

**6** WORLD

**8** NATION

- 'A cease-fire deal would only delay *somewhat* an Israeli military offensive in Rafah'
- Maryam Nawaz becomes first-ever woman Chief Minister of a province in Pakistan
- Your dream is my resolve: PM Modi to youngsters
- Several Indians discharged from Russian army following India's demand: MEA

## Farmers take out tractor rallies in Punjab, Haryana, UP to protest against WTO

**CHANDIGARH/LUCKNOW, Feb 26:** Farmers took out tractor rallies at several places in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh and burnt effigies, demanding the agriculture sector be taken out of the WTO agreement.

In Uttar Pradesh, the rallies led to disruption in traffic at many places and farmers also burnt effigies representing the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which is holding its 13th ministerial conference, a meeting of its highest decision-making body, in the UAE.

On the call of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM),

an umbrella body of several farm unions that spearheaded the 2020-21 farmers' stir, protesters parked their tractors along the highways at many places in Punjab and Haryana.

Effigies representing the WTO were also burnt at Khanauri and Shambhu points on Punjab's border with Haryana where thousands of farmers have been camping after their march to Delhi, led by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM), was halted by security forces. Farmer leaders claimed the WTO's objective was to end farm subsidies and

if India followed it, that would be "suicidal".

In western Uttar Pradesh, protests by farmers with tractors and by burning effigies representing WTO following a call given by the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), disrupted vehicular traffic, which could resume only in the afternoon.

BKU national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait alleged the Union government was ignoring the genuine demands of farmers and condemned the "atrocities" against farmers camping on the Punjab-Haryana border points to press the Centre for various demands, including a legal guarantee of

minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

In UP's Muzaffarnagar district, a tractor march by farmers on a highway disrupted traffic in many places. They also blocked the left lane of the Delhi-Dehradun national highway.

The protesters parked their tractors at Bhurahi under the Purkaji police station area, Bhangela under the Khatauli police station area, Mansoorpur intersection and Rampur Tiraha under the Chhappar police station area.

BKU workers and farmers parked their tractors on National Highway 58 in Meerut causing jam

on the road. An effigy representing the WTO was also burnt there. During this, BKU district president Anurag Chaudhary had a heated exchange of words with officials.

The BKU workers held a meeting under the chairmanship of Madanpal Yadav during which the office bearers called for marching to Delhi on March 14. In Punjab's Hoshiarpur, farmers parked their tractors at several locations including the Jalandhar-Jammu National Highway. Led by Doaba Kisan Committee's state president Jangveer Singh Chauhan, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## House passes 'Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024' Assam to bring UCC through 'front door': CM

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday asserted in the Assembly that his government will bring the Uniform Civil Code through the "front door", while maintaining that the UCC does not deal with traditional rituals or practices.

Replying to a discussion on 'Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024', Sarma claimed that the government was only trying to curb practices conducted by individuals with malicious intent.

"The UCC is in Uttarakhand now. The UCC deals with four points - preventing underage marriage, banning polygamy, inheritance laws and registration of live-in relationships. The UCC does not deal with traditional rituals or practices," the CM said.

The Uttarakhand Assembly had on February 7 passed a Bill that seeks to impose uniform rules on marriage, divorce, inheritances and live-in relationships for all communities - except the Scheduled Tribes.

Sarma had said last month that Assam will be the third state after Uttarakhand and Gujarat to introduce a Bill seeking the UCC and it



would exempt the tribal communities from the ambit of the law. "We will bring the UCC and we will bring it through the front door," Sarma asserted, reacting to leader of opposition Debabrata Saikia's question during the discussion if the proposed legislation on healing practices is a tactic to bring in the UCC by the 'back door'.

The Bill, which was later passed by a voice vote, seeks to eradicate non-scientific healing practices and making 'magical healing' by any person with sinister motive a cognizable and non-bailable of-

fence, with imprisonment of up to five years and a fine of up to Rs one lakh.

Sarma, referring to a ruckus created by opposition parties earlier in the House over the state Cabinet's decision to repeal the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935, said he was saddened at the stance taken by them over such a sensitive issue as child marriage.

"Should the Congress, AIUDF support marriages of five-six year-olds? Can't we be unanimous in one matter that legalises marriages

of only girls over 18 years and boys above 21 years of age? Legislations which promote child marriage should be banned," the CM claimed.

The Act of 1935 contained provisions allowing marriage registration even if the bride and groom had not reached the legal ages of 18 and 21, as required by law.

On the opposition's objections to the 'Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024', Sarma maintained that a similar law in the form of Centre's 'The Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954' was already in place.

"It was passed when the late Jawaharlal Nehru was the prime minister. We haven't taken Nehru's extremist view and banned everything like talisman, mantra, and kavach," he said. The CM claimed that the state government has refrained from implementing the Central Act as it will get in the way of traditional systems, especially prevalent among tribal communities of the state.

"The simple design of our bill is not to prevent anyone from their traditional practices, but we stop anything (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Northeast a significant partner in India's development: Dhankhar

**AIZAWL, Feb 26:** Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday said the Northeast region has been a significant partner in the country's development.

Dhankhar said that India is on the path of unprecedented progress and is currently the fifth-largest global economy.

"The country now has world-class infrastructure of roads and connectivity. In all these developments Northeast, including Mizoram, has been a significant partner", Dhankhar said while addressing the Mizoram Assembly. Dhankhar said the Northeast region has seen unprecedented exponential growth in the last decade and the government's Act East policy has been a game changer.

He said the last decade has been the golden era of the Northeast and the North East Council (NEC) has played a crucial role with the achievement of over 12,000 km of roads, 700 MW power plants and many national institutions coming up. "The remarkable focus on the NE with separate departments at the Centre has resulted in great



outcomes. The exponential rise in physical and digital connectivity and roads has been a game changer," he said.

Dhankhar said the entire world applauded India's presidency of G20 that gave the country a high global image and a cutting edge to its diplomatic power. He said the G20 meetings were held in all states and Union Territories and Mizoram has also gained significant footing in tourism from the

G20 meetings.

He said that Mizoram has enormous potential in tourism, horticulture, local arts and products and these potentials need to be fully exploited.

"This august assembly needs to roll out a roadmap of growth and development that is futuristic and contributes to the success of the glorious marathon for Viksit Bharat 2047," the vice president said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CM to be honoured with 'Ganashilpi Moghai Ojah Xuworoni Bota'

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** The Ganashilpi Moghai Ojah Kalashetra, Assam will honour chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma with the 'Ganashilpi Moghai Ojah Xuworoni Bota'. This was announced by the Jorhat based organisation through a press statement on Monday.

The award will be presented to Sarma during the 'Boghgi Utsav' celebrations to be organised by the Ganashilpi Moghai Ojah Kalashetra in Jorhat on April 19 and 20.

The general committee of the Ganashilpi Moghai Ojah Kalashetra during a meeting on Sunday, unanimously agreed to honour the chief minister of the state with the award.

Speaking on the occasion, president of Ganashilpi Moghai Ojah Kalashetra, Ratul Charan Bora and chief secretary Nilomoni Bora said that Moghai Ojah was able to popularise the dhol as a major instrument in the world state in as early as the 1950s. He performed with legendary Assamese singer (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam's economy will be in shambles in 5 yrs if OPS restored: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said the state's economy will be in "shambles" if the government has to implement the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) for its employees.

Speaking in the assembly, he maintained that employees retiring after 30-35 years of service under the National Pension System (NPS) stand to gain, a notion that the opposition members refused to accept, and staged a walkout.

Replying to a question by independent MLA Akhil Gogoi, Sarma said as per data with the 'FinAssam' portal, there are 4,34,454 pensioners under the state government, excluding those under the Sixth Schedule Areas.

Of these, 2,58,456 are under the NPS and 1,75,998 are under OPS, he said.

The CM also said that 7,006 retired personnel are currently drawing pension under the NPS, which was implemented in the state from 2005.

"Since we implement the central government's pay scale here, we follow their policies with regards to pension. Those who have joined service at a younger age like 25 years, will get a good pension amount under the NPS.

"But, the benefit cannot be same for some with, say, three years of service under NPS and someone with 30 years of service," Sarma said.



He said the Assam government has a pension bill of about ₹ 1,700 crore per month at present.

"If we assume that the current salary bill is ₹ 2,800-3,000 crore per month and pension bill is ₹ 1,700 crore, then under OPS, our pension bill will be more than the salary bill in five years. And, then our economy will be in shambles," Sarma said.

He said only a limited number of employees whose retirement is due soon under NPS could face some financial setback, and the government is aware of it. "The central government has formed a committee to study whether to move forward with NPS or go back to the OPS and other related matters. We have to wait for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Current govt progressing towards fulfilling election promises

**HT Bureau**  
**LAKHIMPUR, Feb 26:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said that the current government on its way to fulfilling most of election-time promises. He said that the current government in the state is doing everything in its capacity to see that promises that were made during elections campaigns were being fulfilled without undue delay.

"The government was on its way to fulfilling the promise of recruiting 1-lakh youths into services of the Government of Assam. This apart, there is whole-hearted attempt at achieving saturation point for all flagship government schemes aimed at uplift of the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of the society," he said while addressing a gathering during the ceremonial distribution of land pattas to 11,483 eligible beneficiaries of Mission Basundhara 2.0 belonging to the Dhakuakhana Legislative Constituency (LAC) in Lakhimpur district. Sarma further added that the current government was committed to see that Assam transforms into one of the top performing states on all fronts in days to come.

"In order to fulfil this aim, there is need to embrace work-culture while at the same time shedding "andolan culture" by the residents of the state," he said.

He also exuded confidence that all sections of society will come forward and join hands to help the State attain its rightful position on all fronts.

It is worth mentioning that a total of 20,419 applicants from Lakhimpur district have been found to be eligible for land pattas under Mission Basundhara 2.0 that got concluded recently. Of these, Bihpuria LAC

accounts for 1,253, Ranganadi LAC accounts for 1,352, Nawboicha LAC accounts for 3,244, Lakhimpur LAC accounts for 3,087 numbers of land pattas while rest are from the Dhakuakhana LAC.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma said land pattas being allotted to so many families in Lakhimpur district manifests the commitments of the present state govt towards ensuring a dignified existence to the members of the indigenous groups. He said that numerous indigenous but non-tribal communities in Lakhimpur district were being deprived of land pattas due to the restrictive rules and regulations of tribal belts and blocks. "The current government, therefore, decided to mitigate the land-related woes of such non-tribal indigenous communities through the medium called Mission Basundhara 2.0," the chief minister added.

In Lakhimpur and Dhemajai districts in particular, non-tribal but indigenous communities who have been designated "protected class" have benefited immensely through Mission Basundhara 2.0, he remarked. In the upcoming Mission Basundhara 3.0, the focus will be on allotment of land pattas to institutions such as temples, clubs, etc., apart from individuals, the Chief Minister stated. He further added that certain stringent rules in the first and second edition of Mission Basundhara that led to rejection of several applications shall be waived off in the upcoming Mission Basundhara 3.0. Member of Parliament Pradan Barua, member of Legislative Assembly Naba Kumar Doley, chairman of Missing Autonomous Council Sunil Pegu, along with a host of other dignitaries were present at the programme.

'None of us live on an island; We live on planet Earth, and we are all connected'

## UN member states meeting to plan how to tackle the world's environmental crises

**NAIROBI, Feb 26:** The world's top decision-making body on the environment is meeting in Kenya's capital on Monday to discuss how countries can work together to tackle environmental crises like climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity.

The meeting in Nairobi is the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, and governments, civil society groups, scientists and the private sector are attending.

"None of us live on an island. We live on planet Earth, and we are all connected," Inger Andersen, executive director of the UN Environment Programme, which is leading the process, told The Associated Press ahead of the talks. "The only way we can solve some of these problems is by talking together."

At the meeting, member states discuss a raft of draft resolutions



on a range of issues that the assembly adopts upon consensus. If a proposal is adopted, it sets the stage for countries to implement what's been agreed on.

In the last round of talks in 2022, also in Nairobi, governments adopted 14 resolutions, including to create a legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution globally. Andersen described it then as

the most significant environmental multilateral deal since the Paris Agreement to limit global warming. For this year's talks, countries have submitted 20 draft resolutions for discussion, including on how best to restore degraded lands, combat dust storms and reduce the environmental impact of metal and mineral mining.

But with countries having differ-

ent priorities, it's often hard to get consensus on the draft resolutions.

However, Andersen said, there's generally "a forward movement" on all draft resolutions for this year's meeting, known as UNEA-6. With this meeting's focus on multilateralism, UNEP wants to build on past agreements it led between governments, such as the Minamata Convention to put controls on mercury and the Montreal Protocol to heal the hole in the ozone layer, Andersen said.

Bjorn Beeler, international coordinator for the International Pollutants Elimination Network, thinks there'll be slow progress on more complex issues such as financing around chemicals and waste.

Beeler also expects strong opposition to a draft resolution that wants to phase out the use of highly hazardous pesticides. The draft resolution, which was submitted by (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# Sensex declines 352 points on profit taking, weak global trends

**MUMBAI, Feb 26:** Closing in the red for the second straight session, benchmark Sensex on Monday declined 352 points due to profit-taking in IT, metal and consumer durable goods shares amid weak global trends.

The 30-share BSE barometer closed at 72,790.13 points, down 352.67 points or 0.48 per cent over the previous close. As many as 26 index constituents declined while four advanced.

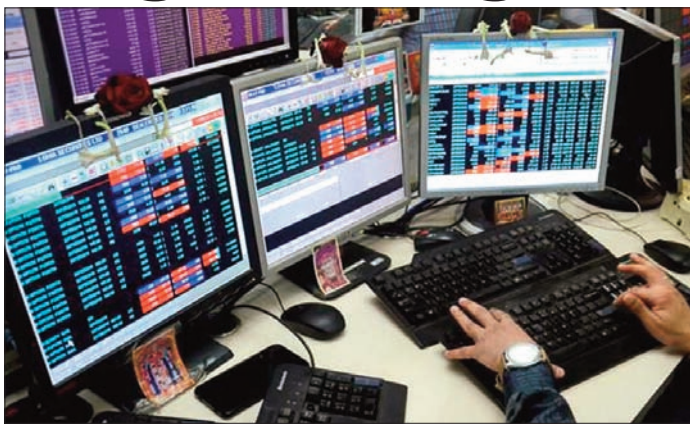
The broader Nifty of NSE dropped 90.65 points or 0.41 per cent to end the day at 22,122.05 points and 37 stocks in the index were in the red.

Selling in index heavyweights, including Infosys, TCS, ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries, dragged the benchmark indices into the negative for the second straight session, analysts said.

Among the Sensex shares, Asian Paints fell the most by 3.9 per cent as analysts expressed concerns over rising competition in the domestic paints market following the entry of Aditya Birla group company Grasm Industries into the paints segment.

IT shares Infosys, TCS, HCL Tech, Wipro and Tech Mahindra continued to slide amid inflation concerns in the US market.

Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Titan,



Bharti Airtel, Axis Bank, Kotak Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance and Maruti were among the other Sensex losers.

On the other hand, Larsen & Toubro gained the most by 2.36 per cent. Power Grid, HUL and Nestle were also among the gainers.

"The market took a breather after the recent run-up as investors' focus shifted from earnings to economic triggers this week.

"The US and India GDP data, eurozone inflation, and US jobless claim data will be influential economic numbers for the central bank to take a call on interest rates, which will dictate market sentiment in the near term," Vinod Nair,

Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

The uncertainty over demand and high US inventory pushed oil prices down, Nair added.

In the broader market, BSE Midcap fell 0.38 per cent while BSE Smallcap slipped 0.06 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE Metal fell the most by 1.27 per cent. BSE Consumer Durables dropped by 1.25 per cent, BSE Teck by 1.13 per cent, and BSE IT by 1.06 per cent.

On the other hand, BSE Utilities gained 1.41 per cent, BSE Power by 1.01 per cent, and Capita Goods by 0.84 per cent.

The underperformance of the banking majors is largely weighing

on the sentiment. However, rotational buying in other heavyweights is capping the damage, Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Market breadth was negative as of the 4,108 scrips traded, 2,268 stocks declined, 1,710 stocks gained and 130 stocks closed unchanged.

Total turnover in the equity segment was ₹ 7,168.78 crore on BSE. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed stocks stood at ₹ 392 lakh crore (USD 4.73 trillion) at close.

Asian markets mostly declined on Monday. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.5 per cent, the Shanghai Composite dropped 0.9 per cent and South Korea's Kospi declined 0.8 per cent. However, the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo gained 0.4 per cent.

European shares also traded lower with Euro Stoxx 50 dropping 0.22 per cent. The FTSE 100 in London slipped 0.34 per cent while CAC 40 in France declined 0.45 per cent.

Oil benchmark Brent Crude dropped 0.5 per cent to USD 76.11 per barrel in futures trade.

On Friday, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers as they purchased securities worth ₹ 1,276.09 crore. (PTI)

## Govt expedites inspection of crisis-hit BYJU'S

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** The corporate affairs ministry has asked its field officers to expedite the inspection of the books of BYJU'S and submit the report, a senior official said on Monday as trouble continues to brew at the edtech firm.

The ministry, which is implementing the companies law, will decide the further course of action after receiving the report from its regional office.

In July 2023, the ministry had asked the office of the Regional Director in Hyderabad to conduct an inspection of the company Think & Learn Pvt Ltd, which is registered in Bengaluru.

Think & Learn Pvt Ltd operates under the brand BYJU'S.

On Monday, the senior official said the ministry has sought to expedite the inspection and submission of the report with respect to BYJU'S. Specific details about the inspection could not be immediately ascertained.

Last year, the ministry ordered the inspection in the wake of various developments at that time at the edtech company, including its inability to finalise the statements

and resignation of auditor.

BYJU'S spokesperson said the inspection is ongoing and the company has received multiple communications requesting information and documents from time to time. "It has cooperated completely and responded with all necessary responses along with documents to the MCA (Ministry of Corporate Affairs).

"The company also apprised them of the corporate governance measures implemented, including the constitution of the advisory council. All directions of the MCA have also been complied with," the spokesperson said in a statement.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) is also looking into the financial disclosures made by the edtech firm for certain financial years.

ICAI President Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal, last week, said the case is under process.

According to BYJU'S spokesperson, the company has also closed its financials for FY 2022 and has effected the necessary filings with the Registrar of Companies (RoC).

"Given all of the above, the

company is also hoping for an expedited closure of the matter," the spokesperson added.

On February 23, shareholders of BYJU'S voted unanimously for removing Founder CEO Byju Raveendran and his family members from the board over alleged "mismanagement and failures" at what was once India's hottest tech startup.

However, the company had called the voting done in absence of founders as invalid and ineffective. Raveendran, his wife and brother -- the only three members on the company board as of now -- stayed away from the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) called by a group of six investors, who collectively hold more than 32 per cent in Think & Learn. At the end, more than 60 per cent of the shareholders voted in favour of all the seven resolutions, which included removing the current management, reconfiguration of the board and a third party forensic investigation into acquisitions done by the company, sources close to the investors had said. However, sources close to BYJU'S had put the number at 47 per cent. (PTI)

## Sitharaman chairs meeting with top executives of 50 fintech cos

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday chaired a meeting with top executives of around 50 fintech firms to discuss regulatory issues being faced by them and impressed upon them to strictly comply with the norms, according to an official.

The meeting was attended by top executives of private sector fintech firms, including RazorPay, PhonePe, Google Pay and Amazon Pay. NPCI officials too were present.

From the government side, the meeting was attended by Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi and MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) Secretary S Krishnan. RBI Deputy Governor T Rabi Sankar was also present.

The meeting comes at a time when the Reserve Bank of India's action against Paytm Payments Bank has put the spotlight on regulatory compliance in the fintech industry.

Representatives of Paytm were not invited for the meeting on Monday.

On January 31, RBI barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) from accepting any fresh deposits or top ups from customers after February 29 for not complying with regulations. The deadline was later extended till March 15. Last week, RBI advised the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to examine the possibility of migrating the users from PPBL to four to five other banks. PPBL has 30 crore wallets and 3 crore bank customers. (PTI)

## Planters' body voices concern over tea quality



**KOLKATA, Feb 26:** Indian Tea Association (ITA), the apex body of planters, on Monday voiced concern over allegations of consumer packs containing "non-compliant" tea. In a statement, ITA said all tea estates in the country are registered with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to comply with the prevalent quality standards. The protocol allows for testing of 33 chemicals for tea, the planters' body said, adding that it is done regularly by both producers and buyers.

These protocols not only include FSSAI-prescribed plant protection formulations but also cover testing of banned chemicals, it said.

The tea industry is also subject to social audit by the certification agencies to ensure compliance with social, environmental and ethical standards, the association said. "These are well documented, and a transparent system is in place to check tea being produced by the estates. ITA supports comprehensive testing to check quality compliance of tea", it said.

However, the planters' body said that there is a need to create further testing infrastructure, including that of green leaf.

"This has been flagged by the association with the appropriate authorities," it said. All the stakeholders in the value chain, such as producers, buyers and packeters, are responsible and law-abiding entities providing the consumer with a safe and sustainable cup of tea, the ITA added. (PTI)

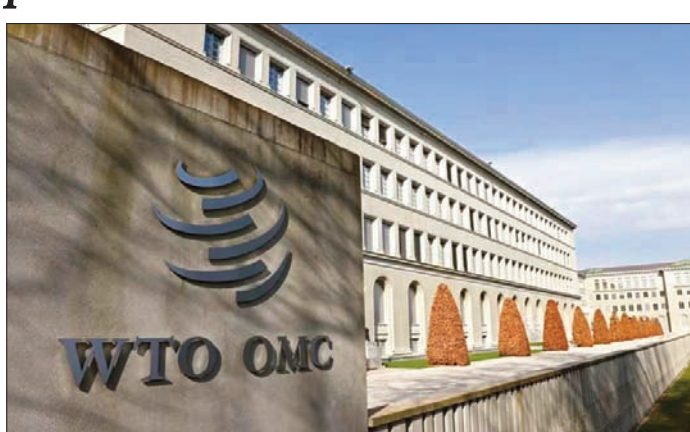
## India seeks permanent solution to long-pending food stockpile issue at Abu Dhabi WTO meet

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** India on Monday called on WTO members to find a permanent solution to the long-pending public food stockpile issue, saying it is directly related to achieving the sustainable development goal of zero hunger by 2030.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) should not negotiate rules on non-trade-related subjects like climate change, gender, and labour and rather these should be addressed in respective intergovernmental organizations. "I re-emphasize that the development agenda would remain incomplete without a permanent solution on public stockholding (PSH) for food security purposes which is directly related to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger by 2030, Goyal said.

This continues to be a long-pending issue for the last few decades and despite having a clear mandate agreed by the members in the past, finding a permanent solution on PSH remains an unaccomplished agenda on which we have to deliver in MC13.

Trade ministers of 164 WTO-member countries are gathering in



Abu Dhabi for the 13th ministerial conference (MC13). The highest decision-making body started the four-day meet on February 26 in the UAE.

The PSH programme is a policy tool under which the government procures crops like rice and wheat from farmers at the minimum support price (MSP) and stores and distributes foodgrain to the poor.

Under the global trade norms, a WTO member country's food subsidy bill should not breach the limit of 10 per cent of the value of production based on the reference year of 1986-88.

India has been seeking amend-

ments to the formula for calculating the food subsidy cap.

As an interim measure, the WTO members at the Bali ministerial meeting in December 2013 had agreed to put in place a mechanism popularly called the Peace Clause and committed to negotiating an agreement for a permanent solution. Under the Peace Clause, WTO members agreed to refrain from challenging any breach of the prescribed ceiling by a developing nation at the dispute settlement forum of the WTO. This clause will be there till a permanent solution is found to the food stockpiling issue.

"I am confident that with the collective efforts of all of us, MC13 will engage constructively to give an outcome on the long pending mandated issue of permanent solution on PSH for food security, send a strong message that the world cares for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized people," he said. Goyal also said that in India, fishermen largely undertake sustenance fishing which addresses hunger, poverty, food and nutrition insecurity of millions of traditional fishers. "Sustainably harnessing fishing resources is a problem of a magnitude that requires a global consensus, taking into account the interests of disciplined nations like India," he said.

He added that any discussion on WTO reforms must incorporate consensus-based decision-making and S&DT (special and differential treatment) for emerging economies.

"India firmly believes that any measures taken to combat climate change, including unilateral ones, should not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade," the minister said. Goyal's statement was posted on the WTO website. (PTI)

# Paytm shares hit upper circuit again at ₹ 428

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Shares of Paytm owner One97 Communications jumped 5 per cent in the morning trade on Monday after Reserve Bank asked retail payment settlement body NPCI to examine the possibility of migrating Paytm Payments Bank customers using '@paytm' UPI handle to other banks.

The stock of crisis-hit fintech company climbed 5 per cent each to ₹ 428.10 and ₹ 427.95 apiece -- also its upper circuit limit -- on the NSE and BSE.

In the morning trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark slumped 288.71 points or 0.39 per cent, while NSE Nifty fell 71.55 points to 22,141.15.

On Friday, the scrip of One97 Communications rallied 5 per cent and locked in upper circuit limit on the BSE.

In a bid to prevent any disruptions in the payment ecosystem, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday asked the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to examine the possibility of migrating Paytm Payments Bank customers using the UPI handle '@paytm' to 4-5 other banks.

The central bank came out with additional steps for the benefit of customers, wallet holders and merchants who are availing banking services from Paytm Payments Bank, which has been barred from accepting deposits and credits after March 15, 2024.

As the PPBL cannot accept further credits into its customer accounts and wallets after March 15, 2024, certain additional steps have become necessary to ensure seamless digital payments by UPI customers using '@paytm' handle operated by the bank, and minimise concentration risk in the UPI system by having multiple payment app providers, the RBI said in a statement.

"NPCI has been advised by the RBI to examine the request of One97 Communication Ltd (OCL) to become a Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP) for UPI channel for continued UPI operation of the Paytm app, as per the norms," it said.



Meanwhile, an advisory committee, set up by One97 Communications after the Reserve Bank's action on its payments bank business, is at a stage of engagement with the company on matters related to the terms of reference for the panel.

The panel's head and former chairman of Sebi M Damodaran on Sunday said, "We have been engaging with the group on matters relating to the Advisory Committee's terms of reference."

He said that the panel members are external advisors and at present Paytm is engaged in dealing with the RBI.

On January 31, the RBI asked PPBL (Paytm Payments Bank Ltd) 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.

Paytm on February 9 announced setting up of a group advisory committee headed by Damodaran. The committee was set up to advise the company on strengthening compliance and on regulatory matters.

One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) holds a 49 per cent stake in PPBL. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Assam to bring UCC

done with ulterior motives," he added. The Congress and AIUDF, which had moved amendments to the bill for defining evil practices and whether it would disturb traditional systems, agreed to withdraw their amendments following the reply from the chief minister.

Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi, who had also moved amendments to the bill, however, did not withdraw his objection that the definition of 'evil practice' was not mentioned specifically in the Bill. (PTI)

## Northeast a significant partner

He said that the Aizawl bypass road and bamboo link roads are being developed at a total cost of over ₹ 600 crore under PM-DevINE scheme. With the development of the Aizawl convention centre and two bamboo link roads there will be an upsurge in tourism in the state, he said. Dhanikar also lauded the legislators for maintaining discipline and decorum in the House, which according to him, is emulated by others. Chief Minister Lalduboma thanked the vice president and said that when Mizoram attained the status of Union Territory in 1972, India had already surged ahead with its fifth five-year plan placing the northeastern state 25 years behind in terms of development. Moreover, for two decades until 1986, the state experienced trouble, he said. "Despite facing numerous obstacles, we take immense pride in our efforts to catch up and align ourselves with the nation's trajectory and the remarkable achievement to characterise our state and its people," Lalduboma said. "Foremost among these accomplishments is the transformation of a once strife-ridden state into the most peaceful state in the country," he added. The vice president on Monday also graced the convocation ceremony of Mizoram University (MZU). A total of 7,980 students were awarded degrees during the occasion. (PTI)

## Assam's economy will be

its recommendations," he said. "Pointing fingers and asking questions can happen in Naxal training camps, not in the assembly. I won't reply to that," Sarma said, when Gogoi insisted that the state government clarifies whether it will restore the OPS. Expressing dissatisfaction at the chief minister's reply, the Congress, CPI (M) and Gogoi, the lone independent MLA, staged a walkout from the House. (PTI)

## Won't allow child marriage

to conduct the listed business of the House. Opposition CPI(M) legislator and the lone Independent MLA, however, remained in the House. The Assam Cabinet on Friday had approved the decision to repeal the Act in a bid to end the social menace of child marriage in the state, Sarma had said. The Act of 1935 contained a provision allowing marriage registration even if the bride and groom had not reached the legal ages of 18 and 21, as required by law. (PTI)

## 'People have seen new

the budget due to the country's growing economy will not have an impact on the ground if revenue leaks due to scams. Renovated railway stations are being used to promote local culture and artisans, he added. The financial losses of the railways used to be a common refrain earlier, but the national transporter is a big force of transformation now, the prime minister said. "I want to tell youngsters that their dreams are my resolve. Your dreams and hard work and my resolve are a guarantee of Viksit Bharat," he said. Several governors and chief ministers, besides hundreds of MPs and MLAs, joined the programme held across the country. (PTI)

## UN member states meeting

Ethiopia and is co-sponsored by Uruguay, aims to create a global alliance of UN bodies like UNEP, the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation. "If this does go through, it would be very significant because it would be the first time ever to see global movement on highly hazardous pesticides," said Beeler, who is attending the talks. UNEP anticipates more than 70 government ministers and 3,000 delegates at the talks. "What we should expect at UNEA-6 is decision makers looking into the horizon, being aware of what is it that's coming to us that could potentially damage our planet, and taking preemptive action to prevent this," said Andersen. (AP)

## CM to be honoured with 'Ganashilpi

Bhupen Hazarika at different places along the length and breadth of the country. Armed with a revolutionary spirit, Ojha was able to highlight the injustices and sufferings in the society through the tunes he played on his musical instrument. When Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha became the president of the Assam chapter of the Indian People's Theatre Association, Ojha held the position of the vice-president of the association. 60 years after Ojha popularised the dhol globally, chief minister Sarma gave the dhulias (artists playing the dhol) of the state the opportunity to make it to the Guinness Book of World Records through their performances last year.

He also honoured them with prize money on the occasion.

"The chief minister has not only helped the dhulias to make a world record, but has also been successful in establishing the Bihu dance globally. We want to honour him with the Ganashilpi Moghai Ojha Xuworoni Bota for this feat," said Nilomoni Bora.

## Farmers take out tractor rallies

farmers also parked their tractors on a road at Bijli Ghar Chowk in Tanda. Addressing a gathering, Chauhan criticised World Trade Organization (WTO) policies, calling those "anti-farmers". Members of several other farm outfits such as Bharti Kisan Union (Rajewal), BKU (Qadian), BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) also held demonstrations and parked their tractors on Hoshiarpur-Phagwara Road, Nasrula-Taragarh Road, Dosarka-Fatehpur Road, Bulowal-Allowal Road and Bhunga-Hariana Road. The protesters also demanded legal guarantees for MSP, debt waiver, implementation of Swaminathan Commission recommendations and pension for farmers.

In Amritsar, farmers parked their vehicles along the highways in Ajnala, Jandiala Guru, Rayya and Beas. In Ludhiana, farmers owing allegiance to the SKM, parked their tractors along the highway on Ludhiana-Chandi-garh road to register their protest against the WTO. In Haryana's Hisar, farmers held protests at 50 locations by parking their tractors along the state and national highways.

All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) state vice president Shamsher Singh Nambardar said the demonstrations were held at places including Surewala Chowk, Mayyar Toll, Chaudhariwas, Bagla Mor, Badopatti and Bas Toll. He claimed that the government was not giving MSP on all crops because of WTO policies. Farmers also held a protest at the Bahadarabad toll plaza on the Haridwar-Delhi National Highway in Uttarakhand and sat on a day-long dharna causing inconvenience to commuters. Heavy police force was deployed on the spot in view of the protest.

BKU's Kranti Morcha President Irfan Bhatti claimed that after the 2020-21 agitation by the farmers in Delhi, the Union government had promised that their demands would be fulfilled. But the promise was broken, forcing farmers to start their agitation again. Farmer leader Subba Singh Dhillion said that if the government "does not fulfil the promise made on MSP" and does not accept the demands of the farmers, then fierce protests would be held. (PTI)



## Memorandum to Pollution Control Board, Assam Burning of waste at Boragaon dumping site irks residents

**Hiranya Barman**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** Residents adjacent to Deepor Beel were alarmed due to burning of waste at dumping site since February 15.

Concerned on the matter environment activist Pramod Kalita submitted a memorandum to Pollution Control Board.

The memorandum stated that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has ordered the closure of the dumping ground in West Boragaon in 2021. However, from the first week of August, the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) has been dumping about 800 to 1,000 tonnes of rotten materials and plastic items, dead animals, etc. daily along the river banks of West Boragaon and Pamohi. They were also being dumped directly in flood prone areas.

The memorandum sought proper investigation and punishing the attempts to reduce the garbage by burning in the present dumping ground from February 15.

The memorandum further stated that the Ministry of environment, forest and climate change notification of Solid Waste Management Rule, 2016 published in the Gazette, Schedule-1, (See rules 15(w), (z), 16(1), (b)(e), 16 (4)) Criteria for Site selection (vii) published in Specification for Sanitary Landfills mentioned that a dumping



ground should be located 100 meters from river shore, 200 meters from residential areas, NHs, public parks, wells etc. and 20 km from airports and Air Force bases. They should be at a distance subject to special permission 10-20 km." And (ix) states that "A buffer zone of no development shall be maintained around solid waste processing and disposal facility, exceeding five tonnes per day, of installed capacity. This will be maintained with in the total area of the solid waste processing and disposal facility. The buffer zone shall be prescribed on a case to case

basis by the local body in consultation with the concerned State Pollution Control Board".

"The Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 No. 33 of 1989 (As Amended) Chapter II, Offences of Atrocities mentioned that 3. Punishment for Offences Atrocities -(i) Whoever, not being a member of a scheduled caste or a scheduled tribe dumps excreta, sewage, carcasses, or any other obnoxious substance in premises, or at the entrance of the premises, occupied by a member of a scheduled caste or a scheduled tribe; with in-

tent to cause injury, insult or annoyance to any member of scheduled caste or schedule tribe, dumps excreta, waste matter, carcasses or any other obnoxious substance in his neighbourhood," the memorandum stated.

Talking to The Hills Times Kalita wanted to know the degree of crime people of Pamhi, Moinakhorong, Maghwapara, Deshtal, Kalitapara, Chakardo, Azara and other villages have committed to face the wrath of GMC.

"They want to reduce the mountains of garbage by burning them in a way destructing biodiversity of Deepor Beel, making the residents of the entire area sick and depriving livestock farmers, fishermen and farmers of their livelihoods. There is not even a needle of garbage dumped from this entire area. In particular, the indigenous people living in this entire area are spending days and nights in a smelly and unhealthy environment, facing severe obstacles in the study, sports and other development of students and children, threatening the livelihoods of the poor. There is a risk of epidemics due to unhealthy environment, dumping ground and contaminated water from Guwahati city falling into Deepor beel," he said.

## Kutumba Surakshya Parishad to move court against Christian Missionaries

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** The Kutumba Surakshya Parishad has decided to move the Gauhati High Court and if necessary the Supreme Court for allegedly neglecting constitutional fundamental duties by the Christian missionaries as mentioned in Article 51 (A) of Constitution of India.

"We are in touch with senior most lawyers of The Supreme court and they have been preparing the draft for PIL which will be submitted to Gauhati High Court first with all our concerns and highlighting government's ignorance and failure, Neglecting constitu-

tional fundamental duties by the Christian Missionaries as mentioned in Article 51 (A) of Constitution of India, Violation of New Education Policy, defaming the secular values and state of the Nation, non compliance to the judgement of the Supreme court of India provided in 2017 against a case no. WP(C) 25006 that Private Schools also cannot practice any exclusive religious practices in the schools," Parishad president satya Ranjan Borah said.

We want to know if a school can have church which cannot have Mosque and Temple, Gurudwara etc and the reason behind the in-

stallation of Churches in the school, Borah said.

We would approach the court with the evidence of severe violation of Juvenile Justice Act, violation of Article 14, 15 of the constitution of India etc, asking the question of being a minority is anyone is not liable to abide by the Article 51 A of the constitution of India. Are the Christian Missionary ruled schools notified and recognised religious institutions as like Madrasa? If not how can a public school can practice exclusive Christianity in their schools? Is it not against the Secular State of the Nation? Borah said.

## 45<sup>th</sup> Beltola Bohagi Utsav from April 19

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** The Beltola Bohagi Utsav Committee has been making extensive preparations to celebrate the Beltola Bohagi Utsav on April 19, 20 and 21. The meeting unanimously decided to retain the old committee. The committee was formed with Narayan Deka as president, Sanjay Goswami as general secretary, Vijay Boro as executive president, Jayant Gogoi as cultural secretary and Pradeep Das as treasurer. The meeting also discussed the 2024 Dr Bhupen Hazarika Awards, and performance of folk culture and prominent singers of Assam. Retaining the traditions the utsav has decided to organise the Patmudoi Bihu Husori competition this year.

## MG Comet EV reaches Guwahati

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** MG (Morris Garages), a British automobile brand with a 100-year-old legacy, reiterates its commitment towards faster adoption of Green Mobility in India with MG Comet EV. After covering more than 19 states, Smart and Sustainable MG Comet EV Drive reached Guwahati. The objective of the drive is to create awareness around EVs - a sustainable, practical, and economical mobility solution for cities like Guwahati. Last year, MG Motor India launched Comet - The Smart EV that sets new standards for the next generation of urban mobility in India. It is the second EV in MG Motor India's portfolio with futuristic and user-friendly smart technologies. MG

Comet is a practical solution for the people in Guwahati. With Comet EV's practical and smart design (Big inside and compact outside), it is easy to drive, manoeuvre, and park in congested areas, making it a perfect city car. It offers a claimed range of 230kms on a single charge\*, and the cost of ownership for Comet is less than the cost of buying two pizzas in a month.

The MG Comet offers a unique, distinctive, sleek design, advanced connectivity, and entertainment features that set it apart from other EVs in India. It comes with a 10.25 head unit and a 10.25 digital cluster. The Comet EV comes loaded with iSMART infotainment, offering 50+ connected features, including remote vehicle functions like AC start, lock,

unlock, and status check, as well as live location sharing and tracking. It also offers more than 100 voice commands to control the EV, including 35+ Hinglish Commands. The Smart EV comes loaded with active and passive safety features like Dual Front Airbags, ABS +EBD, Front & Rear 3 pt. Seat Belts, Rear Parking Camera & Sensor, TPMS (Indirect) and ISOFIX Child Seat. MG Comet has gone through 17 hot stamping panels for structural safety and 39 stringent tests for vehicle and battery safety, making it a safe vehicle for our customers.

The Comet EV comes with three variants, Pace, Play and Plush, starting at ₹ 6.99 lakh, ₹ 7.88 lakh and ₹ 8.58(ex-showroom). The MG Comet EV is offered in 5 Colour Options.

## Grand finale of Set Wet Mega Mister NE on March 1

Mega Mister North East is the brainchild of fashionpreneur Abhijeet Singha

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** Mega Entertainment, Northeast's largest fashion and pageant event organiser, announced that the grand finale of 13th edition of Set Wet Mega Mister North East will be held at ITA Cultural Complex, Guwahati, on March 1.

The pageant has been supported by Title Sponsor - Set Wet, Style Partner - Killer Jeans, Fashion Partner - Butterfly Clothing and Accessories, and Hospitality Partner - Hotel Daayso Oley Allo.

Announcing the 13th edition of Set Wet Mega Mister North East, Abhijeet Singha, Founder of Mega Entertainment, said, "We are so glad to be back with the most awaited manhunt of northeast. And the most unique aspect of Set Wet Mega Mister North East is that we will have not one, but three winners! There will be no runners-up and all the three top contestants will be crowned equally, along with the same prize packages. Mega Entertainment aims to offer equal opportunity to every young man to become a force of positive change in North East as a youth icon."

Abhijeet also revealed during the press meet that one of the winners of this pageant will be sent to represent India at the Top Model of Universe which will be held at



Turkey this year. "Even in the past, winners of this pageant have represented India on international platforms, and they managed to make our nation proud. So, while the pageant is a representation of the talent from northeast India, our ambition to take our winners to international platforms and showcase their skills internationally", added Abhijeet.

Speaking about the brand's partnership with Mega Entertainment, Somasree Bose Awasthi, chief marketing Officer, Marico Limited, stated, "As a leader in the hair styling category, Set Wet has consistently led hair styling conversations among the youth of India. Set Wet Mega Mister North East 2024 marks an exciting milestone in

the brand's journey of emphasising the crucial role of hair styling in creating a lasting first impression and setting the right vibe from the get-go. Rooted in our core message of #ApniHairStyleHiApniVibeHai', this collaboration is set to elevate the grooming experience of not just the contestants but also of our valued customers in the Northeast. Set Wet has a diverse range of product offerings for the youth of today ranging from hair styling gels, waxes, sprays, hair powder, and perfumes, offering a complete range to elevate their style. With this initiative, we aim to form a deeper connection with today's Gen Z and together with Mega Entertainment, we look forward to shaping a new era of hairstyling in the Northeast and

beyond."

Mega Mister North East is the brainchild of fashionpreneur Abhijeet Singha. It has been produced by Mega Entertainment, and is marketed by Mega Activation.

Apart from a prize package of Rs. 50,000 each, the three winners will also win an opportunity to become Set Wet brand ambassadors. Additionally, they will win travel opportunities, professional representation from Mega Entertainment, brand engagements, shoots, appearances at youth and fashion events, and public relations and reputation management for the reigning term from Life's Purple.

Apart from the main winners, there will also be a series of subtitles that the contestants will be vying for. They are Set Wet Mister Vibe Setter, Hotel Daayso Oley Allo Mister Congeniality, Killer Jeans Mister Fashion Icon, Butterfly Mister Style Icon.

The Top-5 contestants will feature apparels by Butterfly Clothing and Accessories, one of the fastest growing brands in Shillong. Founded by Strenuousland Marwein and Rishan Pariat, Butterfly Clothing and Accessories has won numerous awards.

Guwahati-based Reputation Management consultancy, Life's Purple, is the official PR Partner of the event.



Members of Assam State Anganwadi Karmi Sahayika Santha staging a protest at Chachal Dharna Ground in support of their various demand in Guwahati on Monday. HT photos

## Leading real estate companies collaborate to develop 'The Majesty'

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** Two pioneering real estate companies in the Northeast region, Uttarayan Group and Paramount Developers, have joined forces to introduce 'The Majesty,' a premium residential development nestled in Gorchuk, at the heart of Guwahati. With its meticulously designed elevation, The Majesty redefines luxury living in the region.

The project was formally launched recently in the presence of Gauhati MP Queen Oja as chief guest and several other dignitaries. Widely respected musician Kailash Kher performed in the musical evening organised on the occasion.

Featuring a selection of 3BHK, 4BHK, and 5BHK units, The Majesty offers a total of 106 spaciously crafted homes spread across a sprawling 104,787 sqft land parcel. What distinguishes this project is its commitment to providing residents with a harmonious blend of opulence and natural surroundings, with 70% of the area designated as open space. Notably, the project site enjoys proximity to the airport, enhancing convenience for residents.

Comprising three premium B+G+16 residential towers and one Ultra Premium B+G+11 residential tower, The Majesty emanates architectural brilliance from every angle. The entire society is equipped with full power backup and fire safety mechanisms compliant with FESA standards, ensur-



ing residents' peace of mind regarding safety and security.

The architectural design and structural integrity of The Majesty have been meticulously overseen by esteemed firms such as Studio Gravity from Dubai, Bhajanka Associates, SPA Consultants, and Prolific Design. This collaborative effort has resulted in a residential complex that not only meets but exceeds the expectations of modern urban dwellers.

A standout feature of The Majesty is its promise of a 360-degree view from all flats, offering residents breathtaking vistas of the surrounding landscape.

Moreover, with RERA approval, prospective buyers can rest assured of the project's legality and adherence to regulatory standards.

Notably, Uttarayan Group and Paramount Developers have a distinguished track record of delivering lakhs of sqft spaces to their satisfied customers over the last decade, underscoring their commitment to excellence in the real estate sector. They have consistently delivered flats on time, further enhancing their reputation for reliability and quality.

As a landmark project in Guwahati, The Majesty sets a new standard for residential developments in the region, representing the pinnacle of luxury living. With its blend of exquisite design, premium amenities, and serene surroundings, The Majesty emerges as a coveted address for those seeking an elevated lifestyle experience, a press release stated.

## Walkouts have to be subject-based: Assam assembly speaker

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** Members of opposition parties who stage walkouts from the Assam assembly have to specify for how long they are leaving the House or if their protest is specific to any subject in discussion, Speaker Biswajit Daimary said in a ruling on Monday.

In case of a walkout during Question Hour, it will be in force for the entire remaining period of the Question Hour, he said. (PTI)

## IASST to host 'Industry-Academia Conclave on Technology Transfer'

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** The Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology is set to host a transformative Industry-Academia Conclave on Technology Transfer on March 4, 2024, at IASST. This pioneering initiative aims to catalyse collaboration between academia and industry, fostering a dynamic ecosystem conducive to accelerating innovation, commercialisation, and the widespread adoption of cutting-edge technologies for the betterment of society.

With a keen focus on facilitating the seamless exchange of ideas and knowledge, the conclave is expected to serve as a pivotal platform for stakeholders to converge, ideate, and forge meaningful partnerships. Anticipated participants include a diverse spectrum of professionals ranging from researchers and academicians to industry stalwarts and aspiring students.

Professor Ashis Kr Mukherjee, director of IASST, expressed his optimistic outlook on the forthcoming conclave, envisioning it as a catalytic force in bridging the gap between academia and industry. He remarked, "We are enthusiastic about the potential of this platform to unite experts from academia and industry, fostering collaborative endeavors aimed at translating innovative research into tangible real-world applications."

The conclave is set to feature a series of expert talk sessions led by distinguished scientists hailing from prestigious institutions, including TIFAC, SCTIMST, Himalayan Biochemie Herbs, Serum Institute of India Pvt. Ltd., and Tezpur University. These sessions will offer invaluable insights into the latest advancements in technology and innovation, serving as catalysts for meaningful dialogue and collaborative exploration.

For further information, please contact Dr Tarini Dev Goswami, media coordinator at phone number: 9864097318 or email queries to media@iasst@gmail.com.

## ICAI Guwahati honoured as best branch

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 26:** The Eastern India Regional Council of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India has awarded the Guwahati branch as the 'Best Branch in the Eastern Region' for the year 2023. The branch was selected from all branches of the Eastern region, excluding the small and micro branches.

All branches of ICAI conduct various programs aimed at uplifting the image of the profession, updating and developing the knowledge of members, training students, and engaging in nation-building activities among chartered accountants. The 'Best Branch Award' is given for remarkable efforts and performance on various criteria by a regional jury, considering factors such as size and member strength.

The Managing Committee of the branch, led by branch chairman CA Dr Ayush Saraf, received this award at a ceremony held in Kolkata.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Our work is the presentation of our capabilities.  
- Edward Gibbon

## Trouble beckons Mayawati

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), once a formidable force in Indian politics, finds itself at a critical juncture as the 2024 Lok Sabha elections draw near. The recent exodus of MPs and senior leaders from the party signals a deep-seated turmoil within, posing a significant setback for its leader, Mayawati. The departure of prominent figures from the BSP reflects a growing disillusionment with Mayawati's leadership and the party's direction. While some attribute this trend to the uncertainty of securing BSP tickets in the upcoming elections, others point to broader issues of discontent and a lack of resonance with the party's vision. Mayawati, often regarded as a formidable figure in Indian politics, seems unfazed by the unfolding crisis. However, her reluctance to adapt to changing political dynamics and her aloofness from public scrutiny have only exacerbated the situation. The prolonged absence of Mayawati from the political scene has not only eroded the BSP's visibility but has also raised questions about her ability to lead effectively in turbulent times.

Among the notable departures is Ritesh Pandey, the Ambedkar Nagar MP, who recently joined the BJP despite pledging allegiance to the BSP just a month ago. His decision, echoed by others, highlights a growing trend of politicians gravitating towards the BJP in anticipation of the upcoming elections. However, it would be simplistic to attribute the BSP's woes solely to external factors. Internal strife, including allegations of neglect and a failure to engage with party members, has further eroded confidence in Mayawati's leadership. The lack of dialogue and inclusivity within the party ranks has alienated many loyalists, pushing them towards greener pastures. As the BSP grapples with these challenges, questions arise about its future trajectory. The party's performance in the 2019 elections, where it won 10 seats in Uttar Pradesh in alliance with the Samajwadi Party, serves as a distant memory. With the BJP eyeing a clean sweep in the state, the BSP faces an uphill battle to retain its relevance in Indian politics. Mayawati's dismissal of the MPs' exodus as inconsequential further underscores the disconnect between the party leadership and ground realities. While she may remain confident in her nephew Akash Anand's role in the party's future, it is imperative for the BSP to address the underlying issues driving the defections and regain the trust of its supporters.

As the political landscape continues to evolve, it is essential for the party to adapt and rejuvenate its leadership if it hopes to remain a relevant player in Indian politics. The coming months will be crucial in determining the BSP's fate, and decisive action is needed to navigate these turbulent waters effectively. Amidst the turbulence within the BSP, it is evident that the party is at a crossroads. The departure of key figures and the BJP's aggressive poaching tactics highlight the growing challenges facing Mayawati and her leadership. However, the root causes of the BSP's decline extend beyond mere political manoeuvring. Internal dissent, a lack of cohesive strategy, and a failure to resonate with voters have all contributed to the party's current predicament. Moreover, Mayawati's perceived aloofness and the party's disconnect from ground realities have further exacerbated the situation. While she remains confident in her nephew's ability to steer the party forward, it is essential for the BSP to engage in meaningful introspection and address the grievances of its members.

## Indonesia's president elect Prabowo Subianto is known for abuse of human rights



By: Tirthankar Mitra

At a time when India is gearing up for national elections, Indonesia chose its next president. It merits mention not only because it was the world's largest single-day vote but it was an election which is a beacon of hope in a region plagued by autocrats and juntas.

The defence minister, Prabowo Subianto who exit polls suggest won comfortably, declared victory soon after voting ended though his rivals were yet to concede. His ascent to power is tinged with concerns that ripple through the very fabric of his country's democratic credentials. Subianto is scheduled to take over as the President in October this year.

Accusations of interference in the electoral process, arbitrary cancellation of Opposition rallies and intimidation of critics deepen democratic fissures. Incidentally, such gaps have opened wider in the recent years.

If Subianto's policies are stated to be one of continuation of that of his predecessor Joko Widodo, there is cause for concern. Apart from ambitious plans to relocate the Capital of Jakarta, there is a worrying continuity of crackdown on civil society and press freedom. Such apprehensions are not unfounded given Subianto's past. It includes kidnapping of democracy activists in the 1990s and ordering massacres in East Timor in the 1980s.

More skeletons tumble out of Subianto's closet. It is troubling that he is the only candidate who did not reply to a questionnaire on human rights issues. Subianto cannot wish away the fact that the human rights issue is crucial to voters as well as the country's democratic health. But then he will be having time and authority

in his hands to shape his views.

Many are of the view that Subianto turning out to be an autocrat is a far-fetched apprehension. But the fact remains that weakening of democratic institution during Widodo's presidency has left Indonesia vulnerable.

Moving to the economic front to find out the cost of victory to Indonesia one cannot bin the fear that the growth of Widodo period may continue only at the cost of democratic principles. At stake is the delicate balance between democratic values and progress. The strength of Indonesian democracy does not lie in the hands of its leaders. It rests on the resilience of the people to uphold democratic principles.

The international community has to maintain a vigilant watch owing to Indonesia's strategic heft. The country is a crucial trade partner for India being a top supplier of edible oils together with association in the defence sector an acknowledgement of which came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Subianto after election results were out and the latter reciprocated.

The role Subianto will play between China and US will be under the scanner. India's interest does not lie very far away from it. Indonesia is navigating a difficult political terrain. Its civil society and media must stand together to protect the hard fought gains of a reformist era.

Growing militarisation of Indo-Pacific by US allies is not in the interest of Indonesia. How Subianto approach the challenge could shape his legacy. The world's third largest democracy is at a cross roads. The will of the people can go a long way in overcoming any fragility to the system. (IPA Service)

## Junta forcefully recruiting Rohingya to fight rebels

Myanmar's regime is accelerating its effort to recruit up to 50,000 personnel per year to replenish its armed forces under the reinforced Conscription Law.

Several media outlets have recently reported independent and pro-resistance Myanmar media on the forcible recruitment of young men in urban areas. Military junta Chief Min Aung Hlaing activated, for the first time in a decade, a conscription law amid heavy regime casualties and desertions.

Following the announcement, the regime formed a central committee led by the Defence Minister to conscript over-18s into military service. Those who fail to comply face three to five years in prison.

The committee announced the formation of branches in each state and region to implement the law, led by the chief minister with the deputy regional military commander as the vice-chair.

The conscription branches will be established in rural areas and townships. The recruitment process will start in April, regime spokesman Major General Zaw Min Tun said. The spokesman said around 6 million men and 7 million women were eligible for compulsory military service, according to the 2019 census.

He said 5,000 people will be called up each

month and given training, with around 50,000 recruited per year. The conscription is not intended for only one, two, three, or four years and will be eligible for service for two years.

The junta also activated a Reserve Forces Law, allowing it to send veterans back to the front line. Under the law, all former military personnel must serve in the reserve forces for five years starting from the day they resigned or retired.

Conscription has sparked fear and anger among eligible citizens who have been called on to defend the junta that has brutalised them for three years.

It has also been criticised for legalising the junta's practice of rounding up civilians for use as porters or human shields.

Desertions and defections plague Myanmar troops.

The military government's forces have been stretched thin by the recent upsurge in resistance activity. They were already believed to be depleted by casualties, desertions, and defections, though there are no reliable numbers regarding their scale.

The army faces two enemies: the pro-democracy forces formed after the army takeover and better-trained and equipped ethnic minority armed groups that have been battling for greater autonomy for decades.

There are alliances between the resistance groups, as reported by the pro-rebel newspaper The Irrawaddy.

In September of last year, the Defence Ministry of the National Unity Government (NUG), the leading political organisation of the resistance that acts as a shadow government, stated that more than 14,000 troops have defected from the military since the 2021 seizure of

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Saleem Samad

power.

The military seized power and ousted the elected government headed by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, 2021. She has been kept in home custody to serve prison sentences for election fraud and other trumped-up charges.

Forced recruitment of Rohingyas

Myanmar's military is forcibly recruiting Rohingya men from villages and camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Rakhine State, and it is feared they will be used as human shields, activists, and residents of the state warn.

Sittwe, the state capital of Rakhine State, has 13 IDP camps for about 100,000 Rohingya people who were displaced by ethnic and religious violence in the western state

in 2012.

At least 400 Rohingya men have already been forcibly recruited from villages and IDP camps after Rohingya community leaders and administrators were pressured to compile lists of at least 50 men for each small IDP village and at least 100 for each IDP camp in three Rakhine townships – Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and Sittwe.

The junta is offering freedom of movement to Rohingya Muslims restricted to IDP camps as part of a bid to entice them into military service amid the nationwide rollout of a conscription law.

Junta forces have told Rohingya men that if they serve in the military, each one will receive a sack of rice, a citizenship identity card, and a monthly salary of 150,000 kyats (US\$ 41). Rohingya residents of Rakhine State and activists stated.

Since taking the census on Monday, junta officers have repeatedly visited the camp, trying to persuade Rohingya residents to serve in the military with an offer of free movement within Kyaukphyu township, said another camp resident.

However, the conscription law only applies to Myanmar citizens, but the citizenship of Rohingya people has been scrapped after a draconian Citizenship Law of 1982 requires individuals to prove that their ancestors lived in Myanmar before 1823 and

refuses to recognize Rohingya Muslims as one of the nation's ethnic groups or list their language as a national language.

Despite the compulsory military training schedule to begin in April, junta troops arrested at least 100 men from four villages in Buthidaung Township on 18 and 19 February, and they were transferred to a nearby military base for basic military training.

Nay San Lwin, co-founder of the Free Rohingya Coalition, describes that two weeks of training would make them vulnerable either to be captured or killed on the battlefield by the battle-hardened Arakan Army (AA) rebels fighting the military junta for more than a decade. Lwin said the junta's military will use the Rohingya foot soldiers as human shields and porters.

Rohingya to defend IDP villages

Junta troops informed Rohingya community leaders that the AA had established armed fortified camps near the Rohingya villages and that residents would have to undergo military training to defend their villages.

The junta's troops, who are fighting the AA, know the terrain of Rakhine State better than the AA does and have public support.

Since November, the military has surrendered Pauktaw, Minbya, Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw, Myay Pon,

and Taung Pyo townships in Rakhine state.

The capital of Rakhine State, Sittwe, is besieged by government troops. Civil administration officials and their families have been evacuated to safe places by commercial flights, while other officials have been shifted by Naval vessels.

Rights campaigners fear that drafting Rohingya into military service could stoke ethnic tensions in Rakhine state, while legal experts argue that the drive is unlawful, given that Myanmar has refused to recognize the Rohingya as one of the country's ethnic groups and denied them citizenship for decades.

An estimated 1.2 million ethnic Rohingya refugees have been languishing in squalid camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, since 2017 after fleeing the genocide committed by Myanmar military forces.

Another 630,000 living within Rakhine State are designated stateless by the United Nations, including those who languish in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and are restricted from moving freely within Rakhine state. (The author is the Deputy Editor of The Daily Messenger and an award-winning journalist. He can be reached at saleem.samad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @saleem-samadhttps://www.daily-messenger.net/bangladesh/news/14169)

## Greece finds potential in collaborating with India

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Raisina Dialogue's ninth edition, serving as a key Indian forum for discussions on geopolitical and geoeconomic matters, featured Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis as the distinguished chief guest during this year's proceedings. The event aligned with his official state visit on February 21-22.

During his opening address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that, apart from his visit to Greece last year, a substantial 14-year gap had transpired without significant high-level exchanges between the two nations. Diplomatic engagements are naturally influenced by domestic political dynamics and the global environment. The most recent comprehensive bilateral interaction dates back to the 1980s.

Following Ronald Reagan's election as the President of the United States in 1980, the Cold War entered a phase marked by heightened tensions between superpowers. Reagan's assertive rhetoric, coupled with increased defense expenditures and the Strategic Defence Initiative, fueled global apprehensions about a potential nuclear catastrophe. Meanwhile, in India, Indira Gandhi and later her son Rajiv held the prime ministership. In Greece, the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1974 paved the way for Andreas Papandreu's return from exile to establish the Panhellenic Socialist Movement.

Perceived as radical by Western nations, Papandreu advocated for a "third way," distinct from the perceived Eastern and Western blocs, aligning with the traditional post-Independence Indian foreign policy approach that evolved into the

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). He called for the removal of US bases from Greek soil, NATO withdrawal, and rejection of full European Union Membership. Upon assuming the role of prime minister in 1981 and serving three terms (1981-89 & 1993-96), Papandreu tempered his earlier extreme views to avoid significant disruption to the European alliance system.

Hence, it came as no surprise when, in May 1984, India and Greece collaborated in a six-nation effort advocating nuclear disarmament to counter what they deemed as "a rush towards global suicide." Andreas Papandreu made three visits to India: first in November 1984 for Mrs. Gandhi's funeral, then in January 1985 for the 6-nation summit on nuclear disarmament, and finally in January 1986 as the chief guest at Republic Day. Additionally, President Zail Singh undertook a visit to Greece in October 1986. However, as global priorities shifted with the conclusion of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the relationship between India and Greece gradually receded to the background.

In the 21st century, while the Indian economy experienced robust growth, Greece grappled with a severe economic crisis that reached its zenith in 2015. A Reuters report highlighted that from 2008 to 2013, Greeks witnessed a staggering 40% decline in wealth as unemployment and economic hardships proliferated. Disposable household incomes plummeted below the levels observed in 2003, necessitating three massive bailouts amounting to \$280 billion for Greece. Amidst this turmoil, Prime Minister Mitsotakis, leading the New Democracy party, entered the scene in 2016 and eventually assumed the

role of prime minister in 2019.

Subsequently, Prime Minister Mitsotakis has authored an impressive narrative of economic revitalization for Greece. Steering the nation from a "junk" rating, he successfully elevated Greece to an investment-grade credit rating. The electorate reciprocated with a resounding re-election in 2023, acknowledging his accomplishments.

Mitsotakis' keen interest in India is apparent as he expands his focus beyond the European context. During a joint press conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he expressed optimism about the significant potential inherent in the emerging Indo-Greek "strategic partnership." Notably, he advocated for collaboration, particularly in the realm of infrastructure development.

During the recent discussions, Prime Minister Modi highlighted a commitment to doubling trade by 2030, while the Greek leader specifically emphasized India's keen interest in the India-Middle East-Economic Corridor (IMEC). This ambitious project was unveiled with great enthusiasm during the G-20 summit hosted by India in September 2023. However, the attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7 and the subsequent intense Israeli response have temporarily halted further progress on its implementation. Despite the UAE maintaining its commitment to the Abraham Accords and normalizing relations with Israel,

Saudi Arabia has publicly linked any agreement with Israel to a clear path toward establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Considering that the Adani group has already invested \$1.2 billion to acquire control of Haifa port in Israel, it is conceivable that they are ex-

ploring options for a corresponding port in Greece to serve as IMEC's European link.

Adding complexity to the quest for a Greek port under Indian control is the prior transfer of Greece's primary port, Piraeus, to China amid the Greek financial crisis. The operationalization of IMEC hinges on the normalization of the Gaza crisis and the subsequent attainment of a two-state solution to the longstanding 75-year dispute. This journey is anticipated to encounter numerous obstacles before Saudi Arabia can openly acknowledge engaging in infrastructure partnerships with Israel. Despite the challenges, there are indications that the UAE has initiated a practice of permitting trucks to transport goods to Israel overland through Saudi Arabia and Jordan, suggesting a potential shift in regional dynamics.

The resurgence of a closer alliance between India and Greece is indeed a positive development. Similar to the discord between India and Pakistan over divided Kashmir, Greece and Turkey grapple with a comparable dissonance concerning divided Cyprus. Nurturing a robust association with Greece enhances India's influence with Turkey, a nation that Pakistan views as a valuable Islamic ally, occasionally leveraging it to address developments in Jammu and Kashmir.

Furthermore, the diverse landscape of Greece, encompassing both the mainland and islands, presents an enticing tourism destination for India's increasingly affluent and mobile middle class. In honoring Alexander's legacy of bridging the gap between Europe and Asia, the ongoing renewal of this connection remains crucial. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

## Unprecedented relationship with the Middle East: Indian economy

By: Mokshada Choudhary

The countries of the Middle East, are observing as India transforms into a prominent and rapidly expanding economic powerhouse. Currently, India is often likened to the new China, emblematic of its evolution into a promising global industrial cornerstone. This dynamic unfolds vast possibilities for trade and investment collaborations between India and economies of Middle Eastern nations.

Visiting the Middle East this week Prime Minister Narendra Modi stopped first in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he signed an investment treaty, headlined a rally of 40,000 Indian expatriates and opened a vast new Hindu temple. Then India's prime minister headed to nearby Qatar, having just secured the release of eight Indians jailed there for espionage.

The trip, which began on 13th February, 2024 neatly entwined some of the key strands business, migration and security of a historic shift in India's approach to the Middle East. Modi is now injecting new momentum into arguably his most important diplomatic initiative since taking office a decade ago.

India's relationship with the Middle East holds considerable significance for its economy, with various factors contributing to this dynamic:

Energy Imports: India is heavily dependent on the Middle East for its energy needs, particularly crude oil. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates are major suppliers of oil to India. Stability and pricing of oil in the Middle East directly impact India's energy security and economy.

Remittances: The Middle East hosts a large Indian expatriate population, particularly in countries like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. These expatriates contribute significantly to India's economy through remittances sent back home. Remittances serve as a vital source of foreign exchange and income for many Indian households.

Trade Relations: India has strong trade relations with various Middle Eastern countries. Both regions engage in the exchange of goods and services, including petroleum products, gems and jewellery, textiles, and agricultural products. Strengthening trade ties with the Middle East helps diversify India's export markets and promotes economic growth.

Investment Opportunities: The Middle East offers investment opportunities for Indian businesses across sectors such as infrastructure, construction, real estate, healthcare, and hospitality. Indian companies invest in the region, while Middle Eastern investors also participate in projects and ventures in India, fostering economic cooperation and growth.

Strategic Partnerships: India and several Middle Eastern countries have established strategic partnerships in areas such as defence, security, and counter-terrorism. These partnerships not only contribute to regional stability but also facilitate economic collaboration through joint ventures, infrastructure projects, and technology transfer.

Diplomatic Relations: Diplomatic ties between India and Middle Eastern countries play a crucial role in fostering economic cooperation. Bilateral agreements, trade missions, and diplomatic engagements facilitate the

growth of economic relations, leading to increased investment, trade, and cultural exchanges.

Infrastructure Development: Some Middle Eastern countries, such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have invested in infrastructure projects in India. These investments support India's infrastructure development initiatives and contribute to job creation, economic growth, and technology transfer.

Overall, India's economic relationship with the Middle East is multifaceted and mutually beneficial. The region serves as a crucial partner for India in terms of energy security, trade, investment, and labour mobility, contributing to the stability and growth of the Indian economy. Strengthening ties with the Middle East remains a priority for India's foreign policy and economic strategy.

During the visit, in pursuing an intensified strategic partnership with the Gulf, Modi emphasized the two key advantages over other great powers. The first is India's peaceful, pluralistic and tolerant image among many in the Middle East.

Secondly, India has a diaspora population of seven million across the Gulf region that is central to the functioning of Gulf states. Modi's visit harnessed the high-profile, personalized style to recalibrate the UAE relationship. This could be the first step in steering India's relations with Gulf states in a more strategic direction. While it may be one small step for Modi, the visit could herald India's long awaited giant leap into the great game's Middle Eastern theatre. (The author is a student of class XI & a national level sports player in Fencing game)



# The economics of coaching classes



By: Pushkarni Panchamukhi

Markets are acclaimed to give perfect solutions that satisfy both the consumer and the producer. They are said to bring together 'all those who are willing and able to pay' with 'all those who are willing and able to sell' at a certain price called the equilibrium price.

In this situation of market equilibrium, that almost sounds platonic, several contentious questions emerge. Is everyone willing to pay? Who is not able to pay? Does it matter? Do they know what they are paying for? Who is the producer? Is profit their only motive? Obscure answers to these questions have led economists to conclude that the 'invisible hand' of the market may not always be the best way to organise economic activity.

Markets work efficiently for ordinary goods like online taxi services and even in case of 'bads' such as tobacco, logical solutions are provided by the market. However, the 'good' in question is education and the agents providing it are the coaching centres. Without getting into the philosophical debate on what is education, we look at this fairly complex good from an economist's perspective and question the efficiency of coaching classes and how much well-being they actually produce in the society.

Education in itself, especially at the school level, is declared to be a public good which is non-excludable and non-rival. This means that nobody should be excluded from its consumption and consumption by one should not rival the other's.

With private schools occupying 31.5% of the total schools, 46.7% in total enrolments and 49.3% of total teachers in India, the 'public good' nature of education becomes blurred.

Private schooling is both excludable and rival. As if this complexity was not enough, shadow schooling in the form

of coaching centres have mushroomed all over the country to meet an unprecedented demand. The 75th round of the National Sample Survey (NSS 2017) states that 27.2% of students in rural areas and 38.3% of urban students take private tuitions at the secondary level. The 2022 ASER report states that the proportion of rural Indian students between grades 1 to 8 taking private tuition classes increased from 26.4% in 2018 to 30.5% in 2022.

The genesis of a massive and progressively increasing demand for private coaching is the substandard state of government school education. Nearly 35% of both urban and rural students report this as the reason to opt for private schooling, according to NSSO data.

The share of government schooling at all levels of schooling is higher in rural areas, at 68% at the secondary and higher secondary level; than in urban areas where the same is at 38.8% explaining the increasing demand for private coaching.

A thriving coaching culture in urban and rural areas has emerged in a country that's obsessed with entrance exams. Appearing as 'ancillary units' of private schools, coaching centres have witnessed a phenomenal growth with some becoming unicorns and case studies at Harvard Business School. The rising feeling of irrelevance of schools – since they do not provide the code to crack entrance exams – has made parents and students flock to private coaching centres to fill that gap.

So far what sounds like a simple story of effective demand in economics takes a twist because of the original nature of education as a public good that we began with. Public goods create 'externalities' or spillover effects that affect the society positively apart from benefiting the consumers themselves.

Education, justifiably, has several positive spillovers that may or may not be recognised by an individual compelling the

government to make basic schooling not only free but also compulsory. Occasionally, however, a public good can turn into a public bad when they give rise to negative externalities.

Private coaching, that was originally intended to complement school education has almost become a 'substitute good' with a rise in the number of private schools in the country that admit students without expecting them to be physically present. Emergence of coaching classes have turned mainstream schools into 'dummy' schools, allowing students to only attend science practical classes and appear for exams.

The anticipated high rates of return through private coaching gives ground for the steep investment in it, overlooking several negative externalities that have been internalised by the stakeholders especially parents. Charging anywhere between Rs 1,000 to Rs 6,000 per hour, private coaching makes up for the third biggest component of household expenditure on education.

A fervent 'neighbourhood effect' stating how consumer preferences are influenced by surroundings, seems to govern household decisions on consuming private coaching and with asymmetric information and uncertainty, in the form of lack of clear understanding of student's own genuine interest, aptitude and inclination to pursue a certain course in future, it may result in suboptimal consumer choices. Massive advertising and aggressive marketing by coaching centres seems to have multiplied the demand for them validating the economic principle "Supply creates its own demand".

The externalities in case of private coaching are not immediately obvious as in a pollution emitting industry. The rise in dummy schools, extensive commercialisation of education, excessive focus on exams over actual learning, relentless scurrying of young children between school and coaching with little time for

free play and finally increasing mental health issues among teenagers leading to growing suicide numbers are some of these problems.

Rajasthan's Kota, the hub of private coaching, is infamous in reporting 20-25 cases of young students dying by suicide in fear of not fulfilling their parents' aspirations.

Students accounted for 8% of the total deaths by suicide in 2022 according to the National Crime Records Bureau. Of these, most of the students were in higher secondary school. This loss of potential human capital plus loss of productivity among related family members due to acute distress appear intangible although real.

Professor Tilak, an eminent researcher in the field of education talks of three 'fads' in education: Private education is most efficient, English-medium education is very important and pre-primary education is essential. Tilak argues that all these 'fads' are mere views of people that lack research evidence.

That private coaching is a sure road to success can be annexed to the 'fads' list.

An IIT-Madras study revealed that 50% of students who got admission into IITs did not go to any coaching. The recent case of a missing teenager in Bangalore, who feared being reprimanded by parents for his poor performance in a coaching centre, created furore in society, prompting the government to introduce more regulation on private coaching.

Certainly government intervention is needed to correct 'market failures'; in our case the failure of achieving welfare objectives intended through education. However, all regulation will be ineffective till the most important stakeholders, the parents, are fully convinced.

Between the risk taken by parents while perceiving education as a capital good and the joy and satisfaction experienced by students who are consuming it, there are externalities, positive and negative. There is a need to recognize and educate that education is a good where the impact is on parents (through fees), incidence in on students (through their schooling experience) and the effects are on the society (that could be positive or negative). Well-informed choices of parents, in clear recognition of their children's interests and abilities will alone bring about the desired outcomes benefiting individually and collectively. (Courtesy: The Wire)

# Despite working so hard, why does free time remain elusive?

By: Garv Cross

There have been massive gains in productivity over the past century.

So why are people still working so hard for so long?

Output per worker increased by almost 300% between 1950 and 2018 in the US. The standard American workweek, meanwhile, has remained unchanged, at about 40 hours.

This paradox is especially notable in the US, where the average work year is 1,767 hours compared with 1,354 in Germany, a difference largely due to Americans' lack of vacation time.

Some might argue that Americans are just more hardworking. But shouldn't more productive work be rewarded with more time free from work? This is the central theme of my new book, *Free Time: The History of an Elusive Ideal*.

Keynes misses the mark

Many economists see the status quo mostly as a choice: People would simply rather have more money. So they prioritise work over free time. However, in the past, many economists assumed that people's need for more stuff would eventually be met. At that point, they would choose more free time.

In fact, one of the most famous economists of the 20th century, John Maynard Keynes, confidently predicted in 1930 that within a century, the normal workweek would decrease to 15 hours. Yet Americans in their prime working age are still on the job 41.7 hours per week.

Why was Keynes wrong?

Obviously, people's needs or wants were not fully met. In the first half of the 20th century, advertising shifted in ways that emphasised emotions over utility, making consumers feel like they needed to buy more stuff; planned obsolescence shortened how long products remained functional or fashionable, spurring more frequent purchases; and new, exciting – but costly – goods and services kept consumerism churning.

So workers continued to labour for long hours to earn enough money to spend.

Furthermore, as wages rose, the opportunity cost of time spent away from work also grew. This made more free time less economically appealing. In a consumption-saturated society, time spent neither producing nor consuming goods increasingly appeared as wasted time. Interest in slower, cheaper activities – reading a book, meeting a friend to catch up over coffee – started to seem less important than buying a pickup truck or spending an hour at the casino, pursuits that demand disposable income.

Forced labour

It's still important to consider whether there's even any choice to be made.

Almost everyone who works 40 hours a week or more does so because they have to. There are bills to pay, health insurance coverage to maintain and retirement to squirrel away money for. Some jobs are more precarious than others, and many workers even forego earned vacation time for fear of losing promotions.

This hardly makes for a free choice.

But the 40-hour week isn't the result of a personal calculation of costs and benefits. Rather, it's the result of a hard-fought political battle that culminated in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which established the standard 40-hour workweek, along with a minimum wage.

Pressed by a labour movement that was far more powerful than today's, the government implemented a range of progressive economic policies during the 1930s to help the nation emerge from the Great Depression.

Many government officials viewed setting a standard workweek as a way to curtail exploitation and unfair competition among employers, who would otherwise be motivated to push their employees to work for as long as possible.

It was an emergency measure, not a choice of more time over more personal income. Nor was it a step toward the progressive reduction of hours worked, as Keynes had envisioned.

In fact, it was hardly a radical measure.

Labour leaders had initially proposed a 30-hour week, which government officials resoundingly rejected. Even New Deal liberals saw a shortening of working hours as a potential threat to economic growth. So the 40-hour week ended up as the compromise, and the standard hasn't been updated since.

For most Americans, this was an acceptable trade-off. They might be working long hours, but they could afford television sets, cars and homes in the suburbs. Many families could live on the wages of the full-time work of the father, making the 40-hour week seem reasonable, since the mother had time to care for the family and home.

But this consensus has long since been undermined. Since the 1970s, inflation-adjusted wages haven't risen with economic growth. In many households that include married or partnered couples, a single wage earner has been replaced by two earners, both of whom find themselves working at least 40

hours per week.

It's almost as if the 40-hour week has been replaced by an 80-hour week – at least in terms of hours worked per household.

Who has time to raise kids? Who can afford them? It's no wonder the birth rate has declined.

Economic growth, well-being

For decades, the amount of work we do has been talked about as "just the way things are" – an inevitability, almost. It doesn't seem possible for society to take a different tack and, like flipping a switch, work less.

To me, this resignation points to a need to reconsider the social contracts of the past. Most Americans will not abandon their work ethic and their insistence that most people work. Fair enough.

Many people prefer working over having vast stores of free time, and that's OK. And there's still immense value in work that doesn't produce a paycheck – caregiving and volunteering, for example.

But reducing the standard workweek, perhaps by transitioning to a four-day week, could ease stress for overworked families.

These changes require political action, not just individuals making the personal choice to arrive at a



better work-life balance. And yet a national reduction in the standard workweek seems almost impossible. Congress can't even pass legislation for paid

family leave or guaranteed vacation time.

It doesn't help that elected leaders continue to insist that well-being be measured mostly by economic growth, and when the US media breathlessly reports quarterly economic growth data, with increases deemed "good" and decreases deemed "bad."

Why shouldn't free time and its benefits be included in the equation? Why aren't figures on the social costs of unlimited growth publicised? Does it even matter that the Dow Jones Industrial Average has doubled in less than a decade when economic security is so fragile and so many people are overstressed?

The idea that stratospheric increases in productivity can allow for more time for life is not simply a romantic or sentimental idea. Keynes viewed it as entirely reasonable. Opportunities like the one that led to the 40-hour workweek in the 1930s rarely appear. But some sort of paradigm shift is urgently needed. Something has to give. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

# Medical myths: How much sleep do we need?

By: Tim Newman

Although we all know sleep is vital to maintain good health, there are still many unanswered questions. And, over the millennia, a variety of myths and half-truths have developed and stuck.

This feature is the second and final part of our series that tackles sleep-related myths. Find the first part here.

This time, we focus on myths that surround how much sleep the average person needs. We also discuss naps, the effects of sleeping too little or too long, and sleep in the animal kingdom.

**1. Everyone needs 8 hours**

As with many aspects of human biology, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to sleep. Overall, research suggests that for healthy young adults and adults with normal sleep, 7–9 hours is an appropriate amount.

The story gets a little more complicated, though. The amount of sleep we need each day varies throughout our lives:

- newborns need 14–17 hours
- infants need 12–15 hours
- toddlers need 11–14 hours
- preschoolers need 10–13 hours

- school-aged children need 9–11 hours
- teenagers need 8–10 hours
- adults need 7–9 hours
- older adults need 7–8 hours

**You can train your body to need less sleep**

There is a widely shared rumor that you can train your body to need fewer than 7–9 hours' sleep. Sadly, this is a myth.

According to experts, it is rare for anyone to need fewer than 6 hours' sleep to function. Although some people might

claim to feel fine with limited sleep, scientists think it is more likely that they are used to the negative effects of reduced sleep.

People who sleep for 6 hours or fewer each night become accustomed to the effects of sleep deprivation, but this does not mean that their body needs any less sleep. Cynthia LaJambe, a sleep expert at the Pennsylvania Transportation Institute in Wingate, explains:

"Some people think they are adapting to being awake more, but are actually performing at a lower level. They don't realize it because the functional decline happens so gradually."

"In the end, there is no denying the effects of sleep deprivation. And training the body to sleep less is not a viable option." – Cynthia LaJambe.

However, it is worth noting that some rare individuals do seem to function fine with fewer than 6.5 hours' sleep each night. There is evidence that this might be due to a rare genetic mutation, so it is probably not something that someone can train themselves to achieve.

**2. Daytime naps are unhealthy**

Generally, experts recommend people avoid naps to ensure a better night's sleep. However, if someone has missed out on sleep during previous nights, a tactical nap can help repay some of the accrued sleep debt.

Around 20 minutes is a good nap length. This gives the body ample time to recharge. People who sleep much longer than this could mean they descend into a deep sleep, and once awake, they feel groggy.

Daytime napping is relatively common in the United States, but taking a "siesta" is the norm

in some countries. Naturally, our bodies tend to dip in energy during the early afternoon, so perhaps napping around that time is more natural than avoiding sleep until nighttime.

After all, the vast majority of mammals are polyphasic sleepers, which means they sleep for short periods throughout the day.

In a large review of the effects of napping, the authors explain afternoon naps in people who are not sleep deprived can lead to "subjective and behavioral improvements" and improvements in "mood and subjective levels of sleepiness and fatigue." They found people who nap experience improved performance in tasks, such as "addition, logical reasoning, reaction time, and symbol recognition."

Not all naps are equal, however. There is a great deal of variation, such as the time of day, duration, and frequency of naps. One author explains:

"Epidemiological studies suggest a decrease in the risk of cardiovascular and cognitive dysfunction by the practice of taking short naps several times a week."

The author also acknowledges that much more research is needed to understand how factors associated with napping influence health outcomes. Medical News Today recently examined the relationship between napping and cardiovascular disease in a Special Feature.

It is also important to note if an individual experiences severe tiredness during the day, this might be a sign of a sleep disorder, such as sleep apnea.

Scientists will need to conduct more research before they can finally put all the napping

myths and mysteries to bed.

**3. All animals sleep**

Because humans sleep, and our companion animals appear to sleep, many people assume all animals do the same. This is not true. The authors of a paper entitled "Do all animals sleep?" explain:

"Some animals never exhibit a state that meets the behavioral definition of sleep. Others suspend or greatly reduce 'sleep' behavior for many weeks during the postpartum period or during seasonal migrations without any consequent 'sleep debt.'"

They also explain that some marine animals, reptiles, fish, and insects do not appear to enter REM sleep.

Because sleep is not simply a lack of consciousness, but a rhythmic cycle of distinct neural patterns, it is a challenge to distinguish whether an animal sleeps or takes a rest.

"[F]ewer than 50 of the nearly 60,000 vertebrate species have been tested for all of the criteria that define sleep," the authors explain. "Of those, some do not meet the criteria for sleep at any time of their lives, and others appear able to greatly reduce or go without sleep for long periods of time."

**4. More sleep is always better**

Although many people struggle to get the amount of sleep they need to feel refreshed, some regularly sleep longer than their body needs. One might think this could endow these individuals with superpowers.

However, researchers identify a link between longer sleep durations and poorer health. For instance, one study, which followed 276 adults for 6 years, concluded:

"The risk of developing obesity was elevated for short and long duration sleepers, compared to average-duration sleepers, with 27% and 21% increases in risk, respectively."

This finding held even when the scientists controlled the analysis for age, sex, and baseline body mass index. Sleep duration might also impact mortality, according to some researchers.

A meta-analysis, which appears in the journal *Sleep*, concludes "Both short and long duration of sleep are significant predictors of death in prospective population studies."

**5. Sleep deprivation can be lethal**

There is no record of anyone dying from sleep deprivation. In theory, it may be possible, but as far as scientists can ascertain, it is improbable.

It is understandable why this myth may have taken root, though. Sleep deprivation, as many people can attest, can feel horrendous. However, the case of Randy Gardner demonstrates that extreme sleep deprivation is not fatal.

In 1965, when Gardner was just 16, he was part of a sleep deprivation experiment. In total, he stayed awake for 11 days and 24 minutes, which equates to 264.4 hours.

During this time, he was monitored closely by fellow students and sleep scientists. As the days rolled on, sleep deprivation symptoms worsened, but he survived. So why has this myth persisted?

The belief that sleep deprivation can kill might have its roots in a study from the 1980s. Rechtschaffen and colleagues found if they deprived rats of sleep with a particular experimental method, they would die

after 2–3 weeks.

In their experiments, the researchers placed rats on a disc suspended above water. They continuously measured their brain activity. Whenever the animal fell asleep, the disc would automatically move, and the rat would need to act to avoid falling in the water.

Despite the fatalities in Rechtschaffen's experiments, later research showed this is not the norm. Rats deprived of sleep using different methods do not die. Also, other researchers who used the disc method on pigeons found it was not fatal for these creatures.

Sleep deprivation is not painful for humans, though. Back in 1965, Gardner's parents were worried about their son. They asked Lieutenant Commander John J. Ross from the U.S. Navy Medical Neuropsychiatric Research Unit in San Diego to observe him. He describes a steady deterioration in function.

For instance, by day 2, Gardner found it more difficult to focus his eyes. By day 4, he struggled to concentrate and became irritable and uncooperative. On day 4, he also reported his first hallucination and delusion of grandeur.

On day 6, Gardner's speech became slower, and by day 7, he was slurring as his memory worsened. Paranoia kicked in during day 10, and on day 11, his facial expression and tone of voice became expressionless. Both his attention and memory span were significantly diminished.

However, he did not die and apparently, did not experience any long-term health issues.

Another reason why the myth that sleep deprivation can be fatal persists might be due to a

condition called fatal familial insomnia. People with this rare genetic disorder become unable to sleep. However, when individuals with this disease die, it is due to the accompanying neurodegeneration rather than lack of sleep.

Although sleep deprivation will probably not kill you directly, it is worth adding a note of caution: being overtired does increase the risk of accidents. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "Drowsy driving kills — it claimed 795 lives in 2017."

Similarly, a review published in 2013 concludes, "[a]pproximately 13% of work injuries could be attributed to sleep problems." So, although sleep deprivation is not deadly in a direct sense, it can have fatal consequences.

Additionally, if we consistently deprive our bodies of sleep for months or years, it increases the risk of developing several conditions, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and some forms of cancer.

**The takehome**

Overall, we should try and aim for 7–9 hours' sleep every night. It sounds simple, but in our neon-lit, bustling, and noisy lives, it is more challenging than we might like. All we can do is keep making an effort to give sleep the space that it needs.

It is only through persistent research that we will eventually decode all the mysteries of sleep. If you are interested in reading more about the myths associated with sleep, part one of this series can be found here. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)



Rafah is Gaza's main entry point for aid; the U.S. and other allies say Israel must avoid harming civilians

# Netanyahu says a cease-fire deal would only delay 'somewhat' an Israeli military offensive in Rafah

TEL AVIV, Feb 26: An Israeli military offensive in Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah could be "delayed somewhat" if a deal is reached for a weeklong cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday, and claimed that total victory in the territory would come within weeks once the offensive begins.

Netanyahu confirmed to CBS that a deal is in the works, with no details. Talks resumed on Sunday in Qatar at the specialist level, Egypt's state-run Al Qahera TV reported, citing an Egyptian official as saying discussions would follow in Cairo with the aim of achieving the cease-fire and release of dozens of hostages held in Gaza as well as Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel is nearing the approval of plans to expand its offensive against the Hamas militant group to Rafah on the Gaza-Egypt border, where more than half the besieged territory's population of 2.3 million have sought refuge. Humanitarian groups warn of a catastrophe. Rafah is Gaza's main entry point for aid. The U.S. and other allies say Israel must avoid harming civilians. Netanyahu has said he will convene the Cabinet this week to approve operational plans that include the evacuation of civilians

to elsewhere in Gaza.

"Once we begin the Rafah operation, the intense phase of the fighting is weeks away from completion. Not months," Netanyahu told CBS.

"If we don't have a deal, we'll do it anyway." He said four of the six remaining Hamas battalions are concentrated in Rafah.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan told NBC that President Joe Biden hadn't been briefed on the Rafah plan. "We believe that this operation should not go forward until or unless we see a plan to protect civilians," Sullivan said. Early on Monday, Netanyahu's office said the army had presented to the War Cabinet its "operational plan" for Rafah as well as plans to evacuate civilians from the battle zones. It gave no further details.

His office also said the War Cabinet had approved a plan to deliver humanitarian aid safely into Gaza. United Nations agencies and aid groups say the hostilities, the Israeli military's refusal to facilitate deliveries and the breakdown of order inside Gaza make it increasingly difficult to get vital aid to much of the coastal enclave. In some chaotic scenes, crowds of desperate Palestinians have surrounded delivery trucks and stolen the supplies off them. Heavy fighting continued



in parts of northern Gaza, the first target of the offensive, where the destruction is staggering.

"We're trapped, unable to move because of the heavy bombardment," said Gaza City resident Ayman Abu Awad.

He said that starving residents have been forced to eat animal fodder and search for food in demolished buildings. In nearby Jabaliya, market vendor Um Ayad showed off a leafy weed that people pick from the harsh, dry soil and eat.

"We have to feed the children. They keep screaming they want food. We cannot find food. We don't know what to do," she said. Philippe Lazzarini, commissioner general of the U.N. agency for Palestinians, said it has not been able to deliver food to northern Gaza since Jan. 23, adding on X, formerly Twitter, that "our calls to

send food aid have been denied." Israel said that 245 trucks of aid entered Gaza on Sunday — less than half the amount that entered daily before the war.

A senior official from Egypt, which along with Qatar is a mediator between Israel and Hamas, has said the draft cease-fire deal includes the release of up to 40 women and older hostages in return for up to 300 Palestinian prisoners, mostly women, minors and older people. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations, said the proposed six-week pause in fighting would include allowing hundreds of trucks to bring desperately needed aid into Gaza every day, including the north. He said both sides agreed to continue negotiations during the pause for further releases and a permanent cease-fire.

Negotiators face an unofficial deadline of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan around March 10, a period that often sees heightened Israeli-Palestinian tensions. Hamas says it has not been involved in the latest proposal developed by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, but the reported outline largely matches its earlier proposal for the first phase of a truce.

Hamas has said it won't release all of the remaining hostages until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws its forces from the territory, and is demanding the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including senior militants. Netanyahu has rejected those conditions. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on Sunday made clear that a cease-fire deal for Gaza wouldn't affect the military's daily low-level clashes with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, a Hamas ally.

"We will continue the fire, and we will do so independently from the south," he said while visiting the Northern Command.

Israel declared war after the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages were released in a cease-fire deal in November.

More than 130 remain in captivity, a fourth of them believed to be dead. Families have followed the negotiations with hope and anguish. "It feels like Schindler's list. Will he be on the list or not?" Shelly Shem Tov, the mother of Omer, 21, told Israeli Army Radio of his chances of being freed.

Israel's air and ground offensive has driven around 80% of Gaza's population from their homes, putting hundreds of thousands at risk of starvation and the spread of disease. The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza says 29,692 Palestinians have been killed in the war, two-thirds of them women and children.

The ministry's death toll doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants. Israel says its troops have killed more than 10,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has devastated Gaza's health sector. Less than half of hospitals even partially function.

At the Emirates Hospital in Rafah, three to four newborns are placed in each of its 20 incubators, which are designed for just one. Dr. Amal Ismail said two to three newborns die in a single shift, in part because many families live in tents in rainy, cold weather. Before the war, one or two newborns in incubators there died per month. (AP)

Palestinian PM submits govt's resignation, a move that could open door to reforms



JERUSALEM, Feb 26: Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said on Monday his government is resigning, in a move that could open the door to U.S.-backed reforms in the Palestinian Authority.

President Mahmoud Abbas must still decide whether he accepts Shtayyeh and his government's resignation. But the move signals a willingness by the Western-backed Palestinian leadership to accept shake-up that might usher in reforms seen as necessary to revitalize the Palestinian Authority.

The U.S. wants a reformed Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza once the war is over. But many obstacles remain to making that vision a reality.

"The next stage and its challenges require new governmental and political arrangements that take into account the new reality in the Gaza Strip," Shtayyeh said at a Cabinet meeting.

Abbas is expected to choose Mohammed Mustafa, chairman of the Palestine Investment Fund, as the next prime minister. (AP)

UN's secy gen warns the world is becoming 'less safe by the day'

GENEVA, Feb 26: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says combatants in places such as Congo, Gaza, Myanmar, Ukraine and Sudan are turning a "blind eye" to international law as he made a plea for greater respect for human rights and peace around the world.

Speaking at the UN's top human rights body opened its latest session, Guterres warned on Monday that the world is becoming "less safe by the day."

"Our world is changing at warp speed," he told the Human Rights Council. "The multiplication of conflicts is causing unprecedented suffering. But human rights are a constant."

The UN chief said attacks on human rights take many forms, and reiterated his frequent calls for debt relief for some of the world's poorest countries and greater spending to fight climate change. He defended UNRWA, the agency for Palestinian refugees, as the "backbone" of aid efforts in Gaza at a time when top Israeli authorities have called for its dismantling. The UN human rights chief, Volker Türk, also lashed out at "attempts to undermine the legitimacy and work" of the UN and its affiliates.

"The UN has become a lightning rod for manipulative propaganda and a scapegoat for policy failures," he said. "This is profoundly destructive of the common good, and it callously betrays the many people whose lives rely on it."

The council was kicking off a six-week session on Monday as crises of human rights abound. On many minds will be the death this month of white held in prison in President Vladimir Putin's Russia, a permanent UN Security Council member. (AP)

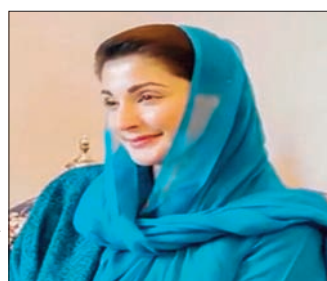
Maryam Nawaz becomes first-ever woman Chief Minister of a province in Pakistan

LAHORE, Feb 26: Senior PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, on Monday, became the first-ever woman chief minister of a province in Pakistan when she was elected to head the Punjab province, describing it as an "honour" for every woman in the country.

Maryam, the 50-year-old senior vice president of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, won the chief ministerial elections amidst a walkout by lawmakers of former prime minister Imran Khan's party-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC).

In her maiden speech at the provincial legislature, Maryam thanked God, her father, Nawaz Sharif, uncle Shehbaz Sharif and the lawmakers who voted for her. Maryam said that she was happy to sit in the seat where her father used to sit.

"My father trained me how to run the office," Maryam, considered the political heir of Nawaz Sharif, said. "Today, every woman of the province is proud to see a woman chief minister," she said and hoped that the tradition of female leadership would continue in the future as well.



The PML-N leader said she had seen hard times like imprisonment but was thankful to her opponents for making her strong.

"But I will not seek revenge," she said, indirectly referring to former Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and former chief justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar. Maryam received 220 votes and won the chief ministerial elections for the politically crucial Punjab province, home to 120 million people.

She defeated Rana Aftab of the PTI-backed SIC, who received no votes as his party boy-

cotted the election. "The votes have been counted according to which Maryam has obtained 220 votes, and SIC candidate Rana Aftab secured zero votes," said newly-elected Speaker Malik Ahmad Khan while presiding over the session.

To win the chief ministerial election, a candidate needs to win the backing of the majority, which is 187 members in the House that currently has 327 seats, according to Geo News. The newly-elected chief minister, Maryam, enjoyed the support of the majority in the House. The PTI-backed SIC's 103 members have taken oath from its total 113 lawmakers in the Punjab Assembly.

Maryam was backed by PML-N allies, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q), and the Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party (IPP). The walkout by at least 103 SIC members -- including the PTI-backed independent lawmakers -- was staged after the SIC nominee for chief minister, Aftab, was not permitted to speak at the point of order. (PTI)

Hungary's parliament set to ratify Sweden's NATO accession in final step toward membership

BUDAPEST, Feb 26: Hungary's parliament is to vote on Monday on ratifying Sweden's bid to join NATO, likely bringing an end to more than 18 months of delays that have frustrated the alliance as it seeks to expand in response to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Hungary's government submitted the protocols for approving Sweden's entrance to NATO in 2022, but the matter has stalled in parliament since then over opposition by governing party lawmakers. Unanimous support among all NATO members is required to admit new countries, and Hungary is the only one of the alliance's 31 members that has not given its backing.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban, a right-wing nationalist who has forged close ties with Russia, has said that criticism of Hungary's democracy by Swedish politicians had soured relations between the two countries and led to reluctance among lawmakers in his Fidesz party.

But the vote on Monday is widely expected to approve Sweden's membership in NATO, removing the final hurdle after it first applied to join the alliance in May 2022.

Ulf Kristersson, Sweden's prime minister, met with Orban on Friday in Hungary's capital, where they appeared to reach a decisive reconciliation. Following their meeting, they announced the conclusion of a defence industry agreement which will include Hungary's purchase of four Swedish-made JAS 39 Gripen jets and the extension of a service contract for its existing Gripen fleet.

Orban said the additional fighter jets "will significantly increase our military capabilities and further strengthen our role abroad" and will improve Hun-

gary's ability to participate in joint NATO operations. "To be a member of NATO together with another country means we are ready to die for each other," Orban said. "A deal on defence and military capacities helps to reconstruct the trust between the two countries."

Monday's vote on Sweden's NATO accession is just one matter on a busy agenda for lawmakers in the Hungarian parliament. A vote is also scheduled on accepting the resignation of President Katalin Novák, who stepped down earlier this month in a scandal over her decision to pardon to a man convicted of covering up a string of child sexual abuses.

After accepting Novák's resignation, lawmakers are expected to confirm Tamas Sulyk, the president of Hungary's Constitutional Court, as the country's new president.

Some opposition parties have said they will not participate in a vote to confirm a new president. But Sulyk was nominated by Orban's Fidesz party, which has a two-thirds majority in parliament and is expected to easily approve his presidency.

A presidential signature is required for approval of Sweden's NATO bid to take effect, but it was unclear when that final endorsement would take place.

Hungary's allies in NATO and the European Union have put increasing pressure on it in recent months to drop its opposition to Sweden's membership. Last weekend, a bipartisan group of US senators visited Hungary and announced it would submit a joint resolution to Congress condemning Hungary's alleged democratic backsliding and urging Orban's government to immediately lift its block on Sweden's trans-Atlantic integration. (AP)

The Taliban hold another public execution as thousands watch at a stadium in northern Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Feb 26: The Taliban held a public execution on Monday of a man convicted of murder in northern Afghanistan as thousands watched at a sports stadium, the third such death sentence to be carried out in the past five days.

The execution took place in heavy showfall in the city of Shibghin, the capital of northern Jawzjan province, where the brother of the murdered man shot the convict five times with a rifle, according to an eyewitness.

Security around the stadium was tight, said the witness, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to talk to the media.

It was also the fifth public execution since the Taliban seized power of Afghanistan in August 2021 as the US and NATO troops were in the final weeks of their withdrawal from the country after two decades of war.

The development was ominous as the Taliban, despite initial promises of a more moderate rule,



began carrying out severe punishments in public — executions, floggings and stonings — shortly after coming to power. The punishments are similar to those under their previous rule of Afghanistan in the late 1990s.

Taliban government officials were not immediately available for comment.

The statement said Monday's death sentence was carried out following approval by three of the country's highest courts and the Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada. The ex-

ecuted man, identified as Nazar Mohammad from the district of Bilcheragh in Faryab province, had killed Khal Mohammad, also from Faryab. The killing took place in Jawzjan.

On Thursday in the southeastern Ghazni province, the Taliban executed two men convicted of stabbing their victims to death. Relatives of the victims fired guns at the two men, also at a sports stadium as thousands of people watched.

Separate statements from the Taliban's supreme court said a man and a woman convicted of adultery were flogged with 35 lashes each in northern Balkh province over the weekend. Two other people were lashed in eastern Laghman province, also over the weekend; they were given each 30 lashes for allegedly committing immoral acts.

The United Nations has strongly criticized the Taliban for carrying out public executions, lashings and stonings since seizing power, and called on the country's rulers to halt such practices. (AP)

South Korea sets Thursday as deadline for striking young doctors to return to work

SEOUL, Feb 26: South Korea's government gave striking young doctors four days to report back to work, saying on Monday that they won't be punished if they return by the deadline but will face indictments and suspensions of medical licenses if they don't.

About 9,000 medical interns and residents have stayed off the job since early last week to protest a government plan to increase medical school admissions by about 65 per cent. The walkouts have severely hurt the operations of their hospitals, with numerous cancellations of surgeries and other treatments.

Government officials say adding more doctors is necessary to deal with South Korea's rapidly aging population. The country's current doctor-to-patient ratio is among the lowest in the developed world.

The strikers say universities can't handle so many new students and argue the plan would not resolve a chronic shortage of doctors in some key but low-paying areas like pediatrics and emergency departments.

Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo said during a televised briefing on Monday that the government won't seek any disciplinary action against striking doctors if they return to work by Thursday.

"We want them to return to work by the end of this month, February 29. If they return to the hospitals they had left by then, we won't hold them responsible" for any damages caused by their walkouts, Park said.

But he said those who don't meet the deadline will be punished with a minimum three-month suspension of their medical licenses and face further legal steps such as investigations and possible indict-

Farmers converge on the EU's headquarters in a fresh show of force

BRUSSELS, Feb 26: Concrete barriers and barbed wire surrounded the European Union's headquarters on Monday as farmers angry at red tape and competition from cheap imports drove their tractors into Brussels in a fresh show of force as the bloc's agriculture ministers met.

Police carrying riot gear patrolled near barricades set up at the main entry points to the European Council building, where the 27-nation bloc's agriculture ministers were gathering. Scores of tractors adorned with flags and banners were ranked in lines, snarling city traffic.

Some lamented what they see as the slow death of working the land. "Agriculture. As a child you dream of it, as an adult you die of it," said one. Farmers dumped a trailer load of tyres a few hundred metres (yards) from the European Council building, and police brought in water cannons before the piles of rubber were set alight.

At the start of the month, a similar demonstration turned violent as farmers torched hay bales and threw eggs and firecrackers at police near a summit of EU leaders.

"We are getting ignored," Marieke Van De Vivere, a farmer from the Ghent region in northern Belgium told The Associated Press.

She invited the ministers "to be reasonable to us, to come with us on a day to work on the field, or with the horses or with the animals, to see that it is not very easy ... because of the rules they put on us".

The protests are the latest in a series of rallies and demonstrations by farmers across Europe.

On Saturday, French President Emmanuel Macron was greeted with boos and whistles at the opening of the Paris Agricultural Fair by farmers who claim that he's not doing enough to support them. (AP)

Feleti Teo is named Tuvalu's new PM after elections that ousted Taiwan supporter

MELBOURNE, Feb 26: Tuvalu's former Attorney General Feleti Teo was named prime minister of the tiny South Pacific nation on Monday after elections a month ago ousted the last government leader.

Teo was the only candidate nominated by his 15 lawmaker colleagues and Governor General Tofiga Vaevalu Falani declared him elected without a vote, government secretary Tufoua Panapa said in a statement. The swearing-in ceremony for Teo and his Cabinet will be held later this week.

It was not immediately clear how the new government will affect China's influence in the country of around 11,500 people halfway between Australia and Hawaii.

The previous prime minister, Kausea Natano, and three of his eight ministers were not reelected in the Jan. 26 election.

Natano had wanted Tuvalu to remain one of only 12 countries that have official diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the self-governed democracy that China claims as its own



territory.

Natano's former Finance Minister Seve Paeniu, who was considered a leadership contender, had argued for Tuvalu's relationships with both Beijing and Taiwan to be reviewed.

A proposed security treaty between Tuvalu and Australia could be rewritten or scrapped under the new government. The treaty, announced in November last year, commits Australia to help Tuvalu in response to major natural disasters, pandemics and military aggression.

Australia offered Tuvaluans a lifeline to help residents escape the

rising seas and increased storms brought by climate change. Tuvalu's low-lying atolls make it particularly vulnerable to global warming. Australia would initially allow up to 280 Tuvaluans to come to Australia each year.

The treaty, which has yet to be ratified, also would give Australia veto power over any security or defense-related agreement Tuvalu wants to make with any other country, including China.

Tuvalu lawmaker Enele Sopoaga, who was prime minister until the previous election in 2019, opposes the treaty. Before Teo was an-

nounced prime minister, Meg Keen, director of the Pacific Island Program at the Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based think tank, said the new government would review the treaty and "put their own stamp on it."

"My view is refinements can be negotiated and the deal has a good chance of proceeding," Keen said.

George Carter, an Australian National University expert on international politics, said Teo had received support from a majority 10 of the 16 lawmakers within two weeks of the election.

Carter said Teo's supporters want Tuvalu to continue relations with Taiwan and that a change of allegiances to Beijing is unlikely in the near future.

"I think he will try to not rock the boat from the current considerations in terms of support for Taiwan for now. But things could change," he said. Carter said Teo had told supporters that Sopoaga, the former prime minister, and Paeniu, the former finance minister, would be excluded from his Cabinet. (AP)

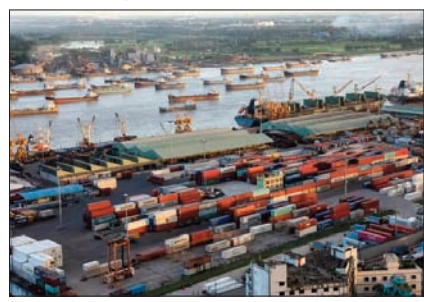


Maitri setu to be inaugurated soon, will facilitate people's movement between India, Bangladesh

## Tripura to be gateway to Southeast Asia by using Chittagong Port

AGARTALA, Feb 26: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Monday said the north-eastern state is going to be the gateway not only to Southeast Asian nations, but also many other countries by having direct access to the Chittagong Port in Bangladesh.

Dhaka has already allowed India to use its Chittagong Port through South Tripura's Sabroom sub-division and Maitri setu is set to be inaugurated for people's movement between two sides of the international border anytime, he said. "Maitri setu built on the river Feni, has already been inaugurated and people's movement through the bridge will start any time. Once the bridge is made operational, the state will have direct access to Chittagong Port in Bangladesh. It will open



new possibilities in business and trade through Chittagong Port". Saha said while laying the foundation stone for the redevelopment of the Agartala Railway Station. Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the

foundation stone for the redevelopment of 554 stations and inaugurated various projects across the country virtually.

"Not only South East Asian (SEA) nations, Tripura will have access to many countries by using Chittagong port and Bay of Bengal. The entire Northeast will benefit from the proposed connectivity", he said.

Saha also highlighted the Indo-Bangla railway project connecting Bangladesh's Gangasagar Station with the Agartala Railway Station. "The trial run between Gangasagar and Agartala has already been carried out successfully. This will also benefit the people of the state," he said.

Union minister of state for social justice and social empowerment, Pratima Bhoumik

also lauded the Modi government's achievement in the connectivity sector.

"The Prime Minister included three railway stations at Agartala, Kumarghat and Udaipur in the list of 544 Amrit Bharat station scheme to provide world-class facilities to the people. A sum of ₹ 96.60 crore will be spent to redevelop three stations in the north-eastern state", she said.

Bhoumika also said the Indo-Bangla rail link will be a game changer once the connectivity is made operational.

"The 32-hour train journey from Agartala to Kolkata via Bangladesh will be completed in just 10 hours. It will boost trade, business and investment in the northeastern state", she added. (PTI)

## Manipur govt extends internet suspension for 5 days

IMPHAL, Feb 26: The Manipur government has extended internet suspension including mobile data services in Churachandpur district for another five days till March 2 in view of the prevailing law and order situation in the district.

A state home department order issued on Sunday evening said the state government after reviewing the prevailing law and order situation in Churachandpur district decided to continue suspension of internet services, mobile data services and internet services through VPN throughout the whole revenue jurisdiction of Churachandpur district till March 2. Mobile service providers were

also directed to ensure compliance of the order, it stated.

The state government on February 16 ordered temporary suspension of internet services in Churachandpur district for five days after a mob entered the district office complexes of the superintendent of police and deputy commissioner and engaged in vandalism and torched government properties.

Two persons were killed in a clash with security forces when a mob barged into the mini-secretariat to protest the suspension of a head constable after a purported video of him with armed miscreants went viral on social media. (PTI)

## New deputy speaker of Nagaland assembly elected

KOHIMA, Feb 26: Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) MLA S Toiho Yephthomi was on Monday unanimously elected as the new deputy speaker of the Nagaland legislative assembly. Yephthomi is the MLA from Suruhoto assembly constituency in Zunheboto district. The deputy speaker post was vacant since the formation of the new House in March. Speaker Sharingain Longkumer announced that NCP MLA Yephtho was the only candidate to have filed nomination for the post and that he has been unanimously elected unopposed as the deputy speaker of the House.

His name was proposed by NDPP minister Salhoutuonuo Kruse and NCP MLA P Longon.

Congratulating Yephtho on becoming the new deputy speaker, Nagaland chief minister Rio said Yephtho, though a first-timer in the state assembly, has rich experience in public domain and also served as leader of various student bodies and also as the chairman of village council - Khekiya in Dimapur district. Rio expressed hope that under speaker Longkumer, Yephtho will be able to catch up with the role of the new officer and also function as an efficient deputy speaker.

Rio also assured the constant support and cooperation in the discharge of his constitutional duty as deputy speaker of the House. Speaker Longkumer also extended congratulations to Yephtho. Yephtho thanked the chief minister and the legislators for unanimously electing him to the post. He sought the support of the speaker and members in performing his duties to the best of his ability and as per the trust and confidence of the members.

"I shall perform my duty in all sincerity with dignity and impartiality preserving the rich tradition of the august House", he said.

The Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) has 25 MLAs, BJP 12, NCP 7, NPP 5, LJP (Ram Vilas), Naga People's Front (NPF) and RPI (Athawale) two each, one JD(U) and four independents. (PTI)

## Indian Army organises ex-servicemen rally in Manipur

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: Indian Army organised an ex-servicemen (ESM) rally at Bishnupur in Manipur on Monday.

The rally was held for ex-servicemen of Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, and Kakching districts. The rally was aimed at facilitating the ex-servicemen community to address their grievances related to pension, personal documentations and other anomalies. The event witnessed a significant turnout of over 450 veterans, Veer Naris and widows.

General officer commanding, the Red Shield Division, was the chief guest of the event, wherein he interacted with veterans, Veer Naris and war widows. During his address, the commanding officer expressed his gratitude to the veterans and their families for their service and sacrifices towards the nation. He also acknowledged the invaluable assistance and cooperation provided by the ex-servicemen community during the prevalent security situation in Manipur.

The rally featured a comprehensive range of facilities to address the unique needs and concerns of those attending the event.

A large number of dedicated assistance booths were established to provide support and guidance on crucial matters including healthcare, pension anomalies and ECHS Polyclinic services. Furthermore, medical specialists from the Army and district civil hospital organized a medical camp to address the health needs of the attendees. The needy received medical consultation, treatment and medicines. A CSD outlet was also established at the rally site.

## Sports university VC addresses session on research at USTM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: A research is conducted to test a theory through deductive logic and develop a theory through inductive logic, stated J P Verma, vice-chancellor of the Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva Sports University while addressing a session at the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) on Monday.

The session was organised by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell of USTM.

Verma made an insightful presentation on 'Writing a Quality Research Paper: Reviewer's Perspective'. He stated that theories are developed by observing a phenomenon. For example: If patients start arriving more in number in a health centre, there must be an outbreak of some disease. Or, if most of the sports persons are medal winners from a particular university, their training program may be superior to that of other universities.

He shared his knowledge from the reviewers' perspective in a research work. He mentioned the rules and regulations of research which included the importance of research objectives, data collection, detection of outliers with the help of SPSS through Boxplot, assumptions violate, development of hypothesis, authenticity issues in experimental research, sample size and effectiveness of research, variance.

## KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL, OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER:::KARBI ANGLONG EAST DIVISION D I P H U

Dated /2024,

### TENDER NOTICE FOR THE SALE OF UNCLAIMED SEIZED TIMBER

1. (a) Under the Provision made in the Assam Sale of Forest produce coupes and mahals by tender system Rule 1977 (Amended upto date) sealed tenders in the prescribed form affixing Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Money receipt worth of Rs. 10/- (Rupees Ten) only, are inviting for the unclaimed seized timber lots as shown enclosed statement.

(b) The tender will be received by the undersigned upto 3.00 P.M (I.S.T) on 12/103/2024 to 13/103/2024. The tender box will be opened on 19/103/2024 after the above given time limit unless for any special reasons the undersigned notified on the notice board. If the office does not function, the date of receiving tenders for any reason, the next working day will be considered at the last date of receiving tenders. No tender delivered by post or hand after this will be considered under any circumstances. (c) The successful tenderers will have to deposit the bid value alongwith D. Cost, G.S.T. as shown in the statement order against each lot within 15 (fifteen) days from the date of issue of settlement order by the undersigned. If the settlement holder fails to deposit the tender value etc. within the time limit the settlement is Viable to be cancelled and earnest money which deposited shall be forfeited. If the highest bidder fails to deposit the tendered value. The lot will be settled with the 2nd highest tender or re-sold the lot subject to fulfilment of terms and conditions of the notice.

2. (a) The tenderer must be accompanied by earnest money "as call deposit pleased to D.F.O Karbi Anglong East Division, Diphu" of Rs. 500/- for General Class and Ts. 250/- for preferential class, no money order will be accepted as earnest money under any circumstances.

(b) The G.S.T., Caste Certificate, P. Tax and in case of non-Tribals Trading License & I. Tax must be enclosed alongwith the tender without which no tender will be considered.

(c) The intending tenderer shall inspect the lots on place shown in the attached schedule before submitting tender and no claim shall be considered under any circumstances afterwards.

The intending tenders are requested to contact the office of the undersigned in the office hours at any working days for further details particulars of the sale notice and collect the sale notice and tender form etc. on payment of Rs. 100/- ( Rupees One hundred) only per copy.

Enclosed:- Statement

Lot Statement of Unclaimed Seized Timber under Karbi Anglong East Division, Diphu from 2023-24.

Sl. No.	Lot No. and Year	Volume	Govt. Royalty (In Rs.)	Staking	Species	No. of Logs	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	BGA36 of 2023-24	4.126 M3	24744.00	Bogijan A/c Beat	Khakan	142 pieces	
2	WR/04 of 2023-24	5.523 M3	5661.00	Western Range, Dokmoka	Non-Sal (Sawn Timber)	355 pieces	
3	CR/01 of 2023-24	5.832 M3	17745.00	Central Range Manja	Non-Sal	54 pieces	
4	ER/11 of 2023-24	0.912 M3	6295.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak	9 pieces	
5	ER/10 of 2023-24	1.15 M3	8680.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak	9 pieces	
6	NR/37 of 2023-24	0.723 M3	2606.00	RHO Offence	M-Sal	13 pieces	
7	NR/38 of 2023-24	0.626 M3	2256.00	RHO Offence	M-Sal	10 pieces	
8	NR/39 of 2023-24	0.596 M3	2148.00	RHO Offence	M-Sal	9 pieces	
9	BG/07 of 2023-24	1.504 M3	9019.00	Bogijan Nc Beat	M-Sal	33 pieces	
10	DP/06 of 2023-24	0.440 M3	4324.00	Deopeni A/c Beat	Teak	1 pieces	
11	DP/09 of 2023-24	0.563 M3	4665.00	Deopani A/c Beat	Teak	2 pieces	
12	DP/10 of 2023-24	0.700 M3	4204.00	Deopani A/c Beat	Teak	5 pieces	
13	DP/11 of 2023-24	0.361 M3	3548.00	Deopani A/c Beat	Teak	1 pieces	
14	DP/12 of 2023-24	0.543 M3	4545.00	Deopani A/c Beat	Teak	2 pieces	
15	ER/07 of 2023-24	0.275 M3	4054.00	Western Range, Dokmoka	Teak (Slab/Plank)	25 pieces	
16	ER/08 of 2023-24	0.441 M3	6501.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak (Slab/Plank)	25 pieces	
17	ER/09 of 2023-24	3.164 M3	4227.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Mixed Logs	24 pieces	
18	ER/10 of 2023-24	1.155 M3	8710.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak	9 pieces	
19	ER/11 of 2023-24	0.776 M3	5185.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak	9 places	
20	ER/12 of 2023-24	0.441 M3	6501.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak (Slab/Plank)	14 pieces	
21	ER/13 of 2023-24	0.441 M3	6501.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak (Slab/Plank)	14 pieces	
22	ER/14 of 2023-24	0.441 M3	6501.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak (Slab/Plank)	14 pieces	
23	ER/15 of 2023-24	3.164 M3	4227.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Mixed Logs	24 pieces	
24	ER/16 of 2023-24	0.33 M3	4865.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak (Slab/Plank)	30 pieces	
25	ER/17 of 2023-24	0.33 M3	4865.00	Eastern Range, Bokajan	Teak (Slab/Plank)	30 pieces	
26	DP/13 of 2023-24	0.953 M3	5715.00	Deopani A/c Beat	M-Sal (Sawn Timber)	12 pieces	
27	DP/14 of 2023-24	0.925 M3	5547.00	Deopani A/c Beat	M-Sal (Sawn Timber)	13 pieces	
28	DP/15 of 2023-24	0.910 M3	5457.00	Deopani A/c Beat	M-Sal (Sawn Timber)	12 pieces	
29	DP/16 of 2023-24	0.504 M3	4835.00	Deopani A/c Beat	M-Sal (Sawn Timber)	10 pieces	
30	WR/13 of 2023-24	4.99 M3	14994.95	Western Range, Dokmoka	Non-Sal Sawn Timber (Fanta)	127 pieces	
31	WR/15 of 2023-24	1.809 M3	5436.02	Western Range, Dokmoka	Non-Sal Sawn Timber (Fanta)	37 pieces	

Sd/-

i/c Divisional Forest Officer,  
Karbi Anglong East Division, Diphu.

Dated 22/02/2024.

Memo No. B/KAE/Tender Lots/2023-24/ 12 33 -(A)



# Your dream is my resolve: PM Modi to youngsters

*'Indian Railways is undergoing a transformation and it will benefit those who are studying in schools and colleges'*

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said a developed India will be the India of youngsters' dreams and they have the maximum right to decide how the country shapes up in the future.

Addressing a function to lay the foundation of railway projects, the Prime Minister said the third term of his government will start in June, but the scale and speed with which new projects have begun have left everyone baffled.

Recalling the events he attended in Jammu and Gujarat over the last couple of days, Modi said he dedicated a dozen Indian institutes of technology (IITs) and Indian institutes of management (IIMs) and five All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to the country.

The Indian Railways is undergoing a transformation and it will benefit those who are studying in schools and colleges and those below 35 years of age, he said, adding that he has laid the foundation for the work to revamp more than 550 railway stations across 27 states and 300 districts.

"Youngsters have the maximum say in deciding how Viksit Bharat (developed India) will shape up... I wish to tell every youngster of the country that your dream is Modi's resolve. Your dream, your hard work and Modi's resolve is the guarantee for Viksit Bharat," the prime minister said, addressing the gathering



spread across 2,000 railway stations and function sites.

Modi laid the foundation for 554 Amrit Bharat stations, a government initiative to revamp key railway stations across the country, and inaugurated rail overbridges and underbridges.

The Prime Minister's outreach to youngsters comes against the backdrop of a surge in the number of first-time voters in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Nearly 1.85 crore first-time voters -- in the age group of 18-19 -- have registered for the polls likely to be held in April-May, as against the 1.5 crore ahead of the 2019 general election.

The total number of voters aged below 30 years is nearly 22 crore.

Modi lauded the youngsters who participated in various competitions across the country on the theme of

"2047: Viksit Bharat ki Railway".

He said every paisa of taxpayers' money is being used for the welfare of the commuters.

"There is also a 50-per cent discount given by the government on every railway ticket," the prime minister said.

"Just as interest is earned on money deposited in banks, similarly, every paisa spent on infrastructure creates new sources of income and employment," he said, adding that the laying of new railway tracks created multiple employment opportunities for labourers to engineers.

"Whatever India does today, it does it at an unprecedented speed and scale. We dream big and work tirelessly to realise those dreams. This resolve is visible in this Viksit Bharat Viksit Railway programme," the prime minister said, as he

launched more than 2,000 rail infrastructure projects worth about Rs 41,000 crore.

Exuding confidence about the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) retaining power in the Lok Sabha polls, Modi said the third term of his government will start from June, but the scale and speed with which it has been working have surprised people.

"People have seen a new India being built in the last 10 years," he said, highlighting the transformation in the railways, including the launch of Vande Bharat trains, an emphasis on cleanliness and electrification of tracks.

Recalling the events he attended in Jammu and Gujarat over the last couple of days, the prime minister said the education and healthcare sectors are also witnessing massive expansion.

Taking a swipe at previous governments, Modi said his dispensation stopped the loot of public money and every penny earned is used in expanding railway services.

"The Indian Railways used to be a victim of politics, but it is the main basis of the ease of travel now and a big source of employment," he said.

Modi cautioned people, saying the increase in the budget due to the country's growing economy will not have an impact on the ground if revenue leaks due to scams.

The financial losses of the railways used to be a common refrain

earlier, but the national transporter is a big force of transformation now, the prime minister said.

He said the upcoming Amrit Bharat stations will be symbols of both development and heritage.

Modi said the Balasore station in Odisha has been designed on the theme of the Jagannath temple in Puri, Sikkim's Rangpur will carry the imprint of local architecture, Sangner in Rajasthan displays 16th-century hand-block printing and the station at Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu will depict Chola influence.

The Ahmedabad station was inspired by the Modhera Sun temple, the Dwarka station by the Dwarkadheesh temple and IT City Gurugram will carry the information technology theme, he added.

"The Amrit Bharat stations will introduce the specialities of that city to the world," the prime minister said.

The Amrit Bharat Station scheme was launched for the development of stations on the railways' network.

It involves the preparation of master plans and their implementation in phases to improve the amenities at the stations through an improvement of station access, circulating areas, waiting halls, toilets, elevators and escalators as necessary, cleanliness, free WiFi, kiosks for local products through schemes such as "One Station, One Product" and better passenger information systems. (PTI)

## Will scrap 'Agnipath', revert to old recruitment system if voted to power: Congress

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Stepping up its attack on the Union government over the "Agnipath" military recruitment scheme, the Congress alleged on Monday that "gross injustice" was done to youngsters and asserted that it would revert to the old recruitment system if voted to power at the Centre.

The opposition party also demanded that appointment be given to the about two lakh youngsters who had cleared the recruitment process but were not given joining letters as the "Agnipath" scheme was launched in 2022.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to President Droupadi Murmu on Monday, highlighting the "gross injustice" done to the youngsters seeking regular employment in the armed forces due to the "Agnipath" scheme, and urged her to ensure justice for them.

The future of nearly two lakh young men and women has become uncertain due to the scrapping of the regular recruitment process in the armed forces, Kharge said in his letter to the president, who is the supreme commander of the armed forces.

"There are many well-known issues with the Agnipath scheme. Former Chief of Army Staff General MM Naravane has written that the Army was 'taken by surprise' by Agnipath and that 'for the Navy and Air Force, it came like a bolt from the blue'," he said in his letter to Murmu.

"Furthermore, the scheme is discriminatory among our jawans by creating parallel cadres of soldiers who are expected to work on similar tasks, but with very different emoluments, benefits and prospects. The majority of Agniveers will be released into an uncertain job market after four years of service, which some have argued could affect social stability," Kharge said.

Tagging Kharge's letter, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on X: "We are with the military candidates, who are full of patriotism and bravery, in the fight for justice." Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said with the spirit of patriotism and service in mind, lakhs of youngsters across the country work hard day and night. "Whether it is cold, hot or rainy, they wake up early in the morning and practise running. They think that they will join the Army, serve the country and also get employment. The BJP govern-

ment crushed the dreams of lakhs of promising youth of the country by bringing Agniveer Yojana," she said in a post on X.

"Lakhs of posts are vacant, crores of youth are unemployed -- this is Modi's guarantee," she added. Addressing a press conference here, Congress general secretary Sachin Pilot said there was no demand for such a scheme.

"In the long term, this scheme will not benefit anybody except saving some money for the government of India. We in the Congress party feel that we should go back to the old recruitment system," Pilot said.

If some changes are to be introduced to modernise the armed forces, that is very much possible in the current setup, but to completely eradicate the old system is not right, he added.

"It is closing avenues of employment. I think it has been done in an ad-hoc fashion, without much thought to the future prospects of how the Army would function. We in the Congress believe that the Agnipath programme is not a positive development and we will certainly go back to the old recruitment system when people vote us back," Pilot said, with party leaders Pawan Khera and Deepender Hooda by his side.

Hooda said several military recruitment processes were completed during and before the outbreak of COVID-19 and only joining was left. But after the introduction of the "Agnipath" scheme, these youngsters selected by the government were not given joining letters.

"These youngsters met (former Congress chief) Rahul Gandhi and shared their pain. Since then, Rahulji has been continuously raising his voice," he said.

On whose demand did the Narendra Modi government bring the "Agnipath Yojana", Hooda asked. "Neither the Army nor the youngsters joining the Army had put forward the demand for the scheme," he said.

"When we asked what will the Agniveers do after four years of service, BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya had said those youngsters will be given the job of a watchman in the BJP office. I want to tell the BJP that the youngsters of the country join the Army with a sense of patriotism and not with a sense of becoming a watchman outside the BJP office," Hooda said. (PTI)

## Several Indians discharged from Russian army following India's demand: MEA



**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Several Indians who worked as support staff to the Russian army were discharged following India's demand, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Monday.

It said India remains committed, as a matter of "top priority", to actively pursuing with the Russian authorities all the relevant cases of Indian nationals for an early discharge from the Russian army.

According to media reports, several Indians have

been working as security helpers in the Russian military and they were forced to even fight with Russian soldiers in certain areas along Russia's border with Ukraine.

"We have seen some inaccurate reports in the media regarding Indians with the Russian army seeking help for discharge," the MEA said in a statement.

"Each and every such case brought to the attention of the Indian embassy in Moscow has been strongly taken up with the Russian authorities and those brought to the attention of the Ministry have been taken up with the Russian embassy in New Delhi," it said.

The MEA added, "Several Indians have already been discharged as a result."

Last week, MEA Spokesperson Randeep Singh said New Delhi was in touch with Moscow for early discharge of Indians working as support staff to the Russian army and urged its nationals to stay away from the conflict zone in Ukraine.

"We urge all Indian nationals to exercise due caution and stay away from this conflict," he had said.

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader Asaduddin Owaisi had earlier urged the MEA to rescue the Indians. (PTI)

## Shajahan Sheikh to be arrested in 7 days: TMC spokesperson

**KOLKATA, Feb 26:** Senior TMC leader Kunal Ghosh on Monday said party strongman Shajahan Sheikh, who has been accused of sexual atrocities and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal, will be arrested in seven days.

The TMC leader's assertion comes immediately after the Calcutta High Court clarified that there is no stay on the arrest of Shajahan.

"About the arrest of Sheikh Shajahan, Abhishek Banerjee is correct. The matter was stuck in the legal tangle of the court. The opposition was doing politics using this opportunity. Thanks to the High Court today for clarifying the matter and allowing the police to take action. Shajahan will be arrested within seven days," Ghosh posted on X.

TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee had on Sunday claimed that Shajahan could not be

arrested because of legal tangles and stay on FIRs filed by the police.

The court directed that Shajahan, the Enforcement Directorate, the Central Bureau of Investigation, the state home secretary be impleaded as parties in the suo motu matter initiated on the allegations of sexual atrocities on women and the land grab of tribal people.

The riverine Sandeshkhali area - situated on the borders of the Sundarbans, about 100 kilometres from Kolkata -- has been on the boil for more than a month with protests against Shajahan, who is absconding, and his supporters.

The unrest in the area stems from accusations against Shajahan and his supporters of land grabbing and sexual assault with the local TMC strongman evading authorities since a mob attack on Enforcement Directorate officials on January 5. (PTI)

## Haryana home minister assures Assembly of CBI probe into killing of INLD state chief

**CHANDIGARH, Feb 26:** Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij told the Assembly on Monday that a CBI probe will be announced in connection with the killing of the Indian National Lok Dal's (INLD) state unit chief, Nafe Singh Rathee.

Vij also denied the opposition's charge that the law-and-order mechanism has collapsed in the state.

"If the House is only satisfied with a CBI probe, then I assure the members that we will hand over the case to the CBI," Vij said while speaking on an adjournment motion moved by the Congress over Haryana's law-and-order situation. Speaker Gian Chand Gupta admitted the adjournment motion as the Congress demanded a high court judge-monitored CBI probe into Rathee's killing.

Soon after the Question Hour, the Congress members raised the issue of Rathee's killing and demanded a discussion on law and order.

Rathee and an INLD worker were killed when unidentified assailants sprayed their sports utility vehicle (SUV) with bullets at Bahadurgarh, near Delhi, on Sunday.

The attack, which came with less than two

months to go for the Lok Sabha polls, drew sharp reactions from the opposition parties in the BJP-ruled state. Twelve people, including former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Naresh Kaushik, were booked on Monday in connection with Rathee's killing, police said.

Vij told the Assembly that police are properly probing the incident, but when Leader of Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda said the case might involve various angles that can only be investigated by a central agency, the home minister said a CBI probe will be announced.

Congress leader Raghuvir Singh Kadian asked the speaker to allow a discussion on the adjournment motion moved by his party.

The speaker admitted the adjournment motion after which the House discussed the issue.

Kadian described Rathee's killing as the state's "first political murder" and demanded a high court judge-monitored CBI probe into the incident. His demand was backed by Hooda.

Kadian also said Rathee was not given a security cover despite the fact that he was facing threats. Vij described Rathee's killing as a very sad incident.

"I immediately directed the officials concerned to take action. I spoke to the DGP, the Jhajar SP and the head of the STF, and directed them to catch the culprits at the earliest," he said.

Vij said the registration number of the car is being verified.

On the opposition targeting the BJP over the alleged breakdown of law and order, he said, "It is being said that the entire law-and-order system has broken down in the state, which is not true."

Those behind Rathee's killing will not be spared and exemplary punishment will be given to them, the home minister said.

Earlier, paying homage to Rathee when the House was condoling his death and that of former Lok Sabha speaker Manohar Joshi, Kadian said the INLD leader's death was not natural.

"It is a political murder and the first one in Haryana since it was carved out as a separate state (in 1966)," the Congress leader said.

Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar led the House in paying tributes to Rathee.

Kadian said Rathee came from a farmer family and rose to become an MLA after a lot of struggle in life. (PTI)

## Traffic hit at Delhi-UP borders in view of farmers' proposed tractor march

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Traffic was affected at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh borders on Monday in view of a proposed tractor march of farmers to the national capital, officials said.

Farmers have planned a protest march on tractors via the Yamuna Expressway, Luharli toll plaza and Mahamaya flyover on Monday.

The Delhi Police has intensified checking at the borders by putting up barricades.

There was heavy traffic at the Chilla border from Delhi towards Noida due to the checking. The traffic was also heavy at the Delhi-Noida Expressway.

Earlier in the morning, Gautam Buddh Nagar Police said intensive checking will be conducted by the Delhi Police as well as the district police by installing barri-

ers at all the border points between the national capital and Noida. Traffic will be diverted in accordance with the situation, it said. The ongoing farmers' protest has also affected the traffic movement at the Singhu and Tikri border points between Delhi and Haryana.

On Saturday, the authorities partially reopened the Singhu and Tikri border points, almost two weeks after they were sealed in view of the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march.

One of the commuters wrote on X that the traffic was heavy at Singhu border service road. The vehicles can be seen crawling near the border.

The two border points were sealed on February 13 as the protesting farmers from Punjab began their protest march to press

the BJP-led Centre over their demands, including a minimum support price (MSP) for crops and farm loan waiver.

Thousands of farmers have been camping on the Punjab-Haryana border near Ambala, about 200 kilometres from Delhi, after their march was thwarted by security personnel.

Apart from this, the traffic was also heavy at other places in the national capital.

Due to the construction of flyover between Apsara border and Anand Vihar, the vehicular movement was affected near Anand Vihar flyover on both the carriageways.

The commuters also complained about the traffic jams at Sardar Patel Marg and towards Gurgaon from the national capital. (PTI)

## Govt working on to increase textile sector's contribution in building developed India, says PM

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday promised all support to the textiles sector, stressing that it will play a crucial role in making India a developed nation by 2047, when India will complete hundred years of independence.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating Bharat Tex 2024, one of the largest-ever global textile events organised in the country, Modi said the government is working in a very wide scope to further increase the contribution of textiles sector in building a developed India.

"We have resolved to transform Bharat into a 'Viksit Rashtra' in the next 25 years. Four important pillars of Viksit Bharat are poor, youth, farmers and women. And notably, the textile sector of Bharat is connected with all these pillars. Therefore, an event like Bharat Tex becomes very important for us all," Modi said.

He further said in 2014, the valuation of textile market of India

was less than ₹ 7 lakh crore, whereas it has now crossed ₹ 12 lakh crore.

The prime minister also said that during the last 10 years, there has been a 25 per cent rise in the production of yarn, fabric and apparel. The government is very much focused on quality control in the textile sector, he added.

"Our government is fully committed to support you in all your endeavours," the prime minister said.

On the employment potential and participation of the rural population and women in textiles sectors, he said that seven out of ten apparel makers are women and in handloom, the number is even higher.

He emphasised that the steps taken in the last 10 years have made Khadi a strong medium of development and jobs. Similarly, welfare schemes and infrastructure push of the last decade have also benefited the textile sector, he said. The prime minister also



elaborated on India's growing profile as a cotton, jute and silk producer.

He said that the government is supporting cotton farmers and is buying cotton from them. He said Kasturi Cotton, launched by the government, will be a big step in

creating India's brand value globally. He further said the government is focussing on skill as well as scale with the number of National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) campuses in the country increasing to 19. He said that local weavers and artisans are

also being connected to NIFTs through special training programmes about new technologies. Bharat Tex 2024 is taking place in two of the largest exhibition centres in India namely Bharat Mandapam and Yasho Bhoomi. Modi also threw light on the govern-

ment's expansive plans to create seven PM MITRA Parks in various states and underlined the emphasis on the creation of opportunities for the entire textile sector.

"Government strives to establish the entire value chain ecosystem in a single place where modern infrastructure with plug-and-play facilities are made available", he said, and added that it will not only improve scale and operation but also bring down logistics costs.

The PM recalled the efforts of the textiles industry during the Covid pandemic for the manufacturing of PPE kits and face masks. He underlined that the government along with the textile sector streamlined the supply chain and provided a sufficient number of PPE kits and face masks to the entire world.

He expressed confidence in India becoming a global export hub in the near future.

The Prime Minister underlined

that the government is readily available to function as a catalyst and work towards fulfilling the dreams of the people, as he urged the industries to come forward with a new vision that caters to the world's needs and diversifies their markets.

Organised by a consortium of 11 Textile Export Promotion Councils and supported by the government, Bharat Tex 2024 is built on the twin pillars of trade and investment, with an overarching focus on sustainability. The four-day event features over 65 knowledge sessions with more than 100 global panelists discussing various issues faced by the sector.

More than 3,500 exhibitors, 3,000 buyers from over 100 countries, and more than 40,000 business visitors, besides textiles students, weavers, artisans and textile workers, are expected to take part in Bharat Tex 2024 along with policymakers and global CEOs. (PTI)



## Prez advocates ethical practice and 'one health' approach for medical fraternity

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** President Droupadi Murmu on Monday urged the medical fraternity to work in accordance with ethics and high values in their professional life and try to solve all problems with the integrated approach of "one health".

Speaking on the 107th annual day and convocation ceremony of Lady Hardinge Medical College (LHMC), President Murmu said medical science is today not limited to just treatment.

"Its scope has become very wide. The gap between the physical, digital and biological realms is shrinking due to the 4th Industrial Revolution," President Murmu said.

"New experiments being done in synthetic biology and new techniques like CRISPR gene editing are proving helpful in finding solutions to problems that have persisted for centuries. But the problem of misuse of these technologies also remains," she added, according to a statement.

President Murmu expressed confidence that the medical fraternity will work in accordance with ethics and high values in their professional life and try to solve all the problems with the integrated approach of "one health".

She said that people consider doctors as God and doctors should understand this moral responsibility and behave accordingly.

"They will be truly successful doctors or nurses only if they have professional competence as well as human values like compassion, kindness and empathy. To be a good healthcare professional, it is also important to be a good person," she said.

President Murmu added, "Gandhi Ji has also called knowledge without character and science without humanity as a sin. Therefore, their primary aim should not be to earn money, but 'service before self'."

The president said she was happy to note that LHMC has been registered as an Organ Transplant Retrieval Centre.

LHMC has started the Comprehensive Antibiotic Stewardship Program to resolve the problem of antimicrobial resistance. LHMC is also working on Blood Bag Delivery under the iDRone Initiative in collaboration with other institutes, the statement said. (PTI)

# Allahabad HC rejects plea challenging Varanasi court order allowing 'puja' in Gyanvapi mosque's cellar

**PRAYAGRAJ, Feb 26:** Hindu prayers will continue in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, the Allahabad High Court said on Monday while dismissing a plea that had challenged the district court's order to this effect.

Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal rejected two appeals filed by the mosque management committee challenging the Varanasi district judge's January 17 order that appointed the district magistrate as the receiver of the "Vyas Tehkhana" or southern cellar of the mosque and January 31 order by which he allowed "puja" to be performed there.

The high court said worship will continue in the "Vyas Tehkhana" of the mosque adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

Mohammad Yasin, joint secretary of Anjuman Intezamia Masajid, the committee that manages the affairs of the Gyanvapi, said that their lawyers are studying the judgement and they might approach the Supreme Court against the order.

Dismissing the appeals, Justice Agarwal said, "After going

through the entire records of the case and considering the arguments of the parties concerned, the court did not find any ground to interfere in the judgment passed by the district judge on January 17, appointing the Varanasi district magistrate as the receiver of the property, as well as the order dated January 31 by which the district court permitted puja in the tehkhana."

Going through the argument made by the Muslim side that the January 31 order was passed without any application, the high court said, "In the instant case, by order dated January 17 the composite prayer made in application was allowed, but only relief (a) was incorporated appointing receiver. Relief (b) allowing worship was added on January 31, 2024 after it was brought to the notice of the Court and order stood modified/amended in terms of Sections 151/152 CPC."

"I find that the challenge made to the order dated January 31 on the plea of res judicata is totally unfounded as the relief prayed by the plaintiff was granted on January 17, 2024 but part of it was not



incorporated in the order which was subsequently modified/amended," Justice Agarwal said.

In its 54-page judgment, the court also noted, "Lastly, an attempt has been made to malign the image and impute motive to the order passed by the Court below on January 31, 2024 on the ground that the officer concerned had passed the order on the last working day."

Justice Agrawal said that puja at

that place has already been started and is going on thus there is no occasion to stop the same.

The high court judge had reserved his verdict in the matter on February 15 after hearing the counsel for the parties.

The mosque committee had moved the high court on February 2, hours after the Supreme Court refused to hear its plea against the district court order and asked it to approach the high court.

A survey conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on the court's order had suggested that the Gyanvapi mosque was constructed during Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's rule over the remains of a Hindu temple.

The district court ruled on January 31 that a Hindu priest can perform prayers before the idols in the southern cellar of the mosque.

The prayers are now being conducted by a Hindu priest nominated by the Kashi Vishwanath temple trust and the petitioner, who has claimed that his grandfather offered puja in the cellar till December 1993.

The district court had directed the local administration to make arrangements within seven days for prayers in the cellar. This would have involved "proper arrangements" with metal barricades at the complex.

The January 31 order of the district court was delivered on the plea of Shailendra Kumar Pathak, who had claimed that his maternal grandfather, priest Somnath Vyas, offered prayers in the cellar till December 1993.

He had said the puja was

stopped during the tenure of then Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav after the Babri masjid in Ayodhya was demolished on December 6, 1992.

During the hearing, the Muslim side had contested the petitioner's version. It had said no idols existed in the cellar and hence, there was no question of prayers being offered there till 1993.

The Muslim side had also countered the petitioner's claim that the basement was under his grandfather's control.

The petitioner had claimed that his family had the control of the cellar even during the British rule.

The said temple is called by the masjid committee as Gyanvapi mosque, the petitioner had said. There is a "tehkhana" (cellar) in the southern side of the subject building which is the principal seat of hereditary "pujar" (priest) of Vyas family, the petition said.

The suit was filed against the action of the state government and district administration restricting the plaintiff to enter the said temple and fundamental right granted under Article 25 of the Constitution being infringed. (PTI)

## Rape survivor shot at by rapist, aides in Rajasthan; 3 arrested

**JAIPUR, Feb 26:** A 25-year-old rape survivor was seriously injured when she was shot at and attacked with a sharp-edged weapon by a man accused of raping her and his two accomplices in Kotputli-Behror district of Rajasthan.

The woman's brother was also injured in the attack and the two are undergoing treatment at Sawai Man Singh Hospital here. The three accused have been arrested, police said.

The main accused Rajendra Yadav was caught on Monday after his leg got amputated after being hit by a train in Jaipur, DGP U R Sahoo said.

On Saturday night, the woman was returning home on a two-wheeler with her brother when Yadav and two others, Mahipal Gujral and Rahul Gujral, attacked them near Pragura police station. The accused followed the siblings before attacking them, police said.

Yadav shot the woman in the back while the other two accused stabbed her and her brother with a sharp-edged weapon. The woman sustained multiple injuries in the head, legs, hands and shoulders, she said.

An FIR has been registered in the matter based on a complaint lodged by the woman's family.

According to the FIR, Yadav allegedly raped the woman on January 16 last year and was subsequently arrested and fired from his job.

He recently came out on bail and started threatening the woman to withdraw the case against him. Yadav attacked her as she did not withdraw the case, the FIR stated. Mahipal and Rahul were arrested on Sunday.

Yadav got his beard and hair trimmed in order to mislead the police. He was on the run and on Monday morning, he was hit by a train on railway tracks in Jaipur's Malviya Nagar, police said.

He was taken to a hospital and was identified as Rajendra Yadav, the main accused of the attack on the woman in Kotputli-Behror, DGP said.

His right leg was amputated in the incident and his left leg was also injured. He is undergoing treatment at the SMS hospital, he said.

They said the FIR against the accused has been registered under sections 307

(attempt to murder), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code and provisions of the Arms Act.

Meanwhile, former chief minister Ashok Gehlot inquired about the health of the victim in the hospital on Monday and talked to her family members.

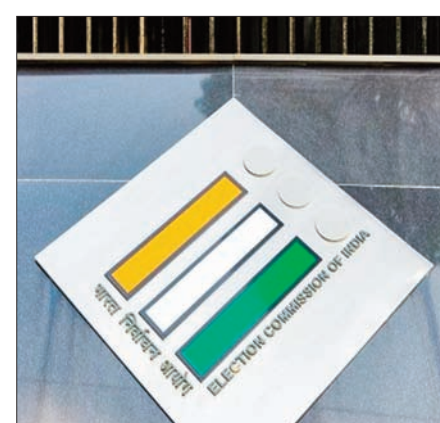
In a post on X, Gehlot said, "Inquired about the victim's health and talked to the family members. If the victim had been given protection, this would not have happened. This is the negligence of the government."

He said that the matter should be investigated quickly and justice should be ensured. The state unit of Congress formed a four-member committee.

Former Health Minister Raghu Sharma, Congress leader Dharmendra Rathore, Rajasthan Child Protection Rights Commission Chairperson Sangeeta Beniwal and former MLA Indraj Gurjar have been included in the committee.

The committee will submit the factual report of the entire matter to the PCC President Govind Singh Dotasra. (PTI)

## EC ropes in banks, post offices to spread voter awareness ahead of LS polls



**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** The Election Commission on Monday roped in banks and post offices to spread voter awareness as part of its efforts to increase voting percentage in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

The poll panel has often expressed concern over urban and youth apathy with many registered voters not turning up at the polling stations to cast ballot in the previous elections.

Over 30 crore of the 91 crore electors did not cast their ballot in the previous parliamentary polls.

The Election Commission (EC) on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with two prominent organisations -- the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) and the Department of Posts (DoP) -- to amplify its voter outreach and awareness efforts ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

The initiative, the poll panel said, is in continuation of its efforts to enhance electoral awareness in the country.

The EC had recently signed an MoU with the Ministry of Education to formally integrate electoral literacy into the educational curriculum of the schools and colleges.

The latest initiative has been taken based on insights and knowledge gained by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar from his past roles and experience working in the financial sector, particularly in the Indian banking sector and India Post Payments Banks, the officials pointed out.

As part of the MoU, the IBA and the DoP with its members and affiliated institutions will extend support in promoting voter education through their extensive network on a pro

bono without charge basis, employing various interventions to empower the citizens with knowledge about their electoral rights, processes and steps for registration and voting.

The members and affiliated institutions will now display voter education messages prominently on their websites, directing visitors to learn more about the electoral process.

Voter education content will be disseminated through various promotional channels such as social media and customer outreach platforms of member institutions, ensuring widespread awareness among stakeholders and the public, the EC said.

Voter education messages will also be displayed in the form of posters, flex and hoardings at office premises at major locations, reaching the customers at key touchpoints.

All member institutions under the IBA and the DoP will establish "voter awareness fora" to engage the employees and customers in discussions and initiatives related to voter education.

The Department of Posts will affix a special cancellation stamp (bearing voter education messages) on the postal articles.

"Despite successfully managing and conducting elections by the Election Commission over the years in a fair and peaceful way along with a significant increase in participation of the electors, there is also a concern that around 30 crore electors, out of 91 crore, did not cast their votes in general election to Lok Sabha 2019. The voting percentage was 67.4 per cent, which the Commission has taken as a challenge to improve upon," the EC said.

The Indian Banks' Association now has a strong network of 247 members across the country. Public sector banks are in lead with 90,000+ branches and 1.36 lakh ATMs followed by 42,000+ branches of private sector banks with 79,000+ ATMs.

Regional rural banks contribute over 22,400 branches, while small finance and payment banks operate around 7,000 branches and more than 3,000 ATMs.

Foreign banks maintain 840 branches and 1,158 ATMs, and local area banks have 81 branches.

"The cumulative number of the branches are over 1.63 lakh with more than 2.19 lakh ATMs across the country," the poll authority pointed out. (PTI)

## Ensure timely completion of disciplinary cases: CVC to govt depts, public sector banks

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has asked all government departments, public sector banks and insurance companies to ensure that disciplinary cases are brought to a logical conclusion within the prescribed timelines and without any inordinate delay.

The commission has said the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) and it have issued guidelines from time to time, impressing upon the organisations concerned for a timely conclusion of disciplinary proceedings.

"However, it has been observed that on many occasions, there is inordinate delay

in bringing the cases to logical conclusion, which is against the principles of natural justice and also defeats the very purpose of initiating disciplinary action," the CVC said in an order.

The commission said it has prescribed model timelines for investigation and conclusion of disciplinary proceedings till the issuance of final orders. The CVC said the existing instructions and guidelines as issued by the commission and DoPT are "strictly adhered to" by the disciplinary authorities and other authorities concerned.

The chief vigilance officers (CVOs) of the respective or-

ganisations may bring these guidelines to the notice of the chief executive officer and all disciplinary authorities concerned, the order said.

"They may also follow up all pending cases to ensure that they are brought to logical conclusion within the prescribed timelines," it added.

The CVC also said in order to ensure a timely and smooth completion of disciplinary proceedings, training needs to be imparted to the prospective and current inquiry officers (IOs) and presenting officers (POs), which will help create a pool of trained IOs and POs in the respective organisations.

"For IOs/POs, who are serving public servants, timely completion of departmental proceedings by them needs to be given due weightage/cognisance by the reporting/reviewing officers in the APARs (annual performance appraisal reports) of such IOs/POs," said the order that has been issued to the secretaries of all central government departments and chief executives of public sector banks and insurance companies, among others.

In another order, the CVC said a time limit of six months has been prescribed for the IOs to complete an inquiry and submit a report to the

competent authority.

"However, it has been observed that in a substantial number of cases, completion of inquiry and submission of inquiry report is taking more than the six-month period. One of the reasons contributing to such delay is due to frequent change of IO as a result of transfer, promotion, retirement etc. of the earlier IO," the order said.

The commission said in order to ensure a timely completion of a departmental inquiry, the same IO should continue to conduct the inquiry even after his transfer or promotion till the inquiry report is submitted by him. (PTI)

## IIT Madras researchers develop first India-specific AI model to determine age of foetus

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Researchers at IIT Madras have developed the first India-specific Artificial Intelligence model to accurately determine the age of a foetus in a pregnant woman.

According to officials, accurate 'Gestational Age' (GA) is necessary for the appropriate care of pregnant women and for determining precise delivery dates.

Called 'Garbhini-GA2', this is the first late-trimester GA estimation model to be developed and validated using Indian population data, they said.

Currently, the age of a foetus (Gestational Age) is determined using a formula developed for the Western population. It is likely to be erroneous when applied in the later part of pregnancy due to variations in the growth of the foetus in the Indian population.

According to officials, the newly developed 'Garbhini-GA2' accurately estimates the age of a foetus for the Indian population, reducing error by almost three times. This GA model can improve the care delivered by obstetricians and neonatologists, thus reducing maternal and infant mortality rates in India.

"GARBH-Ini is a flagship programme of DBT, and the development of these population-specific models for estimating gestational age is a commendable outcome.



These models are being validated across the country," Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

The research was undertaken by Himanshu Sinha, Associate Professor, Bhupat and Jyoti Mehta School of Biosciences, Department of Biotechnology, Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) Madras; Shinjini Bhatnagar, the Principal Investigator of GARBH-Ini programme and a distinguished professor at Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI), Faridabad.

The findings were published in the prestigious international peer-reviewed journal Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia. The BRIC-THSTI is an institute under the Biotechnology Research and Inno-

vation Council (BRIC), Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology.

"We are utilising advanced data science and AI/ML techniques to build tools to predict unfavourable birth outcomes. The first step towards this is to develop accurate GA models that perform significantly better than currently used models designed using Western populations," said Sinha, a coordinator at the Centre for Integrative Biology and Systems Medicine, IIT Madras.

Bhatnagar said, "Improving the GA accuracy is a critical component of the broader goals of the GARBH-Ini study, which aims to reduce the adverse pregnancy outcomes. The mere application of sophisticated data science tools is not sufficient."

"The crux of ensuring that these technological advancements yield tangible benefits in the clinical realm lies in the end-to-end partnership between clinicians and data scientists."

"Such collaboration ensures that the development of solutions is not only technically sound but also clinically relevant and seamlessly integrated into healthcare workflows. This study is an exemplar of this approach," she added.

Ultrasound dating in early pregnancy is the standard of care for determining GA. However, dating based on formulae developed with Western data, particularly in the second and third trimesters, tends to be less accurate in the Indian population due to the variations in foetal growth.

The researchers used genetic algorithm-based methods to develop Garbhini-GA2, which, when applied in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy, was more accurate than the current Hadlock and recent INTERGROWTH-21st models. Himanshu Sinha explained that The Garbhini-GA2 model, compared to Hadlock, reduces the GA estimation median error by more than three times.

"Garbhini-GA2 used three routinely measured foetal ultrasound parameters, was developed using GARBH-Ini cohort data docu-

mented at Gurugram Civil Hospital, Haryana, and was validated in an independent cohort in South India.

"Application of Indian population-specific GA formulae with better accuracy can potentially improve pregnancy care, leading to better outcomes. This accurate dating will also enhance the precision of epidemiological estimates for pregnancy outcomes in the country," he said.

Once validated in prospective pan-India cohorts, this Garbhini-GA2 can be deployed in clinics across India, improving the care delivered by obstetricians and neonatologists, thus reducing maternal and infant mortality rates in India.

The study was conducted in partnership with Gurugram Civil Hospital, Gurugram, Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi, Christian Medical College Vellore, and Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences, Puducherry.

The GA model-building research was funded by the Grand Challenges India programme of the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council, DBT.

Additional funding came from the Robert Bosch Centre for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence (RBCDSAI), IIT Madras and the Centre for Integrative Biology and Systems Medicine (IBSE), IIT Madras. (PTI)

## PM Modi to visit Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra; to review Gaganyaan mission

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a two-day tour of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra from Tuesday and will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 24,000 crore.

He will also release the 16th instalment of about ₹ 21,000 crore to farmers under the 'PM-KISAN' scheme, an official statement said.

Modi will visit Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thiruvananthapuram and inaugurate three important space infrastructure projects worth about ₹ 1,800 crore on Tuesday and review the progress of 'Gaganyaan', India's human spaceflight mission.

The three projects include 'PSLV integration facility' at Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, 'semi-cryogenics integrated engine and stage test facility' at ISRO propulsion complex in Mahendragiri, and 'Trisonic wind tunnel' at VSSC.

In Tamil Nadu, Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple infrastructure projects worth more than ₹ 17,300 crore on Wednesday. The projects include laying the foundation stone of 'outer harbour container terminal' at V O Chidambaram port.

He will also launch India's first indigenous green hydrogen fuel cell inland waterway vessel and address thousands of MSME entrepreneurs working in automotive sector in Madurai as well, the statement said.

In Maharashtra, the prime minister will launch several infrastructure projects related to rail, road and irrigation worth more than ₹ 4,900 crore. He will also release the second and third instalments of about ₹ 3,800 crore under the 'Namoo Shetkari Mahasamman Nidhi'.

Among other programmes, he will disburse ₹ 825 crore of revolving fund to 5.5 lakh women self-help groups across Maharashtra and kick-start the distribution of one crore Ayushman cards across the state. He will launch the 'Modi Awaas Gharuk Yojana' for Other Backward Classes category beneficiaries in the state, and will transfer the first instalment of ₹ 375 crore to 2.5 lakh beneficiaries. The scheme envisages the construction of 10 lakh houses.

Following the transfer of the 16th instalment of 'PM-KISAN' fund, the total amount of money given to more than 11 crore farmers' families will reach over ₹ 3 lakh crore, the statement said. (PTI)



# Sikkim govt to create ₹ 10,800 fixed deposits for newborns

**GANGTOK, Feb 26:** Sikkim chief minister Prem Singh Tamang on Monday announced a new scheme under which the government will make a fixed deposit of ₹ 10,800 in the name of newborns in the state.

Addressing the 'Jan Bharosa Sammelan' in Soreng district, Tamang announced the 'Sikkim Sishu Samridhi Yojana' ahead of the assembly elections in the state.

He said that once the fixed deposit matures, the money can be withdrawn when the child turns 18.

The Himalayan state has the lowest population in the country at 6.10 lakh, according to the 2011 census. Tamang's government has been taking a slew of measures to encourage couples to have more babies to fend off concerns over the aging population.

Among these are additional increments for government employees having two or three children, maternity leaves of one year for female government employees and financial grants for non-working mothers.

"The low fertility rate among the local indigenous population is a matter of serious concern in Sikkim... We must do everything in our hands to reverse the process," Tamang had said last year.

At the programme in Soreng, the CM said the nearly 25,000 temporary government employees who have completed four years in service will get the memorandum for regularisation on February 29 in Rangpo.

Earlier this month, the state cabinet had approved the regularisation of government employees and the restoration of the old pension scheme.

The CM also announced that ₹ 48 lakh will be spent on the construction of home-stays, which will create employment opportunities and boost tourism in the state.

Tamang inaugurated a fire station in the Soreng district. The building at Singling has been constructed at a cost of ₹ 5.5 crore.

The building has residential quarters and restrooms, among others. (PTI)

# All Assam Tangsa Student Union announces boycott of election in Margherita constituency

**HT Correspondent MARGHERITA, Feb 26:** The All Assam Tangsa Student Union has announced its boycott of the upcoming elections in the 83 no Margherita constituency of Tinsukia district.

This decision arises from mounting frustrations among villagers who feel neglected by political representatives and deprived of essential amenities in their communities.

Residents of numerous villages within the constituency, primarily tribal areas, have raised grievances about poor road infrastructure, lack of electricity, sanitation facilities, absence of PMAY houses, and the urgent need for health centers, safe drinking water, and education centers.

Incumbent Dibrugarh Lok Sabha BJP MP and Union minister Rameswar Teli face criticism for failing to address these issues despite being elected to represent the constituency.

Nayung Mossang, president of the All Assam Tangsa Student Union, deplored the region's underdevelopment, especially as the nation celebrates its 75th year of independence.

Mossang stressed the necessity of directing attention to marginalised communities in tribal belt areas like Saleki village, Kamba Gaon, Mungkam, Paharpur, Kharrangkung, Phoolbari, Lalpahar, and Malu Gaon.

Expressing disillusionment with both the current BJP-led government and past administrations, Mossang criticised the lack of progress in developmental initiatives targeting tribal regions.

Specific areas like the neglect of Kamba Gaon Bridge, Mungkam Bridge and road, Kharrangkung road, Phoolbari, and Malu Gaon were highlighted, emphasising the urgency for substantive change.

Mossang declared the union's decision to bar any BJP leaders from entering their villages during the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Threatening a complete boycott of the elections, Mossang emphasised that unless significant steps are taken to address the longstanding issues faced by tribal communities, their participation in the electoral process remains uncertain.

# Pramod Boro attends Tangla Railway Station redevelopment ceremony

*CEM emphasises on regional devp initiatives, lays foundation of nursing institute*

**HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, Feb 26:** Alongside the rest of the state, the Tangla Railway Station in Udalguri district has been accorded a redevelopment opportunity, among the seven railway stations in the state of Assam.

Remarkably, a total of 553 railway stations across the country of India have been given opportunities for redevelopment under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

On Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually laid the foundation stones for the redevelopment of 553 railway stations across the nation, amounting to over ₹ 41,000 crores, as part of the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme aimed at enhancing the welfare and railway communication of the country.

The Tangla Railway Station in Udalguri district is among the seven stations in Assam set to undergo complete transformation under the initiative, enhancing 'ease of travel' and giving immense impetus to tourism in our



region.

During the event, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro, graced the occasion and witnessed the foundation laying ceremony virtually, implemented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

CEM Boro expressed his happiness and joy while attending the event, which gathered a large audience at Tangla Railway Station, including many dignitaries and respected citizens, on this momentous occasion.

He stated that the BTR Govern-

ment, along with the state and central governments, is dedicatedly working towards the welfare and development of the country, and accordingly, laid the foundation stone for the redevelopment of the Tangla Railway Station.

CEM Pramod Boro also laid the foundation stone for the construction of the Institute of Paramedical and Nursing Science at Ambagaon in Udalguri district.

Boro was accompanied by BTR executive member Dr Nilut Swargiary and BTR MCLA Sanjoy Swargiary.

# 32nd Karbi Lammet Amei concludes

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Feb 26:** The 32nd Karbi Lammet Amei (L:A) - the annual conference of the Karbi literary body, which commenced on February 22, concluded on Sunday after a successful four-day run. Liladhar Teron, a member of the Central Committee, expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the conference.

Teron extended gratitude to all the participants and delegates from the sub-branches and regional committees of KLA. He particularly celebrated the incorporation of six tribal languages - Mising, Rabha, Karbi, Tiwa, Deori, and Dimas - as mediums of instruction (MoI) in the foundational stage of education, aligning with the provisions outlined in the National Education Policy of 2020. The recent cabinet decision by the state government on February 23, 2024, was appreciated.

# Jorhat DC issues directive for clearing drainage & footpath obstructions

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Feb 26:** Jorhat deputy commissioner Pulak Mahanta, in his capacity as the chairman of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), has directed concerned authorities and officials to take immediate steps to clear obstructions, encroachments, unwanted blockades, and illegal constructions in natural and other drainage systems.

An order issued under the provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 by Mahanta highlighted the observed obstructions, encroachments, and illegal constructions in drainage systems, footpaths-cum-drains, and other drains adjacent to National Highways/State Highways/PWD roads, public utility roads, Government/Myadi patta land, etc., which could lead to severe waterlogging and urban flooding problems in many parts of the district.

The order emphasised that such wa-

terlogging issues caused nuisance to a large number of residents and instructed concerned revenue circle officers and officials of enforcement agencies, departments, and regulatory bodies like PWD (Roads), NHIDCL, Water Resources, Town and Country Planning Departments, Municipal Boards, Jorhat Development Authority, etc., to take immediate steps to clear/remove/demolish all obstructions/encroachments/unwanted blockades/illegal constructions with proper coordination and advance intimation to the concerned people to prevent waterlogging during the monsoon season.

Furthermore, the order cautioned that any public interference or hindrance during the removal of obstructions by the concerned authorities would be considered as obstruction to public service, and legal action would be initiated as per relevant provisions of the law.

# Unresolved Naga issue major impediment to development: Nagaland Guv

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Feb 26:** Nagaland Governor La Ganesan said the unresolved Naga political issue is a major impediment to the state's development and welfare goals.

In his address on the first day of the 4th session of the 14th Nagaland Legislative Assembly at the Nagaland Legislative Assembly Secretariat in Kohima on Monday, Ganesan called upon all stakeholders of the issue to transcend differences and work towards a final solution through dialogue and compromise. He reaffirmed the state government's unwavering commitment to facilitating a peaceful resolution. He expressed his appreciation to the members of the House for their steadfast dedication towards achieving a peaceful and early resolution of the issue.

He reiterated his government's readiness to pave the way for a final solution that is honourable, acceptable, and inclusive, emphasizing the collective interest of the people of Nagaland.

The Governor highlighted the paramount importance the state government places on nurturing and developing human resources, recognising the immense potential inherent in Nagaland's demographics.

He said to ensure the educational system remains dynamic and responsive to evolving trends, various interventions have been initiated by the school education department.

These include bolstering education management information systems, implementing a teacher attendance monitoring system and establishing professional learning communities for continuous professional development, he added.

Ganesan said the government is actively pursuing the establishment of an Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (ISER) in Nagaland in collaboration with the central government.

"This endeavor aims to elevate the state's higher education landscape, pro-

mote science and mathematics and foster research initiatives.

The acquisition of 200 acres of prime land in Sukhovi in Chumoukedima district underscores the government's commitment to this initiative," he stated.

Ganesan said the state youth resources and sports department spearheaded the construction of five pre-fabricated multi-discipline sports stadiums last year with 11 more underway, including a FIFA standard football stadium with synthetic turf and floodlights at Chumoukedima.

On infrastructure development, the Governor said that the Nagaland public works department (R&B) and public works department (NH) successfully upgraded over 1021.63 kilometers of roads in the previous fiscal year, with plans to construct and improve more than 1032 kilometers in the current year.

He also highlighted various other development projects taken up by the government in the state.

## PICTURESQUE



A parrot sitting on a branch of a tree, in Guwahati on Monday. UB Photos

# PM Modi lays foundation stone of Sikkim's 1st railway station at Rangpo

*Rangpo Railway Station among 2,000 railway projects unveiled by PM Modi*



**GANGTOK, Feb 26:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday laid the foundation stone for Sikkim's first railway station at Rangpo.

It was among the over 2,000 rail infrastructure projects worth about ₹ 41,000 crore unveiled by the Prime Minister.

Sikkim, the Prime Minister said in his address via video conference.

Sikkim Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya was present at Khanikola in Rangpo, where a function was held.

"The foundation stone laying for the Rangpo railway station is a historic and proud moment for Sikkim, underscoring its significance in the context of 'Viksit Bharat@2047' and its potential to enhance the tourism sector by offering expedited and convenient travel options," Acharya said.

He also noted the advantages of the railways during the monsoon, when the national highway-10 encounters disruptions.

The railways will be a blessing during such times, enhancing connectivity and

reliability, he added.

The station will be a part of the under-construction 45-km rail line from Sevoke near Siliguri in West Bengal to Rangpo in Sikkim. It will have 14 tunnels and 22 bridges.

The track on the Sevoke-Rangpo section of the Northeast Frontier Railway will have the capacity to handle 25 tonnes and trains can run at a maximum speed of 110 km per hour. There will be three stations between Sevoke and Rangpo -- Riyang, Teesta and Melli, all in West Bengal.

The project was awarded to IRCON International in May 2010 at a cost of ₹ 4,084.69 crore and the original deadline was May 2015. The revised date is now December 2024 with a revised cost of ₹ 12,474.07 crore, according to officials. (PTI)

# Seminar on 'Globalisation & Mother Language' held

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, Feb 26:** The Morigaon District Literary Body's Research Sub-committee and Morigaon College of Education jointly organised a seminar on the topic of 'Globalisation and Mother Language' in the auditorium hall of the College of Education, Morigaon. Dr Doli Buragohain, the principal of College of Education, inaugurated the seminar by lighting the ceremonial lamp. Mahendra Saikia, the president of Morigaon District Literary Body, presided over the seminar in the presence of distinguished guests.

Khagen Sarma, the president of the Research Sub-committee, delivered the inaugural speech at the seminar. Following the

inaugural speech, Dr Doli Buragohain, the advisor of the Research Sub-committee, explained the objectives of the meeting. Professor Dr Indira Saikia Bora, retired head of the department of Sankardev Studies at Srimanta Sankardev University, spoke on the topic in a fluent and factual manner.

The seminar was attended by Dr Achyut Das, associate professor at Morigaon College and secretary of Morigaon District Literary Body, Imranuz Zaman Shah, coordinator of Internal Quality Assurance Cell at Morigaon College of Education, Harmuhan Kalita, advisor of the Research Sub-committee, and lecturer Wahidur Rahman, all of whom delivered profound speeches during the seminar.

# Minor girl allegedly raped in KA

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Feb 26:** A minor girl was reportedly raped in Karbi Anglong.

According to sources, the girl was allegedly raped by Krishna Ram (20) from Tripura Basti, under the jurisdiction of Borlangpher Police Station on February 24. The Borlangpher police swiftly took the accused into custody. According to accounts provided by the victim's father and witnesses, the young girl was alone in her home on the day when she was administered an intoxicating substance and subsequently assaulted.

Shockingly, upon learning of the incident, villagers were discouraged from reporting the crime to the authorities by an individual named Sumir Pal, who purportedly threatened them.

Pal allegedly asserted that he could secure the accused's release within a mere two days, should the matter be reported to the police. In response to the heinous crime, the victim underwent a medical examination on Sunday night, and an FIR has been lodged with the Borlangpher Police Station. Investigations into the matter are currently ongoing.

# Minister addresses Rajabari Tea Estate workers' concerns

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Feb 26:** The labourers and employees of Rajabari Tea Estate have been staging various protest programs for their salaries, PF, ration, and other entitled facilities for several days. In a press release issued by Biswanath Nag, secretary of ATTSA, Demow branch, on February 24, it was stated that following numerous protests and memorandums, and as per the instructions of the state chief minister, a discussion was held on these issues at Sivasagar Circuit House on February 24, 2024. Present at the discussion

were State Labour minister Sanjoy Kishan, the district commissioner, labour commissioner, chairman of PF, assistant labour commissioner, and representatives of ATTSA, ACMS, and ACKS. Nag stated that the State Labour minister informed them that the Danish Kukurasuwa lease agreement of Rajabari Tea Estate has been cancelled and they are in search of a new applicant. Additionally, the State Labour minister assured them that the dues of the labourers and employees of Rajabari Tea Estate would be disbursed to them within the month of March.

No. BDB/15<sup>th</sup> FC-125/2020-21/1077 Dated Mushalpur the 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2024

### SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & twenty five) only with a validity period of 180 Days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered Contractors of Class-II and Class-I (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD, Building and BTC, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under 15<sup>th</sup> FC (Tied Grant) for the year 2022-23 during the year 2023-24 as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 12.00 Noon on 14/03/2024 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.00 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Tender Amount (Approx)	Cost of Tender Paper	Time of Completion of Work
1	Const. of community Toilet with running water provision at Barbari Bathou Thansali under 15 <sup>th</sup> FC (Tied Grant) for the year 2022-23 during the year 2023-24	Rs. 15,00,000/-	Rs. 450/-	6 (Six) Months from the date of issue of F.W.O.
2	Const. of community Toilet with running water provision at Magwanthan Christian Basti Catholic Church under 15 <sup>th</sup> FC (Tied Grant) for the year 2022-23 during the year 2023-24.	Rs. 15,00,000/-	Rs. 450/-	6 (Six) Months from the date of issue of F.W.O.

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 27/02/2024 to 11/03/2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Demand/Draft/Banker's Cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC K okrajhar, payable at Kokrajhar. The contractor should submit attested copy of latest Registration Certificate, latest Clearance Certificate of Income Tax and Sale Tax, PAN Card, VAT along with the tenders. In case the office remains closed on tender issuing/receiving/opening date the same will be issued/received/opened on the next working day. [The successful tenderer has to be submitted 1% (One P.C.) (in case of ST/SC/OBC) and 2% (Two P.C.) (in case of General) S.D. money against the work in the form of FDR/DCR from any nationalized Bank duly pledge to the Block Development Officer, Baska Development Block, Mushalpur, as mentioned above at the time of allotment of work.]. The B.T.C. authority reserves the right of accepting of tender papers or outright rejection of the same without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/-  
Block Development Officer,  
Baska Dev. Block, Mushalpur  
IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1469



# Phenomenal series win by our young team: Kohli on India's Test series triumph

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: Star batter Virat Kohli on Monday hailed India's Test series win against England as "phenomenal" and lauded the grit, determination and resilience of the "young" team.

India beat England by five wickets in the fourth Test in Ranchi to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series. The final Test will be played in Dharamsala from March 7.

"YES!!! (Indian Flag). Phenomenal series win by our young team. Showed grit, determination and resilience," Kohli tweeted in his first cricket-related comments after making himself unavailable for the Test series.

Kohli and his actor wife Anushka Sharma were blessed with a baby boy on February 15.

Iconic cricketer Sachin Tendulkar attributed the win to the character and the mental strength shown by the players.

"The score is 3-won! India once again came back from a pressure situation and fought back to win the match. It shows the character and the mental strength of our



players," Tendulkar wrote on 'X'. He picked a few individual players for special praise.

"A great first spell in Test cricket for Akashdeep. @dhrujvirel21 was terrific at reading the

length in both innings and his footwork was precise. His partnership with @imkuldeep18 kept us

in the game in the 1st innings, and his knock in the 2nd innings helped us sail home.

"Kuldeep's spell in the 2nd innings was vital. Seniors like @ashwinravi99, @imjadeja and @ImRo45 did their jobs. @ShubmanGill showed great temperament in curbing his instinct in the chase and scored an important 50."

BCCI secretary Jay Shah congratulated the team for the "outstanding" series victory.

"Fantastic victory for Team India in the 4th Test in Ranchi, securing the Test series against England," he tweeted.

He also said the leadership skills of Rohit Sharma played a crucial role in the team winning its 17th Test series at home.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan said: "5 world class players missing... Losing the Toss... deficit in the 1st innings... Full credit to India... that's a very impressive test victory... a lot of new young Indian players are arriving and will be around for a long time." (PTI)

## CITI OPEN

### Madhya Pradesh reach Ranji Trophy semifinals with thrilling four-run win over Andhra



INDORE, Feb 26: Anubhav Agarwal ran through Andhra's batting lineup with a superb six-wicket haul to propel Madhya Pradesh into the semifinals of the Ranji Trophy following a four-run victory over Andhra here on Monday.

In a low-scoring quarterfinal played at the Holkar Stadium, bowlers ruled the roost for the majority of the contest and despite a spirited fight from the visiting side, Madhya Pradesh prevailed to make it to the final four.

With this win, the 2021-22 champions Madhya Pradesh became the second team after Tamil Nadu to enter the semifinals.

On what turned out to be the final day, Andhra were bowled out for a mere 165 chasing 170 to win on the fourth day.

Resuming at 95/4 and with their senior batter Hanuma Vihari on strike with 75 runs more needed to win, Andhra were the more confident side but Agarwal led a stunning fightback once again for Madhya Pradesh.

Having taken three wickets in the first innings to help Madhya Pradesh take a vital lead of 62 runs, Agarwal terrorised the Andhra batters in the second innings to return figures of 6/52 from 19 overs.

Kulwant Khejroliya picked 2/40

while Kumar Kartikeya and Saransh Jain bagged one wicket apiece.

Agarwal struck thrice to put Madhya Pradesh in complete command when he had overnight batter Karan Shinde (14) trapped leg-before in the 51st over of the innings.

In his next over, Agarwal had Vihari (55 off 136 balls, 5 fours) caught by wicketkeeper Himanshu Mantri and pinned Shoaib Mohammed Khan (0) in front of the wickets for a first-ball duck.

While Khejroliya removed KV Sasikanth (7), Andhra threatened to take the game away from MP's grasp with a 32-run stand for the ninth wicket between Girinath Reddy (15 off 42 balls) and Ashwin Hebbar (22 off 52 balls).

Agarwal found a timely breakthrough getting rid of Girinath, which made the task more difficult for Andhra who needed another nine runs with one wicket in hand.

With five runs needed for Andhra to win, Khejroliya trapped No 7 Hebbar (22 off 42 balls) to deliver a narrow win for his side.

For his match-haul of 9/85, Agarwal was declared the player of the match.

**Brief scores:** Madhya Pradesh 234 & 107 beat Andhra 172 & 165 in 69.2 overs (Hanuma Vihari 55; Anubhav Agarwal 6/52) by 4 runs. (PTI)

## Weston McKennie may miss national team games with dislocated shoulder

TURIN (ITALY), Feb 26: Midfielder Weston McKennie will likely miss the CONCACAF Nations League finals at the Dallas Cowboys' stadium next month after dislocating his left shoulder.

McKennie was injured while playing for Juventus on Sunday. He assisted on two goals for the first time in the Italian league before exiting the 3-2 win over Frosinone three minutes from time after landing awkwardly.

Juventus teammate Adrien Rabiot also injured his left foot in the match.

McKennie is a key member of the United States national team and the Americans face Jamaica in the Nations League semifinals on March 21 at AT&T Stadium, with the final three days later.

Panama plays Mexico in the other semifinal.

Juventus said it was still evaluating the timeframes for how long both players will be out. (AP)

## Jake Knapp wins Mexico Open



VALLARTA (MEXICO), Feb 26: PGA Tour rookie Jake Knapp lost a four-shot lead in seven holes and then held it together with a remarkable short game Sunday, closing with an even-par 71 to win the Mexico Open at Vidanta and earn a trip to the Masters.

Knapp said he still sends a text after each round to his grandfather, who died last year, and this message might require a lot of detail.

He didn't hit a fairway until the eighth hole and found only two on the entire round. The former UCLA player never lost the lead, but twice allowed Sami Valimaki of Finland to catch him.

They were tied with six holes to play until Knapp took over, getting up-and-down on four of the next five holes, one of them for birdie. It wasn't easy until the end.

Another big par save on the par-3 17th gave him a two-shot lead going to the par-5 18th at Vallarta Vidanta. Valimaki, needing eagle to have a chance, hit his drive down the right side, off a cart path and it nestled next to a boundary fence. He had to take a penalty drop, effectively ending his chances. Valimaki made par for a 69.

Knapp, who finished at 19-under 265, won in his fifth start of his rookie season. Along with winning \$1,458,000 and moving into the top 10 in the FedEx Cup, the 29-year-old Californian is headed to the Masters and PGA Championship. He also gets into the remaining five \$20 million signature events. (AP)

## Pacers Vidwath, Vysakh shine as Karnataka hunt turnaround win over Vidarbha

NAGPUR, Feb 26: Karnataka batsmen set up a fascinating final day with a determined effort after pacers Vidwath Kaverappa and Vysakh Vijaykumar gave them a foothold against Vidarbha with splendid spells on the fourth day of their Ranji Trophy quarterfinals match here on Monday.

Chasing a massive 371 to win, Karnataka were 103 for one at close with captain Mayank Agarwal (61) and KV Aneesh (1) at the crease. The visitors further need 268 runs on Tuesday for a remarkable victory.

But Karnataka should profusely thank Kaverappa (6/61) and Vijaykumar (4/81) for force opening the door while bowling out Vidarbha for 196 in their second innings.

Vidarbha started the day on a strong note at 50 for no loss and



ahead by 224 runs. But the dismissal of opener Dhruv Shorey (57, 98b, 3x4) sparked a collapse as Kaverappa

and Vijaykumar ripped through Vidarbha innings with an incisive effort. The home side lost remaining

six wickets for adding a mere 103 runs in a little less than two sessions and that gave Karnataka a reasonable opening.

Of course, Karnataka still needed to 371 to win but Agarwal and Ravikumar Samarth went after the target in all earnestness adding 101 runs in 23.4 overs.

They scored at nearly five runs an over as Vidarbha bowlers began to wilt under the onslaught.

However, Samarth was castled by left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate minutes before stumps to give some relief to Vidarbha.

**Brief scores:** Vidarbha: 460 & 196 all out in 57.2 overs (Dhruv Shorey 57, Karun Nair 34; Vidwath Kaverappa 6/61, Vysakh Vijaykumar 4/81) vs Karnataka: 286 & 103/1 in 26 overs (Mayank Agarwal 61 batting, R Samarth 40). (PTI)

## We can't just keep talking to youngsters, need to give them environment to excel: Rohit

RANCHI, Feb 26: The "composed" set of newcomers in the Indian team don't need frequent advice, they need just a supportive environment to excel, said skipper Rohit Sharma after the hosts' series-sealing win over England in the fourth Test here on Monday.

Playing his second Test, wicketkeeper-batter Dhruv Jurel produced a player of the match performance with the bat in both the innings.

His 90 in the first innings allowed India to get close to England's 353 while his 72-run stand with Shubman Gill in the second innings helped the hosts tide past tense moments in the run chase.

Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sarfaraz Khan and Akash Deep were also among the fresh blood who made an impact in the series.

"It's been a very hard-fought series, so to come on the right side of it feels very good. A lot of challenges thrown at us but we responded and were quite composed. These (youngsters) guys want to be here, growing up in the domestic circuit, local club-

cricket, and coming here," said Rohit in the post-match presentation.

"It's a big challenge, but the responses I get are encouraging. We have to give them the environment they want to be in, we can't just keep talking to them, they are very clear in what they want to do," he added.

The performances came in the absence of senior players like Virat Kohli and K L Rahul, pleasing Rohit even more.

"Jurel showed composure, calmness and shots all round the wicket. His first-innings 90 was crucial, and again in the second innings along with Gill.

"It's always not pleasing when you miss key players, but there's nothing we can do as a group. To fill their shoes was not easy, but they responded really well.

"When you make a mark like that, you hold yourself in a good position for a long career. This will motivate them," said the skipper.

England were handed their first series defeat in the 'Bazball' era but skipper Ben Stokes said he was proud of his team especially the inexperienced spinners including



Shoaib Bashir and Tom Hartley.

"It was a great Test match, the scoreboard doesn't give enough credit to the game as a whole, the ebbs and flows. So much credit to our spinners, being exposed to a situation like that at the start of their careers. I couldn't be more proud," said Stokes.

The constant backing from Stokes allowed Hartley and Co. to flourish with the ball even though it wasn't enough against

India's batting depth.

"That's the way I am as a person, allowing these guys to come into an intimidating situation and treat every ball as an occasion. It's brought out a lot of talent not just for us but for India."

England had managed to take a first innings lead in the fourth Test but were all out for 145 in the second to squander the advantage.

Talking about the game, Stokes added: "I'm a massive Test cricket fan. We've been good in periods, yesterday with the bat was incredibly hard against (Ravichandran) Ashwin, (Ravindra) Jadeja and Kuldeep (Yadav), close to impossible. We didn't think the pitch would get any better, and we've seen that today."

"Joe Root, incredible knock, the criticism wasn't very fair, class is permanent etc. And Bashir, what a journey, very proud of him. You come into series and you want to win, but my message has been consistent."

"It's about the input, we don't worry about output. Everyone gave their all," Stokes added in reference to Root's patient hundred in the first innings. (PTI)

## 2023 winner Lionel Messi nominated again for Laureus World Sportsman of Year Award

MADRID, Feb 26: Superstar footballer Lionel Messi was on Monday nominated for the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award, as he returned to the shortlist after winning the coveted honour last year.

The Argentine captain, who lifted the World Cup trophy in 2022, won his record eighth Ballon d'Or in 2023 and led Major League Soccer side Inter Miami to victory in the Leagues Cup for his 44th trophy, another record.

The 25th Laureus World Sports Awards will be held here on April 22.

Messi will face competition from Manchester City's prolific striker Erling Haaland (Norway), tennis superstar Novak Djokovic (Serbia), world record holder pole vaulter Mondo Duplantis (Sweden), world champion sprinter Noah Lyles (USA) and Formula One star Max Verstappen (Netherlands).

Djokovic, who has won the Award four times earlier, clinched three Grand Slam titles -- Australian Open, French Open and US Open -- in 2023 to move to 24



major titles, matching Margaret Court for the all-time mark in tennis.

Verstappen, who won this Award in 2022, set records last year with 10 consecutive Grand Prix wins and 19 victories in one season as he became the fifth For-

mula One driver to record a hat-trick of championship wins.

Duplantis raised his own pole vault world record on two further occasions, either side of a second world title.

No sprinter had swept the board at a World Championship since Usain Bolt in 2015, until Noah Lyles took gold in the 100, 200 and 4x100 metres relay.

Haaland scored 52 goals as Manchester City won the Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup.

Three of the nominees for the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award starred at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest last year.

Faith Kipyegon of Kenya became the first woman to win the double of 1,500 and 5,000m. American Sha'Carri Richardson won a classic 100m from lane nine in her first global final and added 4x100m gold.

Shericka Jackson's winning time of 21.41 seconds in 200m was the second fastest all-time, seven hundredths of a second short of Florence Griffith-Joyner's

35-year-old mark.

In tennis, Poland's Iga Swiatek won her third French Open title in 2023, and regained her No.1 spot in the world rankings with victory at the WTA Finals in Cancun.

The footballer of the year was Aitana Bonmatí: she won the World Cup -- and the Golden Ball for the tournament's best player -- with Spain, Liga F and the UEFA Women's Champions League with FC Barcelona Femeni plus the Ballon d'Or.

Finally, 2023 was the year Alpine skier Mikaela Shiffrin passed the all-time mark of 86 World Cup wins set by Ingemar Stenmark, and the American also won her seventh World Championship gold in giant slalom.

Star American gymnast Simone Biles was named as one of the six nominees for the Laureus World Comeback of the Year Award. After a two-year absence, she returned to win four World Championship golds.

The nominees were selected by 1,300 members of the Laureus Global Media Panel. (PTI)

## IDCA wants deaf cricket's inclusion in Para Asian Games

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: The Indian Deaf Cricket Association (IDCA) on Monday said it is working hard for the sport's inclusion in the Para Asian Games to provide a level-playing field to the differently-abled athletes.

IDCA is a founder member of Differently Abled Cricket Council of India (DCCI), which is being supported by BCCI.

"We are working, we are already in touch with the Asian countries. We have already visited Hong Kong, which is one of the Asian countries who are ready to host the first Asian match with IDCA. But, right now, we are focussing on the World Cup," IDCA president Sumit Jain said here.

"We have got all the government certifications and some of them are under process which will be getting very soon.

"Everything is in process right now and we are working very hard to get that into action very soon."

Even though they are being recognised and supported by BCCI, the IDCA doesn't get any monetary assistance from the nation's cricket board, which it hopes it will get in future.

"As of now, the BCCI has recognised us under DCCI and has been providing us kits and all other cricketing equipments. But there is no monetary support. We are hoping to get financial assistance from BCCI through DCCI in future," said IDCA CEO Roma Balwani.

"We have learnt that in 2025 cricket will be included in Paralympics, so we are hoping that this committee of BCCI will come in the forefront and get all the disability cricket teams to participate."

Balwani also hopes one day a deaf cricketer will represent the Indian mainstream team as besides hearing impairment they have no other problems.

"We are only hoping, we would love at least one of our players if he or she can join the mainstream team. It has been Sumit's vision for over a decade," she said. A 15-member Indian deaf cricket team, under Virendra Singh's captaincy, is set to participate in the Deaf International Cricket Council (DICC) T20 Champions Trophy 2024 to be held in Sharjah from March 6 to March 12. (PTI)



# 'Bazball' meets its match, India secure 17<sup>th</sup> straight Test series win at home

**RANCHI, Feb 26:** India's home supremacy weathered the 'Bazball' storm as Rohit Sharma's men secured a hard-fought five-wicket win over England in the fourth and penultimate Test for a 17th consecutive series triumph in their own backyard here on Monday, handing a harsh reality check to the visitors' unidimensional approach.

Overnight 40/0 in a chase of 192 here, India romped home after surviving a few hiccups with the opening duo of skipper Rohit Sharma (55 off 81 balls) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (37 off 44 balls) providing the perfect platform for others to build with their 84-run stand on day four of the match.

There were some jitters after the two departed in close succession followed by Rajat Patidar and Ravindra Jadeja's dismissal but Shubman Gill (52 not out) and Dhruv Jurel (39 not out) guided the side past the finishing line with an unbeaten 72-run partnership.

Left-arm spinner Tom Hartley (1/64) took the prized scalp of Rohit, while Shoaib Bashir was the most successful English bowler, scalping 3/79 in the second innings for a match haul of eight wickets.

India lead 3-1 in the series with the last

game scheduled in Dharamsala from March 7. The team's last home series loss was a 1-2 defeat to an Alastair Cook-led England in 2012-13. Since then, India have won 39 out of 50 Tests at home.

"It's been a very hard-fought series, so to come on the right side of it feels very good," said Rohit in the post-match presentation.

The host team's victory marked a stunning downfall for 'Bazball', which has been a much-hyped winning mantra for England since 2022 and is now facing all-round criticism for being too rigid and lacking in depth.

Conceptualised after the appointment of Brendon McCullum as coach and Ben Stokes as captain, England's plan to attack irrespective of circumstances found its match in the unflappable approach of the Indians. While the visitors remained stubborn barring the conservative hundred by veteran Joe Root here, the Indians adapted and refused to be bogged down by setbacks.

The result, England would be going back with their first series defeat under Stokes and McCullum. It is also the first time they have lost three back-to-back Tests.

"The only thing I can say is we left



nothing on the field, we've fought hard and I'm happy with that," said Stokes.

England's opening win in Hyderabad was expected to unsettle the home side which was already without superstar Virat Kohli, out due to personal reasons, and the injured K L Rahul.

On the contrary, the team was galvanised by the arrival of rookies, who

grabbed their opportunities with both hands.

Whether it was batter Sarfaraz Khan in Rajkot or wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel and pacer Akash Deep here, the team gained from the infusion of fresh energy.

Jurel was a key factor in ensuring series-deciding win with his gritty 90-run knock in the first innings and the solid

came in the second essay -- both efforts coming in high-pressure situations.

On Monday, Rohit and Jaiswal started positively. After seeing through veteran pacer James Anderson's opening over, Rohit brought out his swat flick to dispatch the 41-year-old for a maximum over wide long-on.

Bashir operated from the other end as runs came thick and fast for India, be it in singles or in boundaries.

The sense of desperation was palpable as Anderson was seen sprinting down to the fine leg boundary and even threw his body but could not stop a boundary off Jaiswal's bat.

The duo swept and reverse swept to tackle the low bounce from the spinners with Rohit playing the lead role in the partnership. He also got past 9,000 runs in first-class cricket.

With nothing going their way, Stokes brought in Joe Root to unsettle the rhythm and the part-timer did just that by exploiting the rough against the Indian left-hander.

Jaiswal failed to control his inside-out shot and Anderson pulled off an absolute stunner with a forward diving catch at backward point.

Stokes was quick to take Root out of

the attack and operated with his two spin twins in Bashir and Hartley, who did a decent job in stopping the run flow.

Gill looked under pressure to rotate the strike, which affected a well-set Rohit at the other end as boundaries dried up, pushing India on the back-foot.

Hartley was finally rewarded for his miserly spell with the prized scalp of the Indian captain.

Rohit came down the track only to be beaten by the flight and spin from Hartley and Ben Foakes did the needful behind the stumps. Though Rohit was way out of the crease, he was adjudged caught behind after getting a faint tinkle on the way to the wicketkeeper.

Bashir sent back Jadeja and Sarfaraz off successive deliveries right after the lunch break. The Indian chase began to unravel with those dismissals but Gill and Jurel teamed up to steady the ship.

Against the run of play, Jurel produced a lovely cover drive off Bashir, who went too wide and full, to get the team's first boundary in 31 overs. There was a sigh of relief and the Indian victory did not seem remote anymore.

The target soon came down to less than 50 and Gill too joined in the party smashing Bashir for back-to-back sixes. (PTI)

## Jurel's Army upbringing gives him the fearless attitude: Raina

**GREATER NOIDA, Feb 26:** India wicketkeeper-batter Dhruv Jurel's Army upbringing gives him the "fearless attitude" on the field, felt former cricketer Suresh Raina, adding that the young player had put in a lot of hard work to reach this level.

Jurel scored a peerless 90 in the first innings of the ongoing fourth Test against England and then played with determination on difficult day-four pitch in Ranchi, scoring an unbeaten 39, to give India a five-wicket win and an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series.

"I was impressed with his (Jurel's) wicket-keeping, he has worked really hard. He comes from an Army family, so he has that fearless attitude of never wanting to lose anything from anywhere," said Raina about the 23-year-old Uttar Pradesh player who made his India debut in the third Test at Rajkot, scoring 46.

Jurel's knock of 90 in Ranchi also received applause from the legendary Sunil Gavaskar, who called him the next Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

"He's (Jurel) been amazing, I have played a couple of matches with him for



Uttar Pradesh. Special credit to Rohit Sharma, the way he gave chances to first Sarfaraz (Khan) and Dhruv Jurel. It is not easy to come into Test cricket and score back-to-back fifties, especially in a crucial Test match where the wicket was turning," said Raina, who played 18 Tests, on the

sidelines of the Indian Veteran Premier league (IVPL).

Sarfaraz scored back-to-back half centuries on Test debut in the third Test at Rajkot.

Raina, who was an integral part of Chennai Super Kings not so long back, said that

he wants Virat Kohli and Royal Challengers Bangalore to break the IPL jinx and lift the trophy this season.

"I wish Virat Kohli and RCB lift the trophy. It is long overdue now, CSK won it last season too but this year I hope that the team who has never lifted the trophy should finally add one to their trophy cabinet. Virat has worked really hard and I think he deserves to win this time," said Raina.

The 37-year-old former India cricketer also said that Kohli should be a part of the 2024 T20 World Cup in the West Indies and the USA because the team needs someone in the middle to soak the pressure.

"A blend of youth and experience will be key for India's success in the Americas."

"Youth and experience is really important because I played in the Caribbean in the 2010 edition, to bat on those wickets is not easy. You need someone to control the innings, he (Kohli) is the chase-master and knows how to handle pressure.

"Now we have players like (Yashasvi) Jaiswal, (Shubman) Gill, Surya (Yadav) and Rinku Singh who can back him and play fearless cricket from other end." (PTI)

## India consolidate second position in WTC standing with five-wicket win against England

**DUBAI, Feb 26:** India consolidated their second spot in the World Test Championship (WTC) standing following their five-wicket win against Ben Stokes' England in the fourth Test at Ranchi on Monday.

The hosts, led by Rohit Sharma, took an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-Test series.

India's point-percentage jumped from 59.52 to 64.58 following the hard-fought win and they further extended the gap with Australia (55%) and Bangladesh (50%), third and fourth-placed teams, respectively. England, on the other hand, are languishing at eighth with 19.44%, just a spot ahead of bottom-placed Sri Lanka, who are yet to open their account.

India have so far played eight Tests in the current WTC cycle, winning five, losing two and drawing one match.

England's 'Bazball' approach

doesn't seem to have given them rich dividends with the visitors having won just three matches, while losing five and drawing one so far.


New Zealand are leading the standing with 75 percentage points and have played just four Test so far.

A total of 12 points are awarded for a win, six for a tie and four for a draw. Teams are ranked according to the percentage of points.


The top-two teams will progress to the final at Lord's in 2025.

India have reached the WTC final both the times since the format was launched. They lost to New Zealand in the inaugural championship final, while bowing to Australia in the second edition.

India have a great chance to further cement their second position if they win the fifth and final Test in Dharamsala, beginning from March 7. (PTI)




**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**  
Department of School Education



### Dear parents, guardians and citizens

- Government is providing free uniform to the students from class I to X of Government/Provincialised schools
- Each student will get 2 pairs of uniform @ Rs 600
- Procurement & distribution of uniform is done in decentralized manner by SMC/SMDC
- We must ensure the quality of school uniform as specified in the guidelines issued by the Government from time to time



**AN APPEAL**

**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam

**D**

Mekhala - Chadar-Dhokhna-Pekok

#	Item	Requirement
1	Chadar	Minimum Length : 275 cm Minimum Breadth : 100 cm Fabric : Cotton (90% Min.), Polyester (10% Max.) Weight of the cloth : 220gm. (Approx.)
2	Mekhala	Minimum Length : 105 cm (after fold stitching of 2.5 cm and 3cm on both sides) Minimum Breadth : 180 cm Fabric: Cotton (90% Min.), Polyester (10% Max.) Weight of the Cloth: 245 gm (Approx.)
3	Saree	Minimum Length : 550cm, Minimum Breadth : 125cm Weight of the cloth : 450gm (Approx.) Fabric : Cotton (90% Min.), Polyester (10% Max.)
4	Dokhna	Minimum Length : 3.10mtr, Minimum Breadth- 1.40mtr
5	Pekok	Length of Pekok- 1 meter 25cm, Width of the Pekok- 85 cm
6	Blouse	1. Fabric : Rubia, 2. Composition : Polyester- 70%, Cotton- 30% 3. Weave : Plain, 4. Size : as per requirement

**Ensure 2 pairs of best quality uniform for each student by 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

**Department of School Education, Government of Assam**

**A** Polyester Blended Woven Shirt/Salwar Kurta


#	Characteristic	Requirement
1	Mass (g/m2)	102 +5%, -2.5%
2	(a) Polyester (b) Viscose/cotton	67 ±3% Units remainder 33 ±3%

**B** Polyester Blended Pant & Skirt

#	Characteristic	Requirement
1	Mass (g/m2)	190 +5%, -2.5%
2	(a) Polyester (b) Viscose/cotton	67 ±3% Units remainder 33 ±3%

**C** T-Shirt with Collar

#	Characteristic	Requirement
1	Mass (g/m2)	200 to 220 (g/m2)
2	(a) Cotton (b) Polyester	58 ±3% Units remainder 42 ±3%



Janasanyog /DF/2842/23/27-Feb-24