We will also probably design a more rational salary structure to ensure that the members are not burdened," he added. Excluding India, together the seven SAARC countries -- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka -- contribute 43 per cent of the total funding to the international institute.

India provides 57 per cent of the funding to the institute for running

its operations.

The university plans to utilise the funding to develop infrastructure in its existing campus located in South Delhi's Maidan Garhi area and focus on expansion to set up branches of SAU across India and in the other SAARC countries.

"We have recently moved to a new permanent campus. Previously, we were functioning from a rented space. So our first focus is to build the required infrastructure such as hostels for students and academic blocks for the new programmes that are in the pipeline to be rolled out starting this academic year," Aggarwal said.

"We will also look into opening offshore campuses of SAU in each of the SAARC countries using the funds and setting up its branches across India," he added.

Earlier in 2022, external affairs minister S Jaishankar had said that some of the SAARC countries had not paid their share of the financial aid to the university due to which the varsity was facing severe financial constraints.

Contd. from Page 3...

## Govt proposes law to ban

providing treatment. It also bars any person from taking part in any sort of advertisement relating to any kind of medicine, or remedy (directly or indirectly) relating to any false claim to cure diseases through healing practices. "The evil practice of magical healing by any person with a sinister motive to exploit common people is a cognisable and non-bailable offence under the said Bill," the statement of object and reasons said.

The punishment will range from imprisonment of one year, which may be extended up to three years, or with a fine of ₹ 50,000, or both in case of first conviction, the Bill said. In case of subsequent convictions, a person will face imprisonment of up to five years or a fine of ₹ 1 lakh or both, it said. Vigilance officers, who will be police officers not below the rank of a sub-inspector, will be entrusted with checking such evil healing practices or magical healing, it added. (PTI)

## Uproar over 'failure'

the actual total investment in the project has been over ₹ 17 crore. Islam maintained that agriculture was a profitable venture when the farmers used to cultivate on their own and he demanded that the same farmers be once again allowed there, though they may not be given settlement rights. Bora countered the AIUDF MLA by claiming that the latter seemed more interested in bringing back the previous cultivators and maintained that the project is a profitable one for the government.

The opposition parties AIUDF, Congress, CPI(M) and the lone Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi expressed dissatisfaction over the minister's reply, claiming that the Gorukhuti project has been a failure, and staged a walkout from the House.

The incumbent government had carried out an eviction drive in Gorukhuti area soon after coming to power in 2021. Around 1,200-1,400 houses, mostly belonging to Bengali-speaking Muslims, were razed to the ground on September 20 and 23 of 2021 in Dhalpur I, II and III villages, leaving over 7,000 people homeless. Village markets, mosques, kabrastans, madrassas and maktubs were also bulldozed. The eviction drive, which passed peacefully on the first day but conducted amid stiff resistance by the local people on the second instance, also left two dead in police firing on September 23, including a 12-year-old boy who had got his first identity proof, an Aadhaar card, just before he was shot dead. Over 20 people were injured, including policemen, during the massive eviction drive. (PTI)

## Steps on to eradicate child

Tingal, executive director of Bachpan Bachao Andolan, praised the Assam government's commitment and described it as a role model for the nation.

He lauded the state's allocation of a budget of ₹ 200 crore to make Assam free from child marriage, along with provisions for the rehabilitation of victims. Tingal emphasised the importance of effective utilisation of allocated funds towards eradicating child marriages and commended the state government's crackdown and legal actions against perpetrators. Rishi Kant, executive director of Kosi Lok Manch, applauded the Assam government's dedication to reaching even the most remote areas to protect children's rights, describing it as commendable.

He highlighted the government's decision to provide admission incentives to girl students joining Class 11, graduation, and postgraduation as a significant step towards ensuring education for all children and consequently ending child marriage. The last National Family Health Survey V (NFHS 2019-21) indicated a decline in child marriage prevalence in Assam since early 2023.

Preeti Lekha Deka, deputy secretary of the state women and child development department, emphasised the need for collective efforts in areas such as reintegration of girl victims into the community and empowering them with relevant skills. In a bid to curb child marriage, the Assam government launched a two-phase drive against child marriage last year, resulting in numerous arrests and case registrations. In the first phase in February last year, 3,483 people were arrested, and 4,515 cases were registered, followed by 915 arrests and 710 cases in the second phase in October. (PTI)

## KAAC orders AROs to take

Dongkamukam Revenue Circle are Dhup Nath Yadav, Chandra Sing Rongpi, Dilip Giri, Ram Samuh Chauhman, Nayan Subba, Jiban Kr. Chetry, and Ram Prasad Chouhan. The SGBs who have been terminated in Karbi Anglong for failing to report on encroachments of VGR land, Phuloni Revenue Circle, are Mohon Sing Teron, Lakhindar Das, and Sarat Chandra Basumatary.

## Mizo body protests move

Chief Minister Lalduhoma had earlier stated that his government strongly opposed the proposed fencing of the border and was in favour of retaining the FMR. He had met Shah on two occasions in January and February and told him about Mizoram's stand on border fencing and lifting of the FMR.

He had said that he urged Shah to not fence the Mizoram section even if the Manipur side is fenced. Lalduhoma had expressed optimism that the Centre may not fence the 510-km-long Mizoram section of the India-Myanmar border. Four Indian states -- Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh -- share a 1,643-km-long international border with Myanmar. The Mizos share ethnic ties with the Chins of Myanmar. (PTI)

## Internet suspension in

the superintendent of police and deputy commissioner, torched vehicles and ransacked properties on February 15, following the suspension of a head constable. The policeman was seen with gunmen in a purported video. Protesters demanded the reinstatement of the head constable in the service, alleging that his suspension was "unfair". (PTI)

## India, the US looking

one of the topmost scientific advisors to President Joe Biden, has made several trips to India in the last year and a half to intensify the scientific collaboration between the two countries as directed by the president and the prime ministers.

"When I go to India and when I speak to people, I can see the palpable difference in terms of wanting the entrepreneurial ventures of the future, industries of the future. Of course, science and technology aspirations are being realised at scale. I see multiple institutions across India wanting to engage in fundamental discovery research as well as applied research. I find a lot more desire to work in partnership with industry," he said.

"So, there is a clear acceleration of the trajectory of wanting to build a science and technology-based innovative economy into the future. I see that," Panchanathan told PTI when asked about the development of India's science and technology in the last 10 years.

"That is something that the US and India clearly share a value that we believe that we are able to deliver for our citizens if we have such a prosperous innovation ethos that we build in both of our nations, that can then be prosperity for all our citizens in both our nations. So clearly, I can see that marked an intentional effort with intensity over the last 10 years," he said.

Panchanathan said he finds the launch of the National Research Foundation (NRF) by India a good step and then trying to see how you can synergise the investments that are being made by the various departments in promoting science and technology, innovations and discoveries being brought together; and also trying to build a lot more research intensity, not only in the premier institutions but in a range of institutions across the nation.

"That would be an important thing. Considering that there's a lot of youth in India to build skilled technical workforce-based institutions that ensure that people are trained for the industries of the future so that jobs of the future are then opportunities for everyone, but more importantly ensure the success of industries of the future," he said.

The 15th Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) since June 2020, Indian American Panchanathan is a computer scientist. An IIT Madras alumni, Chennai-born Panchanathan was recently elected to the prestigious National Academy of Engineering.

The Department of Telecommunications has also expressed interest in wanting to work with NSF in areas where they have shared interest like the next generation of telecommunication systems Six G and beyond, the top American scientist said.

"We are thinking about how we might bring our assets together and see how we might bring both research groups wanting to work together in these areas. Ministry of Earth Sciences, Ministry of Mines, they have also expressed interest in wanting to work with us," he said.

"So, as you can see, what we started off with, Department of Science and Technology and with the Prime Minister's (State) visit has already taken shape in terms of five or six threads of opportunity that we're working on," he said.

During a meeting with the chief scientific advisor, in Ahmedabad, before the G-20 Summit in New Delhi, they talked about how they might further enhance the partnerships by working together not only as bilateral between India and the United States but also looking at other like-minded partners who can work together to do bigger and better things for all nations, he said.

"We have also been exploring the Quad as a framework for how we might work together. India, US Australia, and Japan are the four countries working together, and we have identified AI for Agriculture. This is a great topic that's of interest to everyone and clearly, it has tremendous impact possibilities in the United States, in the Indo-Pacific," he said.

"What we might do in bringing technologies like AI is to see how we can have much more efficient, effective, and technologically inspired agriculture and better outcomes through that. We are already advancing on that. We're about to announce some projects where we'll have some co-funding that we do for AI institutes that we are funded in the United States so that they can partner with companion institutions and researchers in Japan, India and Australia to further see how we can work together," he said.

"We'll also be ensuring a joint call for proposals, bringing all the nations together around this thematic topic in the near future. With these several threads of bilateral partnerships and what we are doing as well as the multilateral partnerships, clearly, the researchers on both sides, India and the US, have got a tremendous amount of interest in wanting to work together for the global good and of course the economic vitality and the national security objectives of both nations," Dr Panchanathan said. (PTI)

## Stop insulting Lord Ram

Prasad said. "Rahul Gandhi, shame on you. Country is ashamed of you. Please improve your language." Addressing a rally in his former constituency Amethi during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Gandhi claimed that the "future of Uttar Pradesh is dancing" by getting drunk at night.

The Congress leader also alleged that not a single person from the OBC or the tribal category was at the Ayodhya Ram temple consecration ceremony on January 22. "Even President Droupadi Murmu was not allowed. Wealthy people were definitely seen in the programme."

Prasad condemned Gandhi's comments on the Ram temple event and asked him to stop "insulting" Lord Ram and his devotees.

"He said only Adani and Ambani were sitting there... Rahul Gandhi, stop insulting Prabhu Ram and Ram bhakts, Rahul Gandhi, stop attacking the faith of the majority of Indian people and using arrogant language for youth," Prasad said. (PTI)

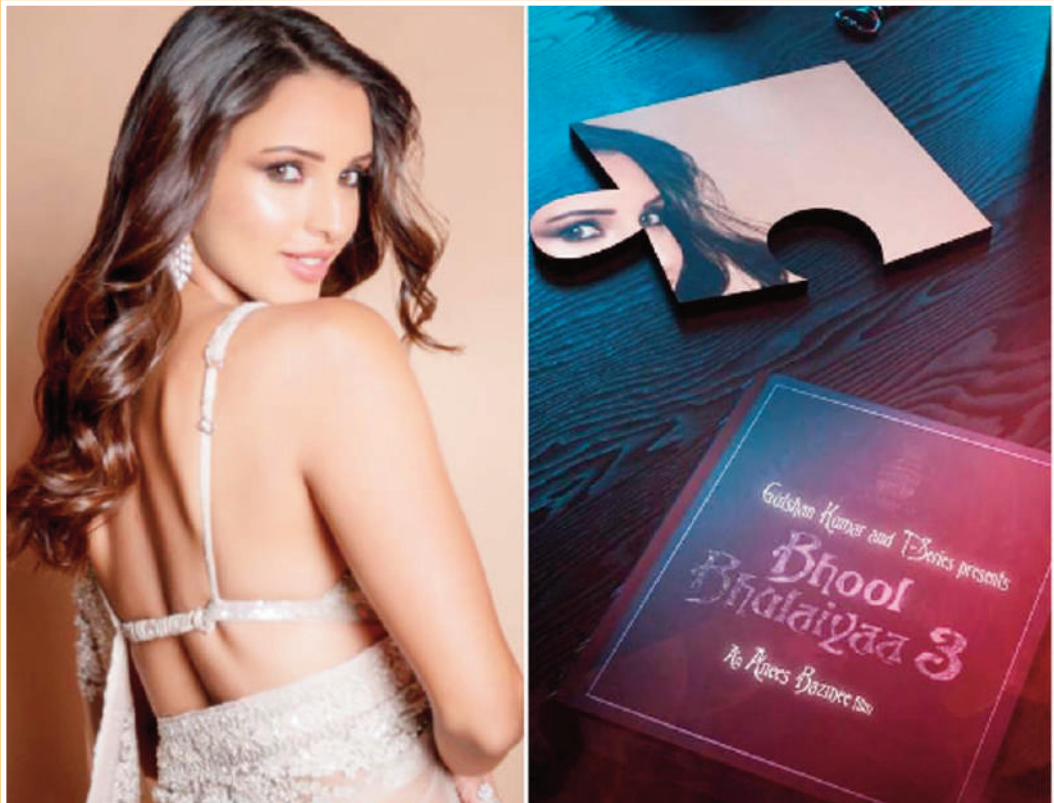


## TRIPTII DIMRI JOINS KARTIK AARYAN'S 'BHOOL BHULAIYAA 3'

**MUMBAI, Feb 21:** Actor Triptii Dimri is the latest addition to 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3', which stars Kartik Aaryan in the lead role. Excited to collaborate with Triptii, Kartik on Wednesday took to Instagram and wrote, "Welcome to the World of Bhool Bhulaiyaa @triptii\_dimri."

The particular update has left Triptii's fans excited. "Excited for Kartik and Triptii," a social media user commented. "Wow...can't wait to see her, another one wrote."

Triptii, who has been a part of films like 'Laila Majnu', 'Bulbbul' and 'Qala', recently skyrocketed to fame with her role in Sandeep Reddy Vanga's directorial 'Animal'. Now it is to be seen what she does with her role in 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3'. (PTI)



## Emma Stone in talks to collaborate with Yorgos Lanthimos on 'Save the Green planet' remake

**LOS ANGELES, Feb 21:** Actor Emma Stone is in talks to collaborate with Yorgos Lanthimos once again after "Poor Things" and "The Favourite".

There are reports that Stone, who is also part of Lanthimos' anthology film "Kinds of Kindness", is circling the director's upcoming remake of Korean hit "Save the Green Planet".

Stone will be in a supporting role and the shooting for the film is set to begin in summer and will take place across U.K. and New York, reported entertainment news outlet Variety.

This isn't one to file under Most Surprising News Ever, but it appears that star Emma Stone and director Yorgos Lanthimos are looking to get the filmmaking band together again. Following the success of The Favourite and Poor Things, they already have one more film together under their belts

via anthology Kinds Of Kindness, but with news that Lanthimos is looking at remaking South Korean fantasy comedy Save The Green Planet as his next film, Stone is in talks to join him in that endeavor as well.

The original, directed by Joon-Hwan Jang and released in 2003, is about Lee Byeong-gu (Shin Ha-kyun), who dives deep into conspiracy theories and starts to suspect that a number of political and big business types are secretly aliens, the reptilian first wave for an invasion of Earth. When he spirals some away to an underground command centre to torture information from them, he hits the Most Wanted list. But, frustrated in their efforts to track him down, the police call in an ace private detective to find him and his victims. So begins a battle of wits between

Byeong-gu, the detective and our hero's devoted girlfriend, who initially buys into his theories, but becomes worried that they're born out of his horrific childhood.

Succession and The Menu writer Will Tracy has written a script for the remake, which Jang himself was attached to make for a while. We're fascinated to see what sort of spin Lanthimos puts on the idea, though it appears that this time Stone (if she makes a deal) will take a supporting role as the girlfriend.

Stone is an Oscar front-runner for Poor Things and took home a BAFTA as part of the film's five wins on Sunday, so it's not shocking she wants to keep collaborating with the Greek director. Kinds Of Kindness is in post-production now, but has yet to announce a release date. (PTI)

## Bong Joon Ho's directorial 'Mickey 17' featuring Robert Pattinson to release in 2025



**LOS ANGELES, Feb 21:** Filmmaker Bong Joon Ho's much awaited Mickey 17, his first project since Oscar-winning Parasite, is delayed and will now arrive in theatres in January next year.

The film, starring Robert Pattinson in the lead, was supposed to release in March this year by Warner Bros but the release date was bumped to a later date. The film is reportedly delayed because of the Hollywood strikes and other production shifts. It is now scheduled to release on January 31, 2025, according to Variety. Mickey 17 will be the Korean filmmaker's first feature film post 2019's Parasite, which became the first non-English film to win the best picture Oscar. Bong Joon Ho, one of the most famous contemporary Korean filmmakers, is known for directing globally acclaimed films such as Memories of Murder, The Host, Snowpiercer and Okja. (PTI)

## Bollywood stars flock Goa for Rakul-Jackky's dreamy nuptials

**MUMBAI, Feb 21:** As the wedding ceremony of the Bollywood couple Rakul Preet Singh and Jackky Bhagnani inches closer, several celebrities from the Hindi film industry were seen arriving at the Goa airport on Wednesday.

Shahid Kapoor was the first to arrive with his wife Mira Rajput. The actor, who is getting a lot of positivity for his latest release 'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya', sported a dapper look with a white T-shirt, matching jacket and blue denims. He rounded off his looks with round black sunglasses.

Mira looked beautiful in a breezy white and green floral co-ord set. She kept her hair open, used minimal makeup, and accessorised the look with black square-shaped sunglasses, and a big brown handbag.

Ananya Panday, who delivered a creditable performance in the streaming movie 'Kho Gaye Hum Kahan', arrived with her rumoured boyfriend Aditya Roy Kapur.

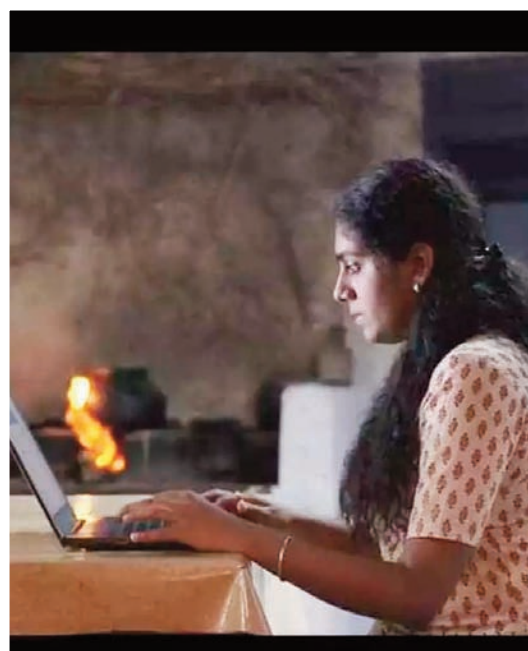
The diva was sporting a casual, no-frills look -- white tank top, beige shorts, matching long shirt and pair of brown slippers. She opted for a no-makeup look, and kept her hair open.

Aditya stole the hearts of the onlookers with his looks -- he wore a white half-sleeved T-shirt, brown joggers, black sneakers, cap and sunglasses.

The soon-to-be parents -- Varun Dhawan and his wife Natasha Dalal (plus a much visible baby bump) arrived in style at the airport. The actors opted for a tie-and-dye pink and orange jacket, white tee-shirt and blue denims.

Natasha wore a neon-green dress and paired it with a white-and-black striped shrug.

Rakul and Jackky are set to have two wedding ceremonies on Wednesday. The first will be a Sikh wedding with Anand Karaj, and the second will be a Sindhi-style ceremony, reflecting both Rakul and Jackky's respective parentage. (AGENCIES)



## 'The great Indian Kitchen' led to more opportunities in Hindi cinema: Nimisha Sajayan

**MUMBAI, Feb 21:** Malayalam cinema star Nimisha Sajayan says the critical appreciation for her 2021 role in "The great Indian kitchen" helped her reach a wider audience and led to work opportunities in the Hindi movie industry. The Malayalam-Language film, directed by Jeo Baby, became one of the most lauded films during

Covid. The movie revolved around how women are stifled in their marriages and are often tied to thankless and back-breaking household chores. Sajayan played the role of a woman who starts to resist her oppression and learns to seek freedom. "It (the film) led to more opportunities from the north. Earlier, my work was limited to south

audiences, but now it has extended to the north state as well," Sajayan told PTI in an interview.

The 27-year-old actor, who will be seen playing a forest officer in Richie Mehta's Prime Video series "Poacher", has been praised for her acting in the series by executive producer Alia Bhatt.

Sajayan's other significant roles are in movies

such as "Oru Kuprasidha Payyan", "Chola", "Nayattu", "Malik" and "Chithha". Based on true events, the multilingual series unravels the illegal ivory trade in India from the lens of forest officials and wildlife warriors. In order to get into the skin of the character, Sajayan said she met a forest officer from Kerala to understand her character. (PTI)

## Bradley Cooper says he was freaking out when he met Jay-Z, Beyonce

**LOS ANGELES, Feb 21:** Hollywood star Bradley Cooper has said that he was "freaking out" when he met rapper Jay-Z and his wife Beyonce.

The actor spoke with the couple when he wanted the 'Formation' hitmaker to play aspiring singer Ally in his movie 'A Star is Born'. The role however, ultimately went to Lady Gaga, reports 'Female First UK'.

The actor was amazed to find the '99 Problems' rapper sitting on the sofa watching daytime TV show 'Judge Judy'. Bradley said during a re-

cent interview with the SAG-AFTRA Foundation, "I went to Beyonce's house, and Jay-Z was watching Judge Judy, I still remember. I'm not kidding. And I was freaking (out). I remember I had this weird cough when I was pitching it to her". He further mentioned, quoted by 'Female First UK', "It was crazy. She was incredible and so was he, and we developed it for like a year together. I mean, she's one of the greatest people of all time. Then that fell through". He also wanted Adele to play the role, but

she only texted him back once and said she was "busy". And after hearing Gaga sing at a benefit concert, Bradley knew he had found the right person to play Ally opposite him as singer Jackson Maine. He said: "It just blew the doors off of the whole place, and it was at that moment where it was like, 'That's it. What was I even thinking?' And then I asked to meet her."

Gaga and Bradley ended up winning the Oscar for Best Original Song for their duet of 'Shallow' from the film. (AGENCIES)





# De Jong penalty earns PSV Eindhoven 1-1 draw with Dortmund in Champions League round of 16

**EINDHOVEN (NETHERLANDS), Feb 21:** Luuk de Jong converted a penalty to cancel out a goal by his former teammate Donyell Malen as PSV Eindhoven and Borussia Dortmund drew 1-1 on Tuesday in the first leg of their Champions League round of 16 matchup. Malen scored against his old club in the 24th minute with a shot that appeared to deflect off the outstretched leg of defender Sergio Dest. Malen didn't wildly celebrate his first Champions League goal since December 2021, instead hold-

ing both hands in the air almost apologetically. The goal was a familiar sight for the PSV fans. Malen scored 50 times in 81 appearances for the Eindhoven club from 2018-21. The crowd at PSV Stadium gave Malen a warm ovation when he was substituted late in the match. De Jong equalized when he calmly slotted a low penalty past Alexander Meyer in the 56th minute after Mats Hummels had brought down Malik Tillman. It took De Jong's Champions League goal tally

to a PSV record nine, one more than Ruud van Nistelrooy. Dortmund players complained bitterly that Hummels had played the ball, but referee Srdjan Jovanovic waved away their protests. "The referee judged that there was a penalty," said Dortmund coach Edin Terzic. "Our wish remains that he should look at the screen. He was very sure of his decision. We think it was a hard decision." Hummels himself was less diplomatic. "Zero percent a penalty. Zero. I slide in, I clearly play the



ball, change its path and only then make minimal contact," the defender told Amazon Prime. "Tillman was laughing himself silly on the pitch, (Johan) Bakayoko was laughing himself silly, they were all grinning at me for minutes." Dest came close to snatching a late winner when he passed Julian Ryerson on the left but Meyer, a late replacement for the injured Gregor Kobel, saved his shot. "In the second half we had it completely under control," PSV midfielder Joey Veerman said. "In

the first half we had the better chances. If you look at the match as a whole we had better chances than Dortmund." The second leg is in Dortmund on March 13. "If we can win our home game, we'll get through and that's the task for now," Terzic said. De Jong also said he was confident heading to Dortmund. "We played well today and we can do that there, too," De Jong said. PSV, led by former Dortmund coach Peter Bosz, finished second

behind Arsenal in Group B to reach its first Champions League round-of-16 match in eight seasons. Dortmund underlined its European pedigree by topping Group F, leaving Paris Saint-Germain in second place. Dortmund was without striker Sébastien Haller who scored the winning goal as Ivory Coast beat Nigeria 2-1 to win the Africa Cup of Nations earlier this month. Haller, who also scored the winner in the semifinal, returned from the tournament with an ankle injury. (AP)

## Manisha's brace seals India's win against Estonia

**ALANYA (TURKEY), Feb 21:** The Indian football team withstood a late charge by Estonia to pick up a hard-fought 4-3 win in the Turkish Women's Cup on Wednesday, the side's first victory against an European nation. Striker Manisha Kalyan scored a brace and the Chaoba Devi-coached side created a piece of history as the Indian senior women's team had never before triumphed over a team from the UEFA confederation in an official outing. The teams were locked 1-1 at half time. Manisha struck in the 17th and 81st minutes while Indumathi Kathiresan (62'), and Pyari Xaxa (79') scored the other goals for India. Lisette Tammik (32'), Vlada Kubassova (88') and Mari Liis Lillemae (90') found the target for Estonia.

Played at the picturesque Gold City Sports Complex, the Blue Tigrisses made a perfect start when they shot into the lead through a Manisha goal. After Estonia drew level off a strike by Lisette Tammik, a rampaging India struck thrice through Indumathi, Xaxa and Manisha to take a commanding 4-1 lead. Just as it appeared that the Indian women were on their way to a resounding victory, Estonia made a last-ditch effort to equalize, scoring twice through Vlada Kubassova (88') and Mari Liis Lillemae (90'). However, the Indian defence did a fine job to see out the rest of the time and secure a memorable win. At the start, India began with an intent to hit Estonia on the counter, using their speedy wingers while letting the opponents drive deeper into the box. This played into the hands of the Blue Tigrisses from the start, as Karthika's interception on the right allowed Pyari to rush into the space behind the Estonian defence. The India striker laced her shot past Estonia keeper Karina Kork, but it struck the upright and was eventually cleared. Pyari often acted as the focal point of the counterattacks for India, and she created a great op-

portunity for the Blue Tigrisses in the eighth minute when she made a swift turn to leave her marker stranded at the halfway line and played a through ball to Manisha on the left with acres of space. However, the latter scuffed her shot. Manisha made up for her earlier miss, however, when she initiated an India move with a clever backheel to Pyari, who put Anju Tamang through behind the opposition defence. A melee ensued inside the Estonia box as Anju's shot was blocked, but Manisha collected the ball and drove it in from the near post from a narrow angle. India ceded more control of the ball after taking the lead and paid the price for it a little after the half-hour mark. Vlada Kubassova sent in an accurate cross from the left, which was nodded in by Tammik. Chaoba Devi's side tightened the screws as they came out in the second half, enforcing a mid-block, which meant that Estonia could no longer control the proceedings in the middle of the park. India took the lead a little after the hour mark through Indumathi. Soumya Guguloth initiated the attack on the right, passing it to Anju, who squared it to Pyari, who, in turn, laid it off for Indumathi at the edge of the box. The India midfielder unleashed a left-footed shot that snuck into the bottom corner. The Blue Tigrisses began pressing harder, and that, along with some cleverness from Anju and a bit of desire and individual brilliance from Pyari, resulted in the third goal. Soumya snatched the ball in the middle and played it through to Anju on the right. However, the latter was in an off-side position and kept herself as far away from the ball as possible. Meanwhile, Pyari made a lung-bursting sprint to the right wing, to get there before any of the Estonia defenders. She barged into the box from the right, cut inside, and placed her left-footed effort into the bottom corner to double India's lead. (PTI)



## Haaland's second-half goal secures 1-0 win for Man City against Brentford

**MANCHESTER, Feb 21:** Erling Haaland added Brentford to his list of Premier League conquests when he came to Manchester City's rescue with a 71st-minute goal to clinch a 1-0 win Tuesday. It looked like City would be dropping points in a tight title race for the second time in four days — after a 1-1 draw with Chelsea — only for Haaland to finally get some space behind Brentford's defense in a counterattack. Julian Alvarez played the ball forward, Haaland collected it and raced past center back Kristoffer Ajer, who lost his footing. One on one with Mark Flekken, Haaland took his shot early and placed a low finish to the Dutch goalkeeper's right for his league-leading 17th goal of the campaign. Of the 21 teams Haaland has faced since arriving in the Premier League last season, Brentford was the only one he'd failed to score against. Not anymore. "He's the best in the world," said Oscar Bobb, Haaland's City



and Norway teammate who made his first Premier League start on Tuesday. The narrow and nervy win moved the defending champions into second place in the

standings, one point above Arsenal and one behind Liverpool. All three title contenders have played 25 of 38 games. Liverpool hosts Luton on

Wednesday. City extended its unbeaten run in all competitions since Dec. 6 to 16 matches, winning 14 and drawing two of them. Pep Guardiola's

team is also into the last 16 in the FA Cup and is well-placed to get into the Champions League quarterfinals after taking a 3-1 lead over FC Copenhagen following the first leg of the round of 16. Could another treble of major trophies be on for the European champions? "The players, for years, have done incredible things," Guardiola said "and they're still doing it." City found it tough to break down Brentford's packed defense — just as Guardiola predicted before the game. The hosts had 25 shots in total, with Bobb having one cleared off the line in the first half as frustration among the City fans drew. The first time Brentford left its defense exposed, Haaland pounced. "After the weekend, we had to show a reaction and I feel we did that," City defender Manuel Akanji said. "Now we have to improve game by game." City playmaker Kevin De Bruyne was an unused substitute and didn't even come out to warm up. (AP)

## Pak team fitness was the lowest priority for Babar, coach Arthur: Hafeez

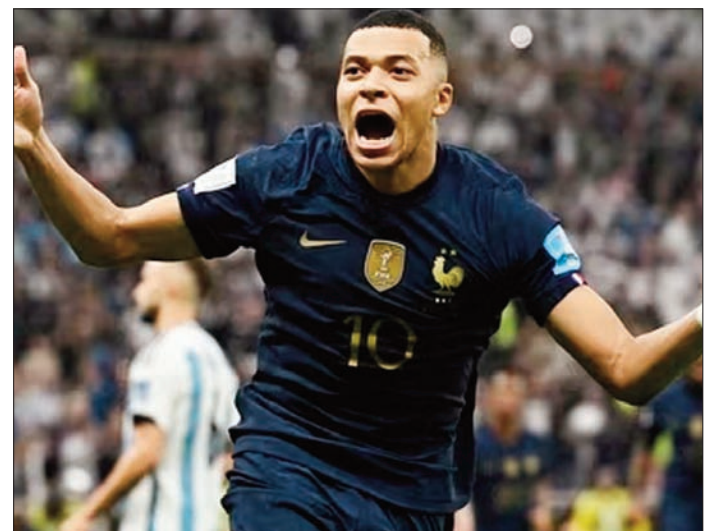


**KARACHI, Feb 21:** Former Pakistan cricket director Muhammad Hafeez has claimed that ex-captain, Babar Azam and foreign coaches Mickey Arthur and Grant Bradburn had given team fitness lowest priority in the lead-up to the ODI World Cup in India. Pakistan, under then-skipper Babar, had failed to make it to the semifinal knockout round, losing five of the nine league games and finishing fifth. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) recently did not renew Hafeez's contract following disastrous tours of Australia and

New Zealand. Hafeez was made team director in late 2023 after Pakistan's abysmal show in the World Cup. Soon after he took charge, Pakistan were white-washed in the three-Test series down under, while they lost the five-match T20I series against the Kiwis 4-1. "When I took over as director (in 2023) and we reached Australia, I told the team trainer to give me a report on the players' fitness standards and prepare a new fitness regimen," said Hafeez. "He told me that the former captain (Babar) and head coach (Arthur)

had told him six months ago that fitness is not the priority at the moment and let the players play as they wanted," Hafeez revealed on the ARY sports channel. "This was shocking news for me when he (team trainer) told me that he was told to not check the players fitness," added Hafeez. Hafeez said that when he checked the body fat percentage and endurance levels of the players, it was way below the international cricket standards. "Fitness in modern-day cricket is top priority for all teams." Hafeez alleged that when tests were carried out on some players in Australia, they couldn't even finish a two-km run. "The players' skin fold (body fat level) was one-and-a-half points above the normal limit," he alleged. Former Test captain, Azhar Ali, who was also one of the experts on the TV show, recalled that when Pakistan had gone for the Champions Trophy in England in 2017, fitness was given top priority, so much so that the coaching staff sent a player (Umar Akmal) back because he had failed a fitness test. (PTI)

## Real Madrid in good shape ahead of possible signing of Mbappe; Barca still struggles



**MADRID, Feb 21:** Signing Kylian Mbappé likely would not be a problem for Real Madrid financially, as it remains the Spanish club with the highest spending limit at 727 million euros (\$786 million). Barcelona's financial struggles continue, though, with its cap being reduced to 204 million euros (\$220 million), the Spanish league said Tuesday. The Catalan club could be in a delicate situation going into the next transfer window. Atletico Madrid has the second-highest cap at 303 million euros (\$327 million). Each Spanish league club has a different spending limit based on factors such as revenues, costs and debts. It is proportional to roughly 70% of a club's revenues. The limits denote the maximum amount each club can spend on players, coaches, youth systems and other areas. Clubs that are overspending need to find ways to either reduce costs or attract new investment. Barcelona's cap, which was at 270 million euros after the summer transfer window, has been gradually reduced after it had been boosted by financial maneuvers that helped the club restructure its debts and gain space to sign new players. If it can't restructure its finances again, the club will be in danger of not being allowed to register its players to compete. Madrid has a much brighter

outlook, with enough cap space to add Mbappé and possibly others. The club hasn't made many blockbuster signings in recent seasons and is free to spend now if it wants to. Mbappé told Paris Saint-Germain last week that he will leave the French club at the end of the season, opening the door for another attempt by Madrid to sign him. Madrid made a big push to sign the France star in 2022, with one of its offers rejected by PSG reportedly reaching nearly 200 million euros (\$216 million). Only four other clubs have spending limits surpassing 100 million euros (\$108 million) — Sevilla (152 million euros, \$164 million), Real Sociedad (144 million euros, \$155 million), Villarreal (143 million euros, \$154 million) and Athletic Bilbao (100 million euros, \$108 million). Alavés has the lowest cap at 31 million euros (\$33 million), just behind the 33 million euros (\$35 million) of Las Palmas. Girona, the surprise team in Spain this season, has a cap of 52 million euros (\$56 million). The Catalan club — controlled by the Abu Dhabi-backed City Football Group network — is six points behind leader Madrid in the Spanish league standings. Third-place Barcelona is eight points off the lead, while fourth-place Atletico trails Madrid by 11 points after 25 matches. (AP)

## Golf has a fractured landscape; Not even the majors can put it back together

**LOS ANGELES, Feb 21:** The grill room at a California municipal golf course had one TV showing LIV Golf in Las Vegas, another showing the PGA Tour in Phoenix. A half-dozen people shifted eyes watching both, the former with fewer commercials on a network known more for "Young Sheldon" reruns. This is the current landscape in golf, and it figures to be that way for the rest of this year and probably well into the next one, if not longer. Consider the immediate future. Rory McIlroy and Rickie Fowler will be in Florida next week the same time Brooks Koepka and Bryson DeChambeau are in Saudi Arabia. At least there is an eight-hour difference in time zones, assuming everyone has The CW app. For those who prefer to play the week before a major, LIV Golf will be on the Blue Monster at Doral ahead of the Masters and PGA Tour players will be in San Antonio. The week before the U.S. Open, LIV will be in Houston, the PGA Tour in Ohio for the Memorial. All of which leads to the common refrain that all anyone wants is

for the best players in golf to be on the same stage. The only place for that is the majors, which always mattered more than all the other tournaments. Now the gap is getting larger. The PGA Tour already has held three of its "signature events" with a \$20 million purse, cold plunges and wild-caught seafood served in player dining. Nothing felt extraordinary about them. LIV Golf had a 59 and a playoff in the dark the first week, and a six-way tie for the lead late on the back nine the second week. The only noise sounded forced. Golf has always had various starting lines depending on the level of interest. The most ardent fans tuned in for Kapalua and its magnificent ocean views for The Sentry to start the year. Torrey Pines is the first PGA Tour event on network television. Pebble Beach is the first weekend without the NFL (and more magnificent ocean views, even when the wind and rain cause waves to crash over the 18th fairway). The Florida swing means the Masters is near. The Players Championship used to boast the strongest

and deepest field in golf, a claim it can no longer make with 15 of the last 30 major champions (a total of nine players) now with LIV. At least it still has the island green. That brings us to the Masters. What poetically is referred to as the annual rite of spring might just as well be called the start of the golf season. "Yes and no," Xander Schauffele said. "If you just love golf, you should have no problem watching the LIV circuit on CW, and you should have no problem turning on CBS or Golf Channel when you watch the PGA Tour, LPGA, whatever you want," he said. And now for the "no." "If you want to see all the best in the world playing each other, then that would be your first tournament to watch," Schauffele said. "But even then, there are guys who should be at Augusta, arguably, based on how good they are. But they made the choice, rolled the dice and they're not going to be there unless they win something crazy." Winning "something crazy" ostensibly would be a major, which

comes with a five-year exemption to the other majors. Still to be determined is whether Augusta National hands out special invitations and to whom, and whether the PGA of America will consider players from other tours, as Kerry Haigh, the chief championships officer, said last year it would. Otherwise, it won't be long before the majors don't have all the best. DeChambeau has only two years left at the Masters before his exemption from winning the U.S. Open runs out. Cameron Smith has an exemption through 2027. Patrick Reed has dropped to No. 100 in the world ranking — he never did reach No. 5, after declaring himself one of the top five players in golf in 2014 when he was at No. 20. Depending on what happens in the Masters, he will be well outside the top 100 for PGA Championship consideration. The five-year exemptions for DeChambeau and Dustin Johnson at the PGA and after next year. The Official World Golf Ranking hasn't found a way to fairly include LIV Golf in its system, and LIV

Golf hasn't provided a reason with such a closed shop. Is the OWGR fair? Yes. Accurate? Not so much. Johnson currently is at No. 238, right behind Ockie Strydom and Troy Merritt. But remember, the majors use the world ranking to determine their fields, and the heads of those organizations were the ones voting not to include LIV. And so it's on to Mexico and Florida and Texas for the PGA Tour, to Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong for LIV, and everyone meets up at Augusta National in April. Rory McIlroy said he thought a signature event would feel cheapened because not all the best players — Jon Rahm, Johnson, Koepka — were there. It was a peculiar opinion because that doesn't always happen, anyway. Only five of the top 10 were playing when McIlroy won the Canadian Open in 2022. And even in a limited-field event like the CJ Cup in Las Vegas he won in the fall of 2021, Rahm, DeChambeau and Patrick Cantlay sat that one out. All were among the top 10 in the world. (AP)



# Fast bowlers have made a difference in series against England: Shubman Gill



**RANCHI, Feb 21:** The pitches might not have been entirely in their favour, but the Indian pacers' ability to strike at vital situations has made a sea of difference in the Test series against England, reckons top-order batter Shubman Gill.

The four spinners – R Ashwin (11), Ravindra Jadeja (12), Kuldeep Yadav (8)

and Axar Patel (5) – together have taken 36 wickets across three matches as compared to 22 by pacers so far.

So, the numbers might be favouring the tweekers, but Gill said the pacemen bowled well according to the conditions to keep their side ahead.

"Wherever we play in India, wickets help spinners a bit. Ash bhai and Jaddu bhai will take wickets anyway, but the way our fast bowlers have bowled, it has made the difference in this series," said Gill during a media interaction ahead of fourth Test, starting Friday.

However, India will be without Jasprit Bumrah for the Ranchi Test as the premier pacer has been given rest as part of the workload management.

He has so far taken 17 wickets from three Tests to lead the chart for India.

But Gill said the other Indian pacers have enough experience in these conditions to make an impact, citing the example of Mohammed Siraj's four-wicket haul at Rajkot.

"Like I talked about Virat bhai, if a player in the class of Boom bhai is not playing, any team will miss him, especially since he leads our fast-bowling attack. But if you look at it, Siraj took four wickets in crucial times in the last match.

"So, I think, all the pacers have enough experience in Indian conditions, especially bowling reverse swing," said Gill.

Gill said the absence of experienced players like Virat Kohli and Bumrah have been viewed as a perfect chance by a clutch of young players to prove their mettle at the biggest stage.

Gill offered Sarfaraz Khan, who made twin fifties in his debut Test at Rajkot, as an example.

"Virat bhai is not with us for the last three Tests, and yes, the absence of a player of his class makes a bit of difference. But I think Sarfaraz came in and played well. So, I think players are doing well in the opportunities that they are getting."

The Punjab man also said there was a certain level of desperation in the aspirants to perform because they might lose their place once the first-choice players return.

"The young players have got the opportunity because Virat bhai or Bumrah bhai are not there. So, those youngsters also know that this opportunity might not remain with them for long, so they are trying to give their best in every opportunity," he noted.

Yashasvi Jaiswal was one such player who grabbed his opportunity with both hands here.

Opening the innings, Jaiswal has so far made 546 runs, including successive double hundreds, to top the run-makers' chart in this rubber.

After the second match at Visakhapatnam, skipper Rohit Sharma had hoped that Jaiswal would remain humble and build on this brilliant start to his career.

However, Gill, took a slightly different view and said as long as someone like Jaiswal can contribute to the team, the attitude should not come under focus.

"I don't think there is any problem with youngsters not being humble. You know, if you don't have it (talent) then you will not be scoring back-to-back double hundreds."

"Not many in world cricket have scored back-to-back double hundreds. He definitely is a sensational player. We have seen it over the eight or nine Tests," he added. (PTI)

## In-form Jaiswal breaks into top-20 of ICC Test Rankings



**DUBAI, Feb 21:** Young India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal on Wednesday broke into the top-20 of the ICC Test Rankings, rising 14 spots to 15th in the batting charts after scoring back-to-back double centuries in the ongoing series against England.

The 22-year-old left-hander joined a select band of seven cricketers to score double centuries in two consecutive Tests including two Indians -- Vinod Kambli and Virat Kohli.

Jaiswal scored 209 in India's first innings in the second Test at Visakhapatnam and then hit unbeaten 214 runs in the second essay at Rajkot to contribute in the home team's massive 434-run victory over England that took them 2-1 up in the series.

Ravindra Jadeja, who was the player-of-the-match in Rajkot, also climbed up in the batting rankings from 41st to 34th position after his knock of 112 in the first innings, the ICC said in a statement.

He also returned with a seven-wicket match haul that lifted him three places to sixth in the bowling rankings. Veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who entered the elite 500 Test wicket club at Rajkot, climbed a rung to the second position behind pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah.

Jadeja and Ashwin continued to hold on to the first two spots in the Test all-rounders rankings. Jadeja consolidated his position among the all-rounders, going from 416 to a career-best 469 rating points.

India captain Rohit Sharma moved up one spot to 12th in the batting list after scoring 131 in the first innings at Rajkot, while Shubman Gill (91) progressed three places to 35th after coming close to a century in the second innings. Debutants Sarfaraz Khan and Dhruv Jurel also entered the rankings in 75th and 100th positions, respectively.

Star batter Virat Kohli, who is not playing in the series due to personal reasons, remains the only Indian in top-10 batters' chart at the seventh spot.

For England, opener Ben Duckett's quickfire 153 in the first innings lifted him 12 places to 13th.

New Zealand's Kane Williamson strengthened his position at the top of the batting rankings after notching a century against South Africa, his seventh in seven Tests, joining Aravinda de Silva, Mohammad Yousuf and Clyde Walcott as the only players to have achieved the unique feat.

He is followed by Steve Smith and Daryl Mitchell. (PTI)

## Jurel hopes to meet Dhoni again during Ranchi Test

**RANCHI, Feb 21:** Young wicket-keeper-batter Dhruv Jurel wants to relive his fanboy moment by meeting the talismanic Mahendra Singh Dhoni during the fourth Test against England here, starting Friday.

Jurel, who made an impressive debut in the third Test at Rajkot scoring 46 in India's first innings, has met Dhoni only once during his first year in the IPL for Rajasthan Royals in 2021.

But the 23-year-old stumper aspires to meet Dhoni again and pick his brains as much as possible.

"It is always my dream to meet Mahi bhai. The last time I met him was in IPL, but I wanted to meet him in India jersey. Whenever I spoke to him, I got to learn some things and that helped a lot in my cricket," Jurel told BCCI.TV.

"I will try to meet Mahi bhai in Ranchi and talk to him."

Jurel recollected his first meeting with Dhoni during IPL 2021.

"I was just watching him and stood up, like 'is this MS Dhoni standing in front of me'. That was the first time I interacted with MS Dhoni, so I was just pinching myself. 'Is this a dream?' I met him in 2021, I guess, my first year of IPL," he said.

"I asked him, 'can I have one photo with you' and we clicked a photo. He gave me one advice -- just go out, watch the ball and play." (PTI)

## Spin-friendly wicket will make it even playing field in Ranchi: Pope

**RANCHI, Feb 21:** England would not mind a rank turner in the fourth Test because assistance to spinners from the word go will make it a level-playing field, vice captain Ollie Pope said on Wednesday.

The Tests in Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam and Rajkot all had sporting pitches, which were not predominantly spin-friendly and had something for everyone.

"If it does spin from ball one, it takes the toss out of the equation, then it's an even playing field," Pope told reporters here.

"A lot of the time the wicket starts out flat and then deteriorates. We won the first game batting first, India the last two batting first. It doesn't define the result if you bat first on slightly flatter wicket but it does give you an advantage," he added.

Pope, one of the heroes for England in Hyderabad, feels that a wicket offering good turn will provide them with wicket-taking opportunities.

"If it does do a fare bit like we expect it to then it gets us into the game. We have got some young spinners, they have bowled well in some pretty good surfaces. It definitely give us wicket taking opportunities. They have done a good job on flat wickets as well."

Pope had used the sweep shot to blunt the effectiveness of Indian



spinners to score a majestic 196 and fashion England's victory in the series-opener.

"Personally, when the ball is doing more your best batter is trying to hit the bowler, trying to get him to bowl off his length. It helps if you try to put pressure on the bowler like we did in Hyderabad."

"If it's spinning we will see more sweep shots, innovative shots. We have realised that the threats that they pose on spinning

wickets, the likes of Jadeja, Ashwin and Kuldeep."

"Our best bet is to put them under pressure like we did in Hyderabad in the second innings. That can give us a large amount of confidence going to the test if it does end spinning a lot like it did then."

With India resting Jasprit Bumrah, Pope feels the hosts can opt to field a fourth spinner in Axar Patel.

"Potentially (India will bring fourth spinner), we got to see what they do once they see the wicket and train this afternoon. See what they want from the pitch, if they want some grass left."

"They have watered the pitch so potentially an extra spinner could be seen from India. With Jasprit missing they might go down that avenue, Axar Patel is definitely an option for them."

Talking about the pitch, he said it looks "platey".

"The pitch looks interesting, very 'platey'. The cracks in the wicket aren't just cracks, there are separate bits of ground that could open up with a lot of sun on them. The ball could deviate more off them if they open up like we expect them to."

Initially he had said that he won't be rolling over his arm in this series but England skipper Ben Stokes, who hasn't bowled since June, has hinted at resuming his all-rounder duties after the colossal 434-run loss in the Rajkot Test.

The fast-bowling all-rounder was seen bowling during the training session here on Wednesday.

"There is definitely a chance, but he has not confirmed yet even in the changing room. He's had a good bowl against our batters," said Pope.

"Let's see how he pulls up tomorrow and see how he goes and if that's good we can see a ball in his hand." Pope added. (PTI)

## 'Expectations that I kept on myself made me disappointed'

**RANCHI, Feb 21:** Shubman Gill had twin challenges to tame when he entered the Test series against England -- a barren run that gripped him for nine innings, which was made grimmer when he dropped down to bat at a rather new No. 3 slot at this level.

Three Tests into the ongoing five-match rubber, Gill has managed to find some answers scoring 252 runs at 42 with a match-winning 104 at Visakhapatnam and a classy 91 at Rajkot. For Gill, it was all about coping with the expectations he had placed on himself, rather than making any sweeping technical changes to his batting.

"It is a bit tough (living up to his own expectations). When people from outside talk about all those things, it did not make much difference to me. But the expectations that I kept on myself made me a bit disappointed," Gill said in a press conference here on Wednesday.

However, Gill said he has still placed the same level of expectations on him but has learned to adjust to them.

"You will definitely have some expectations on you as to how you want to play for the team, the country. But I don't think that has changed my mindset. I still have the same set of expectations for myself."

"It is all about how you are able to forget them and move on quickly and be ready for the next challenge. That is the difference between a big player and an average player," he added.

The 24-year-old could not score a fifty in 11 continuous innings, including the Hyderabad Test against England last month, once he started batting at No. 3, deviating from his preferred opening position.

The rut set in during India's tour to the West Indies mid-last year till he broke it against England at Visakhapatnam.

Gill said batting at No.3 presented him with a different task even though he had batted in that slot in domestic matches earlier.

"I have batted at No. 3 and No. 4 for India A and in some Ranji Trophy matches, and as such, it was not something that I have never done in my life. There are not many technical changes that I had to make to my game. "But it is different when

you open the innings because you don't get that much time to think as you are going right in after the toss. You are the one who is setting the tone," Gill said playing in the middle-order made it mandatory for him to bat as per the situations.

"But when you bat at three or four, there is a certain situation that you have to bat at. If a couple of wickets have fallen early, then you are setting the stage. When you are opening then you are dictating the terms, but in the middle-order you will be playing according to the situations." Gill offered the examples of Vizag and Rajkot Tests to underline his theory.

Gill was joined by Shreyas Iyer when India were 30 for two, and he had to marshal the hosts' innings for their entire second dig while batting for almost 48 overs.

The right-hander said he had a slightly different role in supporting a marauding Yashasvi Jaiswal (214) in the second innings at Rajkot.

"I would not have played any differently even if I was feeling any calm or composed (in Vizag). But definitely, what I was feeling at Vizag was a bit different from what I was feeling in the earlier matches for India (in terms of the match situation)."

"But in Rajkot, the situation was different, we were in a very good position, leading by some 300 runs. So, keeping that in mind, it was a much calmer and composed innings."

Indian batters' failure to kick on after getting a start was a major reason behind their defeat in the first Test. Gill said there was a talk in the dressing room about converting the starts into big knocks to pile pressure on the opposition.

"If you look at the first Test, a lot of players had got the starts. They played almost 50 balls and there were 80s and 90s. All the batsmen had the opportunity to make a big score but unfortunately, they did not get a big one."

"So, we had a chat and the point was if a batsman get set and make a big score like 150 or 200, then it makes a big difference to us and the opposition. It will be good to score runs in the first innings because in India batting gets tough in fourth or fifth day," he explained. (PTI)

## Take Bairstow out of firing line: Cook urges England to bench the out-of-form batter

**LONDON, Feb 21:** Former captain Alastair Cook has urged England to drop wicketkeeper-batter Jonny Bairstow from the Ranchi Test against India, to "protect the player" who is having an abysmal series.

Bairstow, who is playing as a specialist batter, has endured a woeful run in the ongoing five-match series. He is averaging 17.00 having registered scores of 0, 4, 25, 26, 37 and 10 in six innings.

"I'm taking him out of the firing line to protect the player, as I think he's had a tough tour so far and India is a tough place to keep going on the treadmill," Cook told "TNT Sport".

"I'm not saying he'll never play Test cricket again, but it's good to have someone who's fresh of all the debris of this series so far," he added.

Cook backed Dan Lawrence to replace Bairstow as the all-rounder will step up out in Ranchi without any baggage.

"When you're not scoring runs, there's a build-up of pressure and momentum from certain bowlers on you, so I'd let Dan Lawrence have a go."

However, another former captain Michael Atherton feels the England team management will continue to back Bairstow to come good.

"(Bairstow) has been so central to this project that I don't see them leaving him out now, at a critical juncture," Atherton said on the 'Sky Sports Cricket Podcast'.

England trail the series 1-2.

Rest Anderson and Wood in Ranchi,

bringing in Robinson and Atkinson

India have decided to rest pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah from the fourth Test and Cook feels the tourists should do the same with their quicks James Anderson and Mark Wood, who have both played two matches each.

The final match is scheduled to be played in Dharamsala, where the conditions at altitude are known to aid pacers.

"I think James Anderson and Mark Wood will be very effective in the cooler conditions of Dharamsala, so I'm taking them out of the attack as they've bowled a lot of overs in a short period," Cook said.

He called for the inclusion of Ollie Robinson and uncapped Gus Atkinson.

"The two people I'm bringing in are Ollie Robinson and Gus Atkinson -- we haven't seen Gus in a Test match before, but everyone I've spoken to about him thinks he could do well."

"We've seen a lot of Ollie Robinson, who has great skill and great control. He'll give the control that Anderson gives, whereas Atkinson gives that freshness. Both will be raring to go."

Atherton also felt that England would opt to freshen up their bowling attack by resting 41-year-old Anderson.

"My instincts would say they'll freshen up the bowling, that they may bring in Robinson for Anderson and may think about Atkinson for Wood," Atherton said. (PTI)

