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## ABVP to submit memorandum to President Murmu on Sandeshkhali

**KOLKATA, Feb 27:** Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Wednesday said it will submit a memorandum to President Droupadi Murmu to draw her attention on the Sandeshkhali issue.

At a central working committee meeting in Puducherry, the Parishad passed a resolution condemning the alleged crimes against local women by Trinamool Congress leaders in the restive Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district.

ABVP national secretary Saptarshi Sarkar expressed concerns that Sandeshkhali could become

"the Noakhali of the 21st century," referencing the riots in 1946. He called for public dissent against the West Bengal's government's alleged failure to address the issue. "We express dissent against the state government's failure to contain the situation and call upon the public to raise their voice against the crimes against women in Sandeshkhali," he said.

Yagyavalkya Shukla, national general secretary of ABVP, highlighted plans to engage the youth ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections through a nationwide awareness campaign.

"To ensure that the youth play their role in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, ABVP will start a nationwide awareness campaign drive to protect democracy," he added.

In response, TMC state spokesperson Kunal Ghosh acknowledged the possibility of atrocities against some local women and assured action against errant party leaders. He accused the opposition of exacerbating the situation for political gain while affirming the party's commitment to supporting the local people and women. Trinamool Con-

gress Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) state president Trinankur Bhattacharya told PTI that the ABVP should introspect its role in the vandalisation of a bust of Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar inside an educational institute in North Kolkata before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

"Those involved in the Sandeshkhali incident are being arrested and ministers are reaching out to locals. ABVP is destabilising the situation by instigating locals in a way similar to opposition parties such as the BJP," he added. (PTI)



### Assam Cong working president Rana Goswami quits party ● Congress will be impacted, admits Debabrata Saikia

## Ex-MLA set to turn saffron ahead of PM's Jorhat visit

HT Bureau

**JORHAT/GUWAHATI, Feb 28:** Congress in Assam faced another setback on Wednesday as Rana Goswami, the working president of the grand old party, resigned from his position. He also stepped down from the active membership of the Congress party.

Goswami had previously resigned as the party's organisational in-charge of Upper Assam, citing 'various political reasons.'

In a letter addressed to K C Venugopal, the general secretary of the All India Congress Committee, Goswami stated that he was tendering his resignation as the working president of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and as an active member of the Indian National Congress.

"I beg to state that I am tendering my resignation as the working president of Assam Pradesh Con-



gress Committee and as an active member of the Indian National Congress," the letter read.

Copies of the brief letter, which cited no specific reason for leaving the party, were also sent to AICC general secretary Jitendra Singh (in-charge of Assam) and Assam Pradesh Congress Committee

(APCC) president Bhupen Borah. This development, potentially a major setback for the Congress, the main opposition party, occurred just three days after Goswami relinquished his responsibilities as the in-charge of Upper Assam districts and four other districts in North Assam.

Speculations abound that Goswami, now reportedly in Delhi, may join the ruling BJP in the coming days, especially before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposed visit to the state next week, with Jorhat on his itinerary.

Another source indicated that Goswami will join the BJP on March 4. Following his resignation, he is likely to meet BJP president JP Nadda in the presence of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

According to sources familiar with the internal dynamics of the Congress party in the state, Goswami's dissatisfaction stemmed from not being consulted on certain party matters in Assam. Sources also claimed that Goswami's departure could significantly impact his hometown, not only because of his two-time legislature (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Mizoram Assembly adopts resolution against Centre's decision to fence India-Myanmar border

**AIZAWL, Feb 28:** The Mizoram Assembly on Wednesday adopted a resolution opposing the Centre's decision to fence the India-Myanmar border and scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with the neighbouring country.

The resolution, moved by home minister K Sapdanga, urged the Centre to reconsider its decision.

It urged the Union government to instead take steps to ensure that Zo ethnic people, "who have been divided in different countries, are unified under one administrative unit". While moving the resolution, Sapdanga said the Zo ethnic people, who have inhabited Mizoram and the Chin hills of Myanmar for centuries and once lived together under their own administration, have been geographically divided when the British occupied the region.

He said the British demarcated

the India-Myanmar border and divided the Zo ethnic people's land into two countries.

"The Zo ethnic people can't accept the India-Myanmar border, which has been imposed on them by the British. They have been dreaming of reunification under one administrative unit someday," the home minister said.

He said fencing the India-Myanmar border or scrapping the FMR, which will mandate the approval of the imposed boundary, is unacceptable for the Zo ethnic people.

Although the Mizoram government is yet to receive official information about the Centre's plan, it is evident from media reports and statements of Union ministers that the Centre is planning to fence the India-Myanmar border and suspend the existing FMR with Myanmar, he said. Union home minister Amit Shah (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### India-Nepal bilateral ties reviewed

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and his Nepalese counterpart Sewa Lamsal on Wednesday reviewed various key aspects of India-Nepal bilateral ties.

Lamsal is in India in her first foreign visit after assuming charge as Nepal's foreign secretary recently. "The two foreign secretaries held discussions on the entire range of multifaceted cooperation between India and Nepal and also followed up on the seventh-India-Nepal joint commission meeting," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

The joint commission meeting was co-chaired by the external affairs minister S Jaishankar and his Nepalese counterpart N P Saud in Kathmandu last month.

"The visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between the two countries and the priority India attaches to its relations with Nepal under its 'Neighbourhood First' policy, and provides an opportunity to further advance our bilateral ties," the MEA said on Lamsal's visit.

Foreign Secretary Lamsal is visiting India to participate in the eighth Asia Economic Dialogue being jointly convened by the MEA and Pune International Centre on Thursday in Pune.

Nepal is important for India in the context of its overall strategic interests in the region, and the leaders of the two countries have often noted the age-old "Roti Beti" relationship. The country shares a border of over 1,850 km with five Indian states -- Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. (PTI)

### HT BRIEFS

#### Fire breaks out

**BOKAJAN:** Several shops at Duimukhia in Bokajan were burnt down in the evening at around 3 pm which destroyed a hotel and two furniture shops. The owners of the shops said that their shops were closed at the time of the fire. They also claimed that at the time of the fire, there was no power. The owners of the businesses were identified as Kolpana Sutradhar; Gulap Ali and Ajay Shah. It is estimated that more than ₹35 lakh were lost in the incident. Bokajan fire brigade reached the place and prevented the fire from spreading further.

#### Health camp

**DIPHU:** An animal health camp was organised by Regional Rainfed Lowland rice Research Station (RRLRRS), ICAR-NRRI, Gerua, Assam in collaboration with Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Assam Agricultural University, Karbi Anglong, Assam at Amlokhi-Kamala Bagan, Karbi Anglong. More than 245 livestock such as goat, cattle, pigs, etc were vaccinated against various endemic diseases such as goat pox, PPR disease, classical swine fever disease (CSF) etc. during the programme. More than 102 livestock owners were distributed with different health care medicines such as mineral mixture, anthelmintics for deworming along with other first aid drugs for livestock and poultry including feed supplements. The camp was led by Dr Kanchan Saikia, head-in-charge, RRLRRS along with Dr Subal Maibangsa, head, KVK, Karbi Anglong.

## KAAC observes 76<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Semson Sing Ingti

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, Feb 28:** The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) observed the 76th death anniversary of Semson Sing Ingti, the esteemed founder of the erstwhile Mikir Hills District, now Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts, at the Semson Sing Ingti Memorial Park in Diphu.

The commemorative program commenced with the ceremonial garlanding of statues dedicated to Semson Sing Ingti at both the old and new memorial parks, led by KAAC chairman Raju Tisso. The event witnessed the esteemed presence of MLA Darsing Ronghang, executive members of KAAC, and various officials. An interfaith prayer session was conducted as part of



the solemn occasion, followed by a drawing competition for students from local schools.

Furthermore, the 76th death anniversary of Semson Sing Ingti was also observed at Bakalia, organised by the Bakalia Municipal Board. The ceremony, graced by the presence of Nakul Sing Ingti and his wife Rika Mandal, the son and daughter-in-law of the late leader, witnessed a poignant homage paid to the visionary founder.

The couple was honored with traditional Karbi turbans as a mark of respect. Floral tributes adorned the statue of Semson Sing Ingti, accompanied by the illumination of earthen lamps, symbolising the enduring legacy (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Modi govt committed to welfare of farmers, says Amit Shah



**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** The Narendra Modi government is committed to the welfare of farmers and till now more than ₹ 3 lakh crore has been given directly to the peasants under the 'PM Kisan Samman Nidhi' scheme, Union home minister Amit Shah said on Wednesday.

The PM Kisan Samman Nidhi is a central sector scheme with 100 per cent funding from the government of India. It has become operational from December 1, 2018.

Under the scheme, an income support of ₹ 6,000 per year in three equal installments is provided to

all land holding farmer families. The fund is directly transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

"Under the leadership of Honorable Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji, our government is committed to the welfare of farmers. Today Modi ji will provide an amount of more than ₹ 21 thousand crore to more than 9 crore farmers through DBT under the 16th installment of PM Kisan Samman Nidhi," Shah wrote on X in Hindi.

The home minister said till now, crores of farmers have benefited from the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme.

"An amount of more than ₹ 3 lakh crore has been given to the farmers directly through the DBT. This is the largest payment scheme in the world given through the DBT. "It has proved to be historic in making the lives of farmers easier and encouraging agriculture," he said. (PTI)

### Tipra Motha team in Delhi for MHA meeting

**AGARTALA, Feb 28:** A three-member delegation of Tipra Motha, led by its chief Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, arrived in New Delhi on Wednesday evening to attend a meeting called by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), a senior leader of the party said.

Tripura chief minister Manik Saha and his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma, who are currently camping in the national capital, are expected to attend the MHA meeting, Tipra Motha leader Animesh Debbarma said.

Earlier in the day, leaders of Tripura's main opposition party launched a fast-unto-death at Hatai Katat in West Tripura district demanding a constitutional solution to the issue of Tripura people.

Animesh Debbarma said Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, party president BK Hrangkhawl, and ex-MLA Rajeswar Debbarma are slated to attend the meeting, the agenda of which has not been revealed. "Our movement is continuing at Hatai Katat seeking a permanent constitutional solution to the problem of Tripura people. The party is determined to find a solution to the vexed problem", he said. (PTI)

### PM lashes out at DMK over 'China flag' row in spaceport advertisement

**TIRUNELVELI, Feb 28:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday strongly criticised the DMK in Tamil Nadu for being 'oblivious' to the nation's achievements in space sector, after a newspaper advertisement by a state minister belonging to the party over a spaceport kicked up a row over what the BJP claimed had a 'Chinese flag'.

Modi alleged the DMK has disregarded India's success in space technology and demanded that the Dravidian party apologise for featuring China in its advertisement in a daily.

The ruling DMK said BJP's accusation was only political in nature.

Addressing a BJP rally here, PM Modi alleged the DMK regime does not work but only took false credit and it affixed its 'stickers' on Central schemes.

"Now they have crossed the limit. They have pasted the sticker of China to take credit for ISRO launchpad in Tamil Nadu. This is an insult to our space scientists, space sector, your tax money and you (the country)," he

said. The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for a new launch complex of ISRO at Kulasekarapattinam near Thoothukudi, which is worth about Rs 986 crore and the facility is set to accommodate 24 launches per year.

The new complex includes 35 facilities, and features mobile launch structure (MLS) with checkout computers marking a significant stride in enhancing space exploration capabilities. The Tamil Nadu BJP alleged that in an advertisement in a daily the DMK used 'Chinese flag' and 'Chinese language' to claim credit for bringing the new ISRO complex at Kulasekarapattinam, located near Thoothukudi in the state.

The PM said Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai has spoken about it in his address.

The advertisement by minister Anita Radhakrishnan featured a rocket as its backdrop. A rocket, in the middle, was embossed with an image, that looked like a Chinese flag. The photographs of PM Modi and chief minister M K Stalin formed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM will also go on a safari within the park and depart for Jorhat to attend a number of events

## Modi to stay at Kaziranga National Park during his upcoming Assam visit

HT Correspondent

**GUWAHATI, Feb 28:** During his two-day visit to Assam starting on March 8, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to stay at the Kaziranga National Park and go on a jungle safari, an official said on Wednesday.

As per the official, on March 8, Modi is expected to travel to Kaziranga in the evening and spend the night there. The following morning, he will go on a safari within the park and depart for Jorhat to attend a number of events.

In order to finalise plans for the prime minister's visit, Assam Forest and Environment minister Chandra Mohan Patowary visited the Kaziranga National Park and met with a number of high-ranking officials, including chief secretary Paban Borthakur and director general of



police G P Singh.

The official further claimed that arrangements have been made for both elephant and jeep safaris within the park.

The renowned Ahom general Lachit Barphukan's nearly 125-foot-

tall bronze statue will be unveiled in Jorhat on March 9 by the Prime Minister.

In addition, he is expected to address at a public gathering at Meleng Meteli Pothar in Jorhat, lay the foundation stone of Sivasagar Med-

ical College, and take part in the "Griha Pravesh" (house-warming) ceremony for the 5.5 lakh homes built under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY).

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had on February 15 visited the statue of Lachit Barphukan, located at Ahom general's 'maidam' (memorial), at Lahdoigarh in Holongapar area of the district.

Sarma had said that the area will be developed as a Lachit Barphukan Cultural Centre and two museums - one on the Ahom era and the other a war museum with artefacts of that period will also be set up in the precincts.

Barphukan is famed in Assam's history for thwarting the Mughal Army in the 1671 naval 'Battle of Saraihat' on River Brahmaputra. (With inputs from PTI)



**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** Cooperation in combating terrorism, money laundering, organised crime and activities of pro-Khalistani elements

in America were discussed at the India-US Homeland Security Dialogue held here on Wednesday, sources said.

While the Indian delegation was led by Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla, the US delegation was headed by his counterpart Kristie Canegallo, acting deputy secretary, US Department of Homeland Security. An official statement said during the dialogue, both sides reviewed ongoing cooperation in counter-terrorism and security domains, which has been a key pillar of the India-US strategic partnership. In this context, they discussed steps that can be taken to bolster bilateral efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism, drug trafficking, organised crime and ensure transportation security, the statement said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# Sensex, Nifty tumble over 1 pc due to selling in Reliance, bank stocks

**MUMBAI, Feb 28:** Benchmark Sensex tanked more than 1 per cent while Nifty declined below the 22,000 level on Wednesday due to selling in index heavy-weight Reliance Industries and bank stocks amid weak global market trends.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 790.34 points or 1.08 per cent to settle at 72,304.88 with 26 of its constituents ending in the red and four in the green. During the day, it tanked 872.93 points or 1.19 per cent to a low of 72,222.29.

The Nifty slumped 247.20 points or 1.11 per cent to settle at 21,951.15. As many as 46 Nifty shares closed with losses while four advanced.

Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid fell the most by 4.43 per cent due to profit booking by investors.

Reliance Industries dropped around 2 per cent, contributing 185.59 points to the slide. IndusInd Bank, Maruti, Wipro, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra and UltraTech Ce-



ment were the biggest laggards.

Hindustan Unilever, Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services and Bharti Airtel were the gainers.

"Indian markets were jittery mirroring weak global markets. Global investors are awaiting the key US economic data like personal consumption expenditure, in anticipation of good forecast there is a fear that Fed rate cut may be delayed. Turmoil in China's property sector further impacted the

Asian market trend," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined by 1.94 per cent and midcap index went lower by 1.82 per cent.

All the indices ended lower. Utilities fell by 2.82 per cent, oil & gas declined 2.19 per cent, realty tanked 2.12 per cent, telecommunication dipped 1.92 per cent, services (1.89 per cent) and

commodities (1.85 per cent).

Shares of debt-laden Vodafone Idea plummeted around 14 per cent after the fundraising announcement by the company failed to lift investors' sentiment.

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, the owner of the Paytm brand, fell 5 per cent to hit a lower circuit limit. A total of 2,963 stocks declined while 881 advanced and 77 remained unchanged.

In Asian markets, Seoul settled with gains while Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets ended mostly higher on Tuesday.

The BSE benchmark climbed 305.09 points or 0.42 per cent to settle at 73,095.22 on Tuesday. The Nifty ended 76.30 points or 0.34 per cent up at 22,198.35. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.90 per cent to USD 82.90 a barrel. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,509.16 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

## Equity investors become poorer by ₹ 6 lakh cr as markets crash

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** Investors' wealth eroded by ₹ 6 lakh crore in a single day on Wednesday as the BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled over 790 points.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 790.34 points or 1.08 per cent to settle at 72,304.88. During the day, it slumped 872.93 points or 1.19 per cent to 72,222.29. The market capitalisation (mcap) of BSE-listed companies eroded by ₹ 6,02,338.56 crore to ₹ 3,85,97,298.49 crore (USD 4.71 trillion). "Investors resorted to heavy selling ahead of Thursday's F&O expiry. Weak Asian market cues and Dow Futures indicating a negative start also led to a massive round of profit-taking across the board as benchmark Sensex closed below the crucial 73k mark. "The

pessimism can also be attributed to lack of direction ahead of Thursday's release of the January US Personal Consumption and Expenditures (PCE) index, the Fed's preferred measure of inflation that tracks consumer spending," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid fell the most by 4.43 per cent. Reliance Industries fell by 2 per cent, contributing 185.59 points to the markets slide. Maruti, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Wipro, JSW Steel, Asian Paints, Tata Steel, Reliance and Titan were the other major laggards.

Hindustan Unilever, Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services and Bharti Airtel were the gainers.

In the broader market, the BSE

smallcap gauge declined by 1.94 per cent and midcap index went lower by 1.82 per cent.

All the indices ended lower. Utilities fell by 2.82 per cent, oil & gas declined 2.19 per cent, realty tanked 2.12 per cent, telecommunication dipped 1.92 per cent, services (1.89 per cent) and commodities (1.85 per cent).

A total of 2,963 stocks declined while 881 advanced and 77 remained unchanged. In Asian markets, Seoul settled with gains while Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets ended mostly higher on Tuesday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,509.16 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

## World Gold Council Launches 'You are Gold' Campaign

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 28:** The World Gold Council has unveiled its latest initiative, the 'You are Gold' multimedia campaign, aimed at reinvigorating the relationship between millennials and Gen Z with gold in India. This innovative campaign seeks to present gold as not just a precious metal, but as a symbol of empowerment and self-expression for the youth of today. At the heart of the campaign is a captivating film that celebrates the courage and perseverance of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Through inspiring stories, the film showcases how gold serves as an ally for young women and men, helping them overcome doubts and insecurities to shine brightly in their pursuits. Arti Saxena, Head of Marketing for India, World Gold Council, emphasized the importance of empowering today's youth. She stated, "Our goal is to make gold relatable to today's youth by showcasing stories that resonate with them. We want them to see gold jewellery as a reflection of their go-getter qualities and as a source of empowerment."

Siddhi Yadav Machado, Executive Creative Director, The McCann World group, highlighted the contemporary narrative of the campaign. He explained, "The 'You are Gold' campaign embodies a modern approach tailored to today's generation, celebrating individuality and courage." The multimedia campaign



is set to make a significant impact across various media platforms in India. The campaign's film will be prominently featured on major broadcast networks such as Star Entertainment, Sony Pictures, Zee Entertainment, and Viacom 18. Additionally, digital platforms like YouTube, Google, Facebook, and Instagram will be utilized to reach a wider audience.

Recognizing the importance of targeted outreach, the campaign will leverage tech media platforms to tailor its messaging to specific demographics and interests. Furthermore, strategic partnerships, such as sponsoring the Women's Premier League 2024, aim to enhance the campaign's reach and influence.

## Asian stocks lower after Wall Street holds steady near record highs

**HONG KONG, Feb 28:** Asian markets were mostly lower on Wednesday after US stocks held near their record levels in a quiet day of trading. US futures and oil prices fell.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 edged 0.3 per cent lower to 39,173.50.

Shares in Hong Kong and Shanghai sank after the territory's financial chief announced a budget aimed at boosting tourism and the property industry. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong slipped 1.4 per cent to 16,562.96, while the Shanghai Composite sank 1.9 per cent to 2,957.85.

China's largest private property developer, Country Garden, said Wednesday that it is facing a liquidation petition after failing to repay a term loan facility worth 1.6 billion Hong Kong dollars (USD 204.5 million). The first hearing in the case is scheduled for May 17.

The move comes after China Evergrande, the world's most heavily indebted real estate developer, was ordered to undergo liquidation following a failed effort to restructure USD 300 billion in late January.

Australia's SandP/ASX 200 was little changed at 7,660.40 after the Australian Bureau of Statistics said Wednesday the country's inflation rate held at a two-year low in January, triggering hopes that the Reserve Bank may cut its benchmark interest rate.

South Korea's KOSPI gained 1 per cent to 2,652.29, while Thailand's SET was down 0.6 per cent.

On Tuesday, the SandP 500 added 0.2 per cent, to 5,078.18 and was just off its all-time high set last week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 0.2 per cent, to 38,972.41, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.4 per cent to 16,035.30.

Macy's climbed 3.4 per cent after reporting better results for the latest quarter than feared. It also an-

nounced a sweeping reorganisation as it tries to kick-start growth in revenue.

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings steamed 19.8 per cent higher for the biggest gain in the SandP 500 after saying it's seeing healthy demand from customers.

AutoZone revved 6.7 per cent higher after reporting a stronger profit than expected. Much of its growth last quarter came from its stores in Mexico and Brazil. Zoom Video Communications climbed after toppling analysts' forecasts for profit last quarter. It also announced a programme to buy back up to USD 1.5 billion of its stock, which would send cash directly to shareholders.

Those winners helped offset a 1.5 per cent drop for Chevron, one of the main reasons for the Dow Jones Industrial Average's slide. The company warned that its pending takeover of Hess may be under threat.

Cryptocurrency prices have also been running higher. Bitcoin rose above USD 57,000 before edging back below the threshold and is up by roughly a third so far this year already.

New exchange-traded funds that hold bitcoin have made investing in the cryptocurrency easier, while also driving business for Coinbase and others who safeguard those ETFs' bitcoins. Coinbase rose 2.7 per cent Tuesday to bring its gain for the year so far to 14.5 per cent. Earnings reporting season is winding down for the big companies in the SandP 500, and the hope is that a remarkably solid US economy will help profits grow through this year.

A report in Tuesday morning showed orders for long-lasting manufactured goods were weaker last month than economists expected, but they were better than forecast after ignoring airplanes and other transportation items. (AP)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Mizoram Assembly adopts

had on February 6 announced that the entire India-Myanmar border would be fenced. Two days later, on February 8, he said that the Centre has decided to scrap the India-Myanmar Free Movement Regime (FMR) to maintain the country's internal security and demographic structure of the northeastern states.

Sapdanga alleged that the recent decisions were motivated mainly by the demands of the Manipur government. The idea of fencing the India-Myanmar border and lifting the FMR, as reported in a section of media, stemmed out of some reasons, including national security, smuggling of contraband items, illegal immigration and movement of insurgents, he said. Sapdanga said national security "can't be an excuse" for fencing the India-Myanmar border and lifting the FMR.

"If the Centre is so concerned about national security, it should also fence all the international borders that the country shares with neighbouring countries," he said.

It should also abolish the mechanism India has with Nepal and Bhutan, under which people of these countries can visit each other's territory without a visa, he said. He said that even during the peak period of insurgency in the northeastern states, the FMR with Myanmar was never questioned. He said that fencing the international border and lifting the FMR will severely affect people living along the border on either side.

"I urge the Centre to consider the hardships that will be faced by the Zo ethnic people if the India-Myanmar border is fenced and the FMR is scrapped," Sapdanga said. After a prolonged discussion, the assembly unanimously adopted the resolution. Chief Minister Lalduhoma and leader of the opposition, Lalchhandama Ralte of the Mizo National Front (MNF), were present.

Four Indian states -- Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh -- share a 1,643-km-long international border with Myanmar. Mizoram shares a 510-km-long border with Myanmar's Chin state and the Mizos share ethnic ties with the Chin people. Mizoram's civil society organisations and student bodies also strongly opposed the Centre's decision to fence the border and lift the FMR. (PTI)

## KAAC observes 76th death

of the revered leader. The event saw the participation of esteemed dignitaries including Kamsing Hanse, president of Karbi Lammet Anei, and Hemsing Teron, Chairman of the Bakalia Municipal Board, among others.

## Cooperation in combating

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the vibrant people-to-people ties between the two countries, by taking steps to enable safe and legal migration, counter illegal migration, human trafficking, money laundering, cyber-crimes and misuse of the cyber domain for illegal activities including terror-financing.

The co-chairs reiterated their keen interest in consolidating the mutually beneficial collaboration between the respective law enforcement agencies through exchange of information, capacity building, technical assistance and regular meetings of sub-groups set-up under the framework of the Homeland Security Dialogue, the statement said. The Indian delegation is believed to have raised the issue of the activities of the pro-Khalistani elements on the US soil and also their active support and funding to the separatist elements based in India, the sources said.

The meeting was held against the backdrop of a row over the alleged assassination attempt on top Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Panun, a US citizen.

The US has been demanding accountability in the matter. India is also seeking action against the pro-Khalistan elements involved in the July 2023 attack on the Indian consulate in San Francisco, the sources said.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has identified more than 50 pro-Khalistani activists who had attacked the consulate in San Francisco. New Delhi is also pushing for the extradition of 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana. A US court had dismissed Rana's appeal against extradition.

The dialogue concluded with signing of the following document which will further deepen bilateral security cooperation: A Memorandum of Cooperation on law enforcement training between the US Federal Law Enforcement Training Centre and India's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy. Both sides agreed to hold the next round of the senior officials' Homeland Security Dialogue in Washington D.C. at a mutually convenient date. The last India-US homeland security dialogue was last held in January 2022. (PTI)

## PM lashes out at DMK

a prominent part of the advertisement, published in DMK's Tamil mouthpiece 'Murasoli'. Against this background, Modi alleged DMK is not prepared to hail India's progress and the nation's achievements in space technology. The DMK leaders could not 'see anything', he said apparently referring to the nation's milestone events in space technology.

"They gave this advertisement from the tax that you pay. It didn't have India's space success, they didn't want to highlight it before Tamil Nadu, before the world." The advertisement did not have the images of Bharath's (ISRO) space programmes and they could not feature India's flag on it, he slammed.

This is the time to punish those who 'cannot see' and are oblivious to the nation's achievements, he added.

The PM said in a post on X: "DMK's advertisement today is hilarious. They have insulted Indian science and the Indian space sector, for which they must apologise." Responding to the allegation, DMK spokesperson J Constandine Ravindran said the BJP's accusation was only political in nature and it does not reflect facts.

The objective of the advertisement was to show that India has succeeded in space technology, on a par with developed nations that have already made accomplishments in space sector. In furtherance of the objective, the advertisement has multiple rockets as its background featuring shades, flags or logos of nations that have succeeded in space technology.

India is featured among them, showing the nation's achievements in the field of space technology on a par with countries that have already succeeded, he said. Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai alleged on X: "This advertisement by DMK Minister Thiru Anita Radhakrishnan to leading Tamil dailies today is a manifestation of DMK's commitment to China & their total disregard for our country's sovereignty."

"DMK, a party fighting (sic) high on corruption, has been desperate to paste stickers ever since the announcement of ISRO's second launch pad in Kulasekarapatnam was released." (PTI)

## Ex-MLA set to turn saffron

tenure but also due to his strong influence over the party rank and file for nearly three decades. Goswami has served in various positions such as Congress district president and led the youth wing of the INC. There is also a speculation that a faction of party leaders and workers may follow Goswami to the saffron camp if he chooses to join.

It's worth noting that there were discussions in political circles about Goswami potentially switching sides after he left the Congress leader's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra midway in Assam. However, Goswami refuted any such move at the time, citing poor health for his departure.

Meanwhile, the leader of the opposition Debabrata Saikia of the Congress informed reporters that Goswami did not provide any reason for quitting the party. "He has not given any reason for quitting the party. If provided, we can analyse and take suitable action to rectify the situation," Saikia said.

"The party had some inkling about Goswami's decision as he was absent from several political programs, but he should have discussed his grievances with the Congress state president," he added. Saikia acknowledged that Goswami's resignation would impact the Congress but affirmed their commitment to strengthening the party. "I will not deny it, but we will continue with our efforts to strengthen the party," he said.

Responding to speculations about Goswami switching sides, the chief minister on Tuesday stated that he had no information about it, but "he is a powerful leader of the Congress, and if he joins the BJP, I will welcome it." Goswami, a close associate of former CM Tarun Gogoi, was elected to the assembly in 2006 and 2011 from Jorhat. He was appointed the state party's working president in 2021.

Earlier this month, Congress MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha resigned as state working president and, along with another party legislator, Basanta Das, expressed support for the BJP-led government's 'development agenda'. (With inputs from PTI)

## Services trade issues get less attention at WTO despite having over 20 pc share in world trade

### Name Correction

**Correct Name: MALINA BORA**  
**Wrong Name: MALINA BORAH**  
**C/o: Thaneshwar Bora**  
**Add: Vill: Belaguri**  
**Po & Ps : Howraghat**  
**Dist.: Karbi Anglong**  
**Pin: 782481**  
**(M) 7896062290**

### NAME CHANGE

I, Bishnu Devi W/O of Late Indra Bahardur Thapa has changed my Name to Bishnu Kumari Thapa Vide affidavit 1791 dated 23/02/2024 sworn before notary Mrs. Phunu Barman, From now on my name shall be addressed as Bishnu Kumari Thapa for all future purposes. Bishnu Kumari Thapa W/o Late Indra Bahardur Thapa Vill- Chandrasing Teron Gaon, PO & PS - Diphu, Dist - Karbi Anglong, Assam

**ABU DHABI, Feb 28:** Trade in services such as movement of skilled professionals accounts for over 20 per cent of the global commerce but the sector is still not getting sufficient attention in the negotiations of the WTO, according to experts and officials.

The experts also said that developed or rich member nations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are only interested in pushing their own non-trade agenda and not focusing on issues which really need special focus of the Geneva-based multi-lateral body.

Trade ministers and officials of the 166-member WTO are gathered here to discuss wide ranging issues such as agriculture, and fisheries subsidies.

The 13th ministerial conference (MC13) of the WTO on Wednesday entered the third day. MC is the highest decision making body of the global trade watchdog.

"There are enough issues related to trade are there to discuss in the WTO like sanitary and phytosanitary issues, technical barriers to trade and mutual recognition agreements (MRAs), but the developed nations want to push new issues," an international trade expert, who did not wish to be named, said.

Sharing similar views, an official said that there are no discus-

sions on services trade in terms of how this can be improved.

"There are no talks on that. They are not talking about MRAs, about mobility issues, how the mobility issues will be tackled. They are not discussing the issues which are restrictive for the developing nations," the official said.

Another expert said that issues like the movement of care-givers from emerging nations to rich nations needs attention as countries like India have demographic dividend for another 25 years and the EU has demographic deficit.

"But they are not willing to accept immigration or mobility rules," the official added.

Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that services trade account for over 20 per cent of the world trade and despite that it is mired in non-transparent domestic regulations that impede the cross-border trade.

"It receives far less attention at WTO meetings resulting in insignificant progress on critical issues of importance to developing countries. The only issue that gets priority treatment is extension of the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions as it is of interest to the USA, EU and other developed countries." GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

The customs duty moratorium is

a temporary measure to prevent countries from imposing import taxes on digital products like software, music and movies. India, Indonesia, South Africa and many other countries are opposed to the extension which has been renewed every two years since 1998.

"However, it is expected that extension may be agreed for another two years in the spirit of bonhomie and consensus building," Srivastava said. He added that so far there is no progress in the MC13 on a proposal of the G-90 (group of 90 nations which consists of developing countries) for enhancing existing flexibilities and exemptions for developing countries in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). "This could involve longer transition periods for implementing GATS commitments, greater flexibility in domestic regulations affecting services and technical assistance, and capacity building for developing countries," Srivastava said.

India had earlier floated a proposal on trade facilitation in services (TFS).

India's objective behind this proposal is to initiate discussions on comprehensively addressing the numerous barriers -- both at the border and behind it -- that hinder the full potential of services trade across all modes of supplies. (PTI)



## ‘Movement is not against Jesus Christ and Christianity’ Concern on alleged conversion of educational to religious institutions: Kutumba Surakshya Parishad

By Hiranva Barman

GUWAHATI, Feb 28: Kutumba Surakshya Parishad president Satya Ranjan Borah said that the parishad has raised concern on the alleged conversion of educational institutions into religious institutions and that the ‘movement’ is not against Jesus Christ and Christianity.

Talking to The Hills Times Borah said that he had appealed to all other stake holders related to this issue so that collective and inclusive solution can be found at the earliest.

“Love for one’s own mother doesn’t imply hate for others,” he added.

Earlier, Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma had told the Meghalaya assembly that the state govt would first verify the reports about the ‘anti missionary campaign’ in Assam before taking up the matter with Assam CM.

“I have seen the statement of the CM of Meghalaya. I welcome and appreciate his concern. If he wants I am ready to talk with him with the facts. We too want the facts to be placed in black and white for the sake of the constitution of India. This movement is not against Jesus Christ and Christianity. We are concerned about the conversion of educational institutions into religious institutions. I think Christian Missionary ruled schools are not notified and recognised religious institutions; rather, these are public schools. So, being a responsible citizen of India they too have fundamental duties to value the secularism of the nation. So, I am pleased by seeing the concern of Meghalaya CM so that we can solve the issue in a proper way. I ap-



pealed all other stake holders related to this issue so that we can find out a collective and inclusive solution early. Further, I would like to request everyone not to divert the issue from its core concerns. We don’t want anyone to face difficult consequences,” Borah said.

Meanwhile, the parishad has sent a letter to Assam chief secretary for alleged practice of exclusive religious practices by the Christian Missionaries by defaming the “Secular” values of Bharat and by encouraging anti-constitutional activities by ignoring the Fundamental Duties of being the Citizen of India as defined in

the Article 51 (A) of the Constitution.

The Parishad in its letter wondered if the dress or costume of the teachers specially the Father-Sisters of Christian Missionaries run institutions was not exclusive religious? If the installation of idol of Jesus Christ and Mother Mary and the sign of Cross in the institutions was not exclusive religious practices? The presences of churches inside the campus of educational institutions ruled by the Christian Missionaries; was not exclusive religious practices?

The letter further stated that by doing so the Christian Missionaries have al-

legedly violated Right to Equality (Article 14 of the Constitution of India), Right against Discrimination (Article 15), Right to personal liberty (Article 21) and that they have been nullifying the secular values and morality of ‘Bharat’.

“...by ignoring & neglecting the celebration of ‘Saraswati Puja’ in their educational institutions; rather by the celebration of Exclusive Christian religious festival like ‘Christmas’ there; they have clearly proven their communal agenda in the name of educational services; and it also proved their anti-social & anti-Constitutional behavior as well.

### Road accident claims budding cricketer in city

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 28: A tragic road accident in Lokhra area claimed a budding cricketer recently.

The deceased youth, who was traveling on a two-wheeler, met with an accident near Forest Gate in the Lokhra area of Guwahati. He was identified as Dipankar Rongpi.

Meanwhile, the other youth on the motorcycle also sustained injuries in the accident and his condition remains critical, sources said.

While, the details of the accident are yet to surface, it has been reported that the injured youth, identified as Montu Das, was rushed to the nearby Ayur-sundra Hospital where he is fighting for his life.

### New office bearers take charge

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 28: Office bearers of the managing committee for the year 2024-2025 took charge on Wednesday.

Branch (EIRC) held a ceremony on the occasion.

CA. Saurabh Choudhury took charge as the branch chairman and CA Raginee Goyal was appointed as vice chairperson. CA Anjani Kumar Mundhra took charge as branch secretary and CA Jay Prakash Gupta was elected as branch treasurer for the year 2024-25.

CA Sushil Kumar Kalani was appointed as the chairman of CPE committee of the branch and CA Gaurab Garodia assumed the chairmanship of the student body of ICAL, EICASA. CA. (Dr) Ayush Saraf, the outgoing chairman gave an audio-visual report of the activities and performance of the branch during his chairmanship year 2023-24 and handed over the charge to the incoming Chairman wishing him a successful year ahead. CA Saurabh Choudhury in his acceptance speech, put forward his vision for the upcoming year. CA Ravi Kumar Patwa, former chairman of EIRC was present at the ceremony and he also addressed the members and students.

A galaxy of former Chairmen and senior as well as young members of the branch were also present at the event.

### IT department conducts raids in city

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 28: The income tax department conducted widespread raids in various parts of Guwahati and other parts of the Northeast, sources said.

The raids were conducted on properties of businessman Adarsh Jhunjhunwala.

Sources said Jhunjhunwala is the owner of several companies, including Best Cement.

Amidst allegations of tax evasions amounting to crores of rupees, the raid was conducted, sources added.

The IT department carried out raids at Athgaon, Ulubari and ABC among others.



APCC president Bhupen Kumar Borah along with opposition party leaders during the opposition party meeting at hotel Lily in Guwahati on Wednesday. HT photo

### Women folk meditate on Brahmaputra shore

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 28: Over 40 women meditated together on Brahmaputra river front on Wednesday. The programme was organised by The Blissful Soul.

Blissful Soul is a group of spiritual enthusiasts headed together with Ritu Gupta, Archana Agarwal, Kavita Patwary, Indu Lakhota and Vishakha Agarwal.

Today participants engaged in intensive meditation sessions and guided mindfulness exercises. The programme was structured in an environment for individuals to explore various meditation techniques, fostering mental clarity and stress reduction.

They were all seen going to home gleefully post programme.



### February is low vision awareness month

## Topcem Cement hosts 7<sup>th</sup> free cataract surgery and eye check-up camp

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 28: Topcem Cement, a leading Cement brand of Northeast India has been conducting the 7th free cataract surgery and eye check-up camp in association with Eye Doctors- An Eye Clinic & Surgery Centre, Guwahati.

This is the 7th cataract surgery camp by Topcem Cement towards its aim to provide free eye care to the masses.

Rural eye screening camps are being organised by Eye Doctors- An Eye Clinic & Surgery Centre, Guwahati with the primary goal of detecting cataract disease and uncorrected refractive error. A total of around 200 patients are expected to be screened for eye diseases in the rural areas Morigaon and Udalguri over a period of 15 days which started from February 19 2024 by a team of ophthalmologists from Eye Doctors Clinic and Institute, an eye institute & surgery centre, Guwahati. Cataract Surgery for the selected patients will be conducted at the institute. Out of the total cataract cases, Topcem Cement will provide support to 40 patients.

“Topcem Cement is committed towards every social cause which helps in social development and provides support to the poor. In the past also we have taken various initiatives and will continue to do the same in future.” said by Dr



Anil Kapur, president, sales & marketing, Meghalaya Cements Ltd.

Free Cataract Surgery, an initiative of Topcem Cement, since the year 2018 stands in alignment with progressive initiatives spearheaded by the Government, both at the

central and state levels, such as the National Programme for Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment, a government initiative aimed at reducing the prevalence of avoidable blindness in India by 2025.

By providing this valuable serv-

ice, Topcem Cement demonstrates its dedication to improving the lives of poor and in need people through accessible eye healthcare solutions. It also reflects the company’s unwavering commitment to the eye health of the community, a press release stated.



Beautiful green parrot sitting on a branch of a tree in Guwahati on Wednesday. UB Photos



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Self-defence is Nature's eldest law.*  
-John Dryden

## Q-mark over democratic integrity

The recent Rajya Sabha elections across various states of India have once again highlighted the precarious state of political morality and the erosion of democratic values. The events unfolding in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka serve as stark reminders of the challenges facing the electoral process and the imperative need for political accountability. In Himachal Pradesh, the spectacle of cross-voting, with 15 seats affected, has plunged the Congress into a state of crisis, particularly endangering the stability of the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu-led government. The brazen defiance of party whips and the alarming ease with which legislators switch allegiances underscore a troubling trend towards opportunism over principled governance. The unprecedented level of cross-voting in Himachal Pradesh, notably resulting in a tied vote eventually decided by lot, reflects a worrying departure from democratic norms. Despite possessing a comfortable majority, the Congress was blindsided by defectors within its own ranks, signalling not only a lapse in party discipline but also a betrayal of public trust. The insidious tactics employed, including allegations of horse-trading and coercion, further tarnish the integrity of the electoral process. The reported involvement of central investigating agencies adds another layer of complexity to an already volatile situation, raising questions about the abuse of power for political gain.

Moreover, the recurrence of such incidents in other states like Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka amplifies the gravity of the situation. The resignation of the Samajwadi Party's Chief Whip in Uttar Pradesh and the disciplinary measures contemplated by the BJP in Karnataka underscore the widespread repercussions of cross-voting across party lines. Chief Minister Sukhu had foreshadowed ahead of voting that the BJP had a plan, which found clear mention in another Congress leader Harshwardhan Chauhan, a minister in the state, who had said that, "The BJP has only 25 MLAs. Even without numbers, BJP is fielding their candidate. This means they are planning horse-trading." It is imperative for political parties to introspect and address the root causes fuelling such defections. Mere allegations and counter-allegations serve only to exacerbate the crisis, while the erosion of public trust in the democratic process deepens. In this context, the responsibility falls not only on political leaders but also on constitutional authorities to safeguard the sanctity of elections. The role of the Governor in upholding constitutional norms and ensuring the stability of state governments cannot be understated, particularly in times of political upheaval.

As the nation approaches the Lok Sabha elections, the onus is on every stakeholder to uphold the principles of democracy and ethical governance. Political expediency must not be allowed to trump the will of the electorate, and concerted efforts must be made to restore faith in the democratic process. The events unfolding in Himachal Pradesh and beyond serve as a sobering reminder of the fragility of democracy and the imperative need for collective action to safeguard its integrity. The cross-voting underscores Congress' trouble on account of its rank-and-file crossing over to BJP. Its ally Samajwadi Party also seems to be heading for similar trouble during the forthcoming Lok Sabha election. INDIA alliance needs to analyse, strategise and execute as far as swiftness of their rank-and-file is concerned, to come to a positive and balanced solution to the current conflict. It is incumbent upon all political actors to rise above partisan interests and reaffirm their commitment to the ideals of democracy, lest the fabric of our nation's democratic framework be further compromised.

## Formal job generation in India hit hard in last 10 years

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

The latest EPFO data released last week shows that formal job generation in India has been a casualty since 2018-19 when new EPF subscribers joining the EPF were 13.94 million but had fallen to 13.85 million in the year 2022-23. During this period there were great fluctuations showing that fewer decent jobs were created in informal sector and those created belonged to low category.

If we look at the number of new members who joined and exited the EPF, it could be puzzling. In the year 2018-19 the number of workers exited from membership was 12.29 million since September 2017, while in 2022-23, this number was 13.36 million. This shows very large fluctuation in the formal job market of the country, and thereby the relatively more secure and covered under social security net were not so secure.

According to the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation's Net Payroll Data, the total number of EPF members were 13.85 million in the country while we have over 900 million people in working age population, out of whom only about 400 million are in actual jobs, which are counted as employed, and which included even those who had gotten 1 hour of paid jobs in a week. This presents a very frightening picture of the Indian job market.

In 2022-23, a total of 77570 workers of less than 18 years of age became members of EPF; workers between the age of 18-21 were 3.2 million and between 22-25 were 3.6 million. It is to be noted that every year about 20 million people enter the job market. Obviously, the new job generation in formal sector is very unsatisfactory.

Moreover, the members of the EPFO are increasingly dissatisfied on account of their not getting enough financial security both in terms of their fund settlement claims, and the family pension they get. In 2022-23, EPFO rejected 34 per cent of the claims made by the subscribers, that is one in every three. It is a very high rate of rejection which has risen sharply from only 13 per cent in 2017-18. In 2018-19, EPFO rejected 18.2% of all final settlement claims made by its subscribers. This rose to 24.1% in 2019-20, 30.8% in 2020-21 and 35.2% in 2021-22.

It is a serious matter because EPFO is the largest state-run retirement fund with around 290 million workers under the scheme of which 68 million are active subscribers. In addition to this EPFO subscribers have issues with their pension fund also. It is only recently, the Union Ministry of Finance has turned down a request to increase the monthly minimum pension under the Employees Pension Scheme (EPS) from ₹ 1000 to ₹ 2000.

The EPS is also handled under EPFO. There are only 7.55 million pensioners as per Annual Report 2022-23, which shows that only a fraction of India's workers are eligible under EPS, 3.64 per cent receiving pensions up to ₹ 1000 per month, while 1.17 million receive ₹ 1001-₹ 1500. Around

0.868 million pensioners receive pension between ₹ 1501 and ₹ 2000 per month and only 26,769 receive more than ₹ 5000 per month. Department related Parliamentary standing committee had also found the pension amount too little.

All theses show that apart from little new formal job generation, those who are in formal job under social security covers, are actually getting too little social security cover. Employment growth has been dismal as is also evident from a recent study by D Tripathi Rao of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Lucknow, prepared in collaboration with researchers from Birla Institute of Technology and Science, and Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. It was aptly said in the paper that India's economy is witnessing a stagnating employment growth rate, weakening employment elasticity, slow structural transformation, and brewing structural problems in the country's labour market, such as low female labour force participation and rise in the unemployment rate.

The researchers have found after analysing the NSSO employment and unemployment survey, and Periodic Labour Force Survey of the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment that the economic growth, rather than creating more jobs, has resulted in the net labour displacement. The paper published in the Indian Journal of Labour Economics, asserted that the agricultural sector, though employing most youth, contributed low value-added to the overall economy, resulting in significant employment challenges.

There is significant gender disparity in the labour market and a growing level of unemployment for highly educated youth than the less educated, the study pointed out. "In 2020-21, the total labour force in India stood at an estimated 556.1 million. Out of this total, 292.2 million (54.9%) were self-employed, 121.1 million (22.8%) were in regular employment and an estimated 118.6 million (22.3%) were in casual employment. The number of unemployed people declined from 26.4 million in 2019-20 to 24.3 million in 2020-21 in India, while an additional 119 million people were not added to the potential labour force during the same. The estimates show that self-employment has been the chief driver of the Indian job market."

Unemployment rises with education level, the report said, adding "the unemployment rate for the illiterate and less educated class (below primary) was 0.57% and 1.13% respectively while, for the highly educated class (graduates and above), it was 14.73% in 2020-21 for the age group '15-29 years'. This pattern follows across the years." It is worth noting that the latest unemployment rate as per CMIE data for February 25, 2024 on 30 day moving average basis is 7.8 per cent, which is 2 per cent higher than the last month. The last decade proved to be the era of joblessness in India, worst in the independent India, and new job generation in both the formal and informal sector remained dismal. (IPA Service)

# Emboldened India bloc raring to take saffron brigade head on

While Rahul Gandhi, joined by his sister Priyanka Gandhi, resumed Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Moradabad on February 25, TV news channels and even some YouTubeers were articulating their anxiety on whether Rahul would turn the massive mass upsurge which had flooded the streets and lanes of the city to greet him, into votes.

The expression of apprehension was malevolent in nature. The media was simply playing the saffron tune in its attempt to attenuate the impact of the Yatra and project it as an irrelevant exercise. The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra movement was launched by Rahul Gandhi and Tamil Nadu chief minister M. K. Stalin; on September 7, 2022. The movement was intended to set a counter narrative and also unite the country against the "divisive and politics of hatred" of RSS and Narendra Modi.

Unlike the Bharat Jodo Yatra, which focused on campaigning against communalism and divisive politics, the Bharat Nyay Yatra focuses on justice for the Dalits, poor, EBCs and minorities along with livelihood issues such as inflation and unemployment. At no stage Rahul projected the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra ( 'India Unity and Justice March') which started on January 14, 2024 from Thoubal in Manipur and will end on 20 March 2024 in Mumbai spanning east-west of India, as a vote-seeking venture. His Yatra has one single mission to arouse the people against the autocratic and communal politics of RSS and BJP.

These media experts and pollsters did not bother to find out the impact of the Yatra at the ground level and whether it has succeeded in making the targeted section of the society think of their own interest. Instead of comparing the gains and outreach of the NDA and INDIA, they have been echoing the claims of Modi that NDA would cross the 400 seat mark in the upcoming elections. In their quest to project Modi was the winner warrior, they tend to ignore the fact INDIA or precisely Congress has nothing to lose.

It had lost to the communalised election of 2019. It has nothing to lose in 2024. Instead, it will be interesting to watch what and how much NDA and Modi lose this time. Electorally, the numerical gain of a political party in the east and north India, precisely in Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, UP, and Madhya Pradesh, matters most for coming to power. In Bihar, NDA had won 39 out of 40 and in Jharkhand it had won 12 out of 14. The BJP won 18 of the 42 seats from Bengal.

At national level BJP-led NDA had won 353 seats. The BJP won 37.76% of votes, while the NDA's combined vote was 45% of the 603.7 million votes. Congress won 52 seats. In Bihar and Jharkhand, even if INDIA bloc fails to retrieve its ground, it certainly

could not be attributed its loss. Nevertheless, this election is going to be the mother of all battles in Bengal. This is the reason that RSS has taken over the command of the saffron army in the state and spearheading the battle. The incident of Sandeshkhali clearly manifests to what extent the RSS and Modi can subvert the state machinery in the state.

But the situation is quite different and indeed challenging for the RSS and BJP. The saffron ecosystem, ably assisted by the Godi media, had tried to create a deceitful narrative that Dalits, OBCs and EBCs have subscribed its politics of Hindutva. No doubt at some local level, for some local issues and compulsions, they have supported a saffron candidate, but that was not out of ideological or philosophical compulsion or orientation. If the RSS and BJP had motivated these sections to rally behind them, Modi would certainly not have honoured Karpoori Thakur with Bharat Ratna.

The depressed sections of the society, since the days of emergence of socialist movement under the leadership of Thakur in sixties, have been with the regional parties. The BJP has always been a political non-entity in the state. It was the shift of



Bhumihar, Rajputs and to some extent of Brahmins away from Congress in eighties that provided with the opportunity for BJP top grow in the state. In both the states, Bihar and Jharkhand, the people from the three upper castes have been the support base for BJP.

It would be out an out a skewed perception to construe that it was the philosophy of Hindu Rashtra and revival of the concept of new Hindutva, that has conjured the upper caste to join the saffron brigade. In fact, it was the emergence of class war in Bihar in seventies, eighties and nineties and compulsion to preserve their class interest that made them look towards the BJP as its emancipator. It is a known fact how these upper caste leaders used the senior journalists stationed in Delhi to influence the judiciary through the RSS leaders and BJP ministers.

Though the slogan of Hindutva has undoubtedly mesmerised the Dalits, OBCs and EBCs, they had not forgotten the feudal torture and oppression meted out to them by the upper-caste landlords. A look at the elections results since nineties would make it distinctly clear that these people relied on the regional parties like RJD, JD(U) or CPI(ML) or IPF, championing their cause. It is something else that leaders like Nitish Kumar exploited them for their personal gains. But in that exploitation the element of adherence to communal political line is completely absent.

Either it was the election of 2005, 2010, 2015 or 2020, BJP could not emerge as a potential

force. It came to power by using Nitish. It would not be a hyperbole to say Nitish has been an indirect founder of BJP in Bihar. In a state having the legacy of left to centre and leftist politics, he provided the ground to BJP to grow and flourish.

The electoral performance of RJD and CPI(ML), earlier Indian Peoples Front (IPF) is a testimony to it. CPI(ML) is the only communist party in Bihar which has grassroots cadre and support since its opening. It has been winning not less than dozens of assembly seats on its own without entering into any alliance. Even in 2020, it won 16 on its own. Ironically, on some of the seats the RJD had fielded its candidates. But the RJD could not ensure the victory of its candidates.

In Jharkhand, after its creation in 2000, the BJP is dependent on the support of the upper caste people, those migrated to Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Ramgarh and other towns. Ranchi and Hazaribagh have significant population of Kayasthas. But after eighties the Brahmins, Bhumihars and Rajputs migrated there. Politically, the Kayasthas and Brahmins sided with the Congress. But the Congress could not counter the strength of JMM, which was working amongst the tribals with Marxist Coordination Council of veteran Marxist-Leninist A K Roy. In that backdrop, the upper-caste people had before them the BJP as the only tenable and serving alternative. Riding on the bandwagon of BJP, they usurped the land and forest of the adivasis. These people were the mainstay base for the corporate houses like Adanis.

BJP has been put its all might in the three states of eastern

India: Bihar, Jharkhand and Bengal. Going by the mood of the people, more precisely the response Rahul's BJNY received in Bihar and Jharkhand, it could safely be said that he has succeeded in his mission to make people realise the fallacy of voting on religious line. The incredible response to the Jana Vishwas Rally of RJD leader Tejashwi simply underlines peoples' trust in INDIA bloc and their craving for a dignified life.

A visit to the rural areas of Bihar would make it abundantly clear the politics of secular forces and RSS-BJP Hindutva politics, which is of felonious nature. The media has been indulging in its dirty game to project the INDIA as a non-starter in these two states, as so far they have no sorted out the issue of seat-sharing. But senior Congress leader from Jharkhand, Subodh Kant Sahay, and even members of the JMM think tank assert that it has been already been sorted out and they have been waiting for the BJP to make the move. They are also waiting for the March 3 public rally of INDIA to be held in Gandhi Maidan of Patna.

The March 3 public meet will be the most memorable day in the contemporary politics Bihar and Jharkhand. This is for the first time in recent times the constituents of INDIA bloc would join shoulders to commit to fight out the BJP from the state. Senior INDIA leaders claim that it would virtually herald launching of the election campaign in the state. For strategic reasons, senior INDIA leaders are holding back the names and seats on which they would contest.

Going by the mood in the INDIA bloc, it appears that time is waiting for them. Their mission is to reach out to the oppressed people and offer them the candidate of their choice. The exercise is neither hair-splitting nor quite stretching. The constituents RJD, CPI(ML), CPI(M), CPI and Congress are too willing to accommodate others. With Nitish joining NDA, the INDIA bloc is left with extra 16 seats which was in possession of JD(U) of Nitish. (IPA Service)

## Northeast: A decade of transformation and progress

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Nehruvian state, in its post-colonial era, implemented a divisive strategy known as "divide and rule" in the Northeast, manipulating identities to create artificial separations. This approach lacked historical grounding, overlooking the ongoing cultural influences of Vaishnavism, Shakti worship, and indigenous tribal practices that maintained a connection with Bharatiya culture rather than the influences of invaders. The colonial project contributed to the fabrication of a false consciousness, making it easier to marginalize and convert communities. Since 2014, a significant shift has occurred, aiming to unite the Northeast as an integral part of the Indian civilization state. This transformative approach emphasizes the celebration of cultural diversity, aligning with the broader trend seen in other regions and states.

A significant metamorphosis is unfolding in the northeastern region of India. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government has embarked on a groundbreaking journey to uplift the eight states of the Northeast, often referred to as Ashtalakshmi. This initiative adopts a comprehensive "whole of government approach" with a dual focus on promoting peace and stability, alongside fostering the overall development of the region. The overarching vision is to turn the Northeast into a thriving contributor to India's broader aspiration of a developed nation, encapsulated in the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Within the visionary framework known as "Purvodaya," the government has devised a strategic plan for the Northeast region, grounded in three fundamental principles. Firstly, there is a strong emphasis on accelerating development to seamlessly integrate the Northeast with the broader national framework. This involves expediting development initiatives to ensure a cohesive connection with the nation. Secondly, the strategy prioritizes addressing conflicts as a crucial step towards establishing enduring peace and stability. Resolving conflicts is recognized as a fundamental prerequisite for sustained harmony in the region.

Lastly, the approach underscores the importance of economic and cultural enrichment for overall development. Preserving cultural heritage and enhancing economic opportunities are deemed integral to the region's comprehensive progress. Together, these principles serve as the foundation for a holistic and progressive approach aimed at fostering growth in the Northeast. Evaluation against these standards reveals a distinctly positive and promising conclusion – a new dawn has emerged in the Northeast.

The past decade has witnessed a remarkable improvement in the security landscape, marked by a substantial decline in insurgency incidents and casualties among civilians and

security forces. From 2014 to 2023, the region experienced a commendable 73% reduction in insurgency incidents, a significant 71% decrease in security forces' casualties, and an impressive 86% drop in civilian deaths.

Notably, over 8,900 extremists have surrendered during this period. The overarching strategy focuses on establishing enduring peace to address persistent challenges effectively.

In 2023, pivotal agreements were inked with prominent groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), and the Dimas Peace Accord. Previous agreements, such as the Tribal Peace Accord (Assam, 2022), Assam-Meghalaya Inter-State Boundary Agreement (2022), Assam-Arunachal Pradesh Inter-State Boundary Agreement (2022), Karbi Agreement (2021), Bru Agreement (2020), Bodo Accord (2020), and NLFT/SD Agreement (2019), have played a crucial role in stabilizing the region. Another significant milestone is the reduction of unrest-prone areas governed by the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). Its complete removal in Tripura and Meghalaya is noteworthy. Presently, it operates in a limited capacity in Assam (4 districts), Nagaland (4 districts), Manipur (7 districts), and three districts in Arunachal Pradesh. These collective efforts reflect a dedicated commitment to instilling lasting peace and stability in the Northeast.

The last decade has marked a period of impressive economic advancement, characterized by substantial growth in infrastructure, enhanced connectivity, and a notable rise in per capita incomes throughout the region. Noteworthy is the significant surge in per capita income observed across various states. Manipur has demonstrated a remarkable doubling of its per capita income, while Mizoram has stood out with an impressive 3.2-fold growth. Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura have experienced an almost threefold (2.9 times) increase in their per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) over the same period.

Nagaland and Assam have recorded growth exceeding 2.5 times (refer to the figure). Although relatively more conservative in comparison, Meghalaya has still achieved an admirable 1.5 times growth in per capita income. These figures highlight the positive economic trajectory in the region, accompanied by tangible enhancements in the overall standard of living.

The Vibrant Village Program is making significant strides in fostering development across the Northeast region, reflecting the government's steadfast commitment with substantial budgetary allocations. The Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER) has witnessed a remarkable budget increase, soaring from ₹ 2,333 crore in 2014-15 to ₹ 5,892 crore in 2023-24, marking an impressive growth of 153%. A key player in this

developmental landscape is the PM DevINE Scheme, which has allocated Rs 1,500 crore to pivotal infrastructure initiatives. Among these, the National Roadway Development Program, known as "Parvatmalai," is being implemented in a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode, aiming to construct eight roadway projects spanning 60 km each to enhance connectivity in the Northeast and other hilly states. Additionally, the Bharatmala Project, focused on constructing 5,196 km of roads, has successfully completed 514 km. The strategic approach extends to sector-specific missions, exemplified by the National Mission on Edible Oils—Oil Palm (NMEOP), the National Bamboo Mission, and the Majuli project, reflecting a targeted effort to address diverse developmental needs in the region.

In the realm of capacity-building endeavors, the Northeast region has seen the implementation of two water supply projects amounting to Rs 118 crores. The Northeastern Development Finance Corporation Limited (NEDFI) has played a pivotal role by actively supporting 5,490 microfinance projects, with total sanctions reaching ₹ 789 crores and disbursements amounting to ₹ 622 crores.

The SAMBHAV Mission Mode Programme, designed to establish 75 gram panchayats/village councils across 42 districts in 8 states of the Northeast, has successfully facilitated essential services for all citizens. Additionally, aligning with the government's global climate agenda, comprehensive plans have been devised under the Northeastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) to rejuvenate 292 wetlands in the region. This multifaceted approach underscores the government's unwavering dedication to holistic development, encompassing vital sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, and environmental sustainability in the Northeast.

The Northeast, historically neglected and mismanaged since India's independence, grappled with genuine challenges stemming from erroneous policies that fostered division over unity. This misguided approach exacerbated issues of separatism, compounded by a lack of development and inadequate attention to regional concerns. Petty politics further intensified these challenges. However, the impact of the current government's strategy is becoming increasingly visible, evident in the consistent establishment of peace and stability. This is reflected in the decline of insurgent activities, a reduction in inter-state border disputes, and substantial investments in development. The northeastern states are swiftly advancing towards achieving the status of Ashtalakshmi, making significant contributions to the broader national narrative and emerging as an economic force. In essence, despite historical setbacks, the region is now at the cusp of positive transformation, poised for increased integration into India's growth trajectory. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewsive@gmail.com)



## Lizards and other species are evolving with climate change, but not fast enough



By: Michael P. Moore

Climate change is threatening the survival of plants and animals around the globe as temperatures rise and habitats change.

Some species have been able to meet the challenge with rapid evolutionary adaptation and other changes in behaviour or physiology. Dark-coloured dragonflies are getting paler in order to reduce the amount of heat they absorb from the sun. Mustard plants are flowering earlier to take advantage of earlier snowmelt. Lizards are becoming more cold-tolerant to handle the extreme variability of our new climate.

However, scientific studies show that climate change is occurring much faster than species are changing.

**What is evolutionary adaptation?**

The word "adaptation" is used in many ways by climate scientists, but it has a very specific meaning to biologists: It refers to genetic changes that are passed on from one generation to the next and improve a species' ability to survive in its environment.

These genetic modifications make evolutionary adaptation different from "acclimation" or "acclimatisation," which involve advantages that are not passed on to offspring. For example, when people move to high-altitude cities, they start producing more red blood cells as they acclimate to the low oxygen.

All over the world, plants and animals have adapted to many different warm and dry habitats, prompting scientists to question whether species might also adapt to our rapidly changing climate, too. Thus far, the answer seems to be no for most species.

**Evolving, fast and slow**

A recent study of the populations of 19 bird and mammal species, including owls and deer, shows one potential barrier to adaptation.

In animals that take several years to reach breeding age, the climate has already shifted by the time their offspring are born. Genes that gave the parents an advantage – like hatching at exactly the right time or growing to the best size – are no longer as beneficial for the offspring.

Populations of these slow-maturing animals are adapting to climate change, but not enough during each generation to thrive in the changing conditions. In fact, the rate of evolution is so mismatched to the rate of global warming that the study's authors estimate that nearly 70% of the local populations they studied are already vulnerable to climate-driven extinction over the coming decades.

Small-bodied animals, such as many fish, insects and plankton, typically mature quickly. Yet, recent research on small fish and a type of fast-maturing plankton called a copepod revealed another hurdle for rapid genetic adaptation to climate change.

Many species possess genes that permit them to live in environments that are 1 to 2 degrees Celsius (about 2 to 4 Fahrenheit) warmer than today, but new genetic mutations must arise to enable survival if climates reach 4 to 5 C (about 7 to 9 F) warmer, as is possible in some regions, particularly if greenhouse gas emissions continue at a high rate.

To test species' resilience, scientists warmed populations of these fast-maturing species over many generations to observe their genetic changes. They found that both the copepods and the small fish were able to adapt to the first couple degrees of warming, but populations soon went extinct above that. This was because genetic mutations that increased their ability to live in hotter conditions occurred at a slower rate than the temperatures rose.

Cold-blooded species, such as lizards, frogs and fish, are especially vulnerable to climate change because they have a limited capacity to regulate their own body temperatures. Their ability to evolve in response to climate change is expected to be critical for their survival.

However, rapid adaptation to climate change often comes at a cost: Populations get smaller due to the deaths of individuals that cannot tolerate new, hotter temperatures. Therefore, even if species do evolve to survive with climate change, their smaller populations may still go extinct due to problems such as inbreeding, harmful new mutations or plain old bad luck, such as a disease epidemic.

In a now-classic study, researchers studying lizards in Mexico discovered that the high death rates of just the heat-sensitive individuals – representing only a subset of the entire population – caused 12% of all lizard populations in Mexico to go extinct between 1975 and 2009. Even with some heat-tolerant adult lizards surviving in each population under the warmer conditions, the researchers estimated climate change would kill so many heat-sensitive adults within each population that 54% of all populations would go extinct by 2080.

**Evolutionary adaptation isn't species' only option**

Another way species adjust to rising temperatures is acclimation, sometimes called "phenotypic plasticity." For example, great tits in the UK – small birds that are common in yards and forests – lay their eggs earlier in warmer years so that their nestlings hatch right as the winter weather ends, no matter when that happens.

However, a recent analysis of more than 100 beetle, grasshopper and other insect species all over the world found that acclimation may not help those species enough. The study's authors found that the species they reviewed gained an average of only 0.1 C (about 0.2 F) greater heat tolerance when acclimating to 1 C (about 2 F) warmer air temperatures during their development. Thus, the rate of global warming seems to be outstripping species' abilities to acclimate, too.

Plants and animals could also escape the impacts of global warming by migrating to cooler habitats. A global analysis of more than 12,000 different plants and animal species recently showed that many species are migrating toward the poles fast enough to keep pace with rising temperatures, and many tropical species are moving upslope to higher elevations as well.

Nonetheless, migration has its limits. Research shows that tropical birds that already live high in the mountains could be doomed because there is no room for them to migrate any farther upward. Tropical species, therefore, may be on what the authors call an "escalator to extinction."

High-latitude and high-elevation habitats also present numerous challenges for species to overcome besides temperature. Our own research across 800 species of insects all over the Earth shows that butterflies, bees and other flying insects are especially hindered from migrating to higher elevations because there is not enough oxygen for them to survive.

**Many species lack obvious climate strategies**

Overall, evolutionary adaptation appears to help lessen the impacts of global warming, but the evidence thus far shows that it is insufficient to overcome current rates of climate change. Acclimation and migration provide faster solutions, but research shows that those may not be enough, either.

Of course, not all evolution is driven by warming temperatures. Plant and animal species appear to be also gradually adapting to other kinds of environments, including human-created ones like cities. But the fast pace of global warming makes it one of the major threats that species must respond to immediately.

The evidence indicates that humanity cannot simply assume that plants and animals will be able to save themselves from climate change. To protect these species, humans will have to stop the activities that are fueling climate change. (Courtesy: The Wire)

## The future of urban mobility: Shared, connected, and electric

By: Promit Mookherjee

The world is in the midst of a major migration. Every week, more than 1 million people make the transition away from rural life to cities, with projections indicating that by 2050 cities will become home to approximately 7 billion inhabitants. This massive influx of people poses a significant challenge to urban mobility systems. The ability of these systems to adapt will be crucial in determining whether cities can continue to fulfil their role as the engines of economic growth.

The past holds important lessons for the future of urban mobility. In the developed world, where a substantial portion of urbanisation has taken place, mobility has been automobile dominated and focused on personal modes of travel. For instance, the United States (US) has around 900 cars per 1000 population—almost a car per person. This reliance has come at a cost, manifesting in productivity losses caused by congestion and massive carbon emissions and air pollution. Estimates suggest that if the same trends continue, by 2050, urban dwellers could lose on average 106 hours per year stuck in traffic jams. As the next wave of urbanisation unfolds, particularly in developing nations, mobility planning must increasingly focus on a new paradigm that facilitates more efficient and sustainable movement of both people and goods.

Technology will be a major shaper of new urban mobility systems. Driven by a strong global push to decarbonise, the biggest disruption is currently the transition to electric vehicles (EVs). Yet, the contours of this transition vary across geographies. China has been the outright leader in this regard accounting for over 50 percent of all electric vehicles sales. In the developed world,

EV growth has largely been driven by people looking to replace their fossil fuel-powered personal vehicles with new electric variants. In Europe and US, electric cars accounted for 15 and 8 percent of all car sales in 2022.

However, in the emerging world, EV sales have been driven largely by the two-wheeler and three-wheeler segments. These vehicles are largely utilised by people in lower income brackets, many of whom are captive users.

While in the developed world, the transition to electric vehicles is predominantly driven by affluent consumers with access to diverse transportation options, in the developing world, it's the lower-income groups leading the charge. For them, electric vehicles serve not just as a means of transport but as an indispensable tool vital for sustaining their livelihoods.

The rise of digitalisation is also creating a new transition from private to shared urban mobility. While there are various definitions of shared mobility, fundamentally, it refers to a shift towards "mobility as a service", where digital platforms enable the sharing of vehicles and bicycles by multiple users. This allows better utilisation of the existing vehicle stock, leading to reduced costs, congestions, and emissions.

The growth of shared mobility has been quite remarkable; between 2016 to 2019, e-hailing trips grew from 5.5 trillion to 16.5 trillion. This has also become an attractive avenue for investors

with more than US\$ 100 billion invested in shared mobility companies since 2010.

In the short run, shared mobility will be people-driven. However, in the long run, the advent of autonomous vehicles is likely to add a new paradigm. Cities of the future could well be characterised by shared robo-taxis and robot-shuttles with optimised routes that can reduce costs and emissions. Some estimates suggest that autonomous shared mobility services could reach over US \$400 billion by as early as 2030. However, there still remain many risks with autonomous vehicles.

City governments are now actively attempting to identify a regulatory framework that can make autonomous vehicles safe while maintaining convenience. The pace at which enabling regulations evolve will determine the growth of autonomous mobility.

Therefore, in the future will be shaped by the advent of new vehicle technologies combined with increased digitalisation and automation. However, whether these technological trends are successful in shaping effective urban mobility systems will depend upon the ability of city authorities to effectively incorporate these disrupters into the broader city planning process.

In the developed world, existing cities will need to be reimaged to enable a transition from a private-vehicle dominated mobility system powered by fossil fuels to cleaner more efficient



## Can behavioural changes improve and encourage waste segregation in India?

By: Pooja Haldea & Muskan Jain

India faces a colossal waste management problem, which is exacerbated by poor segregation and sorting practices, especially in the country's urban parts.

Globally, the country ranks fourth in the Plastic Mismanaged Waste Index. It generates about 1.51 lakh tonnes of municipal waste daily, yet only 47% of it undergoes proper processing.

Municipal corporations across India insist on garbage segregation – that is, sorting waste into wet and dry – but they have had limited success in making this work on the ground.

Understanding behavioural patterns linked with waste segregation, and deploying nudges informed by behavioural science can go a long way in making some change.

Over the years, improper disposal has increased the volume of total waste in landfills across the country, contributing further to higher levels of short-lived climate pollutants such as methane.

The waste sector contributed to 4% of the total greenhouse gas emissions in 2018. Given the environmental and health implications, waste management should be urgently addressed.

**Behavioural barriers, facilitators**

Effective waste segregation can be difficult due to the confusing terminology of "dry" and "wet". Items labelled "wet" can be considered as dry waste and vice versa. This lack of intuitive classification complicates accurate sorting.

For instance, items labelled as "wet", like used paper napkins, might be more suitable for dry waste disposal. Conversely, seemingly dry items, like leftover food, fall under the wet waste category.

There is also an underestimation and a lack of understanding about the immediate and long-term harmful effects of improper waste disposal. Awareness campaigns are often linked to mitigating climate change and reducing pollution. These goals can be perceived as distant or irrelevant where lower importance is assigned to future outcomes.

Inconsistency among family members in segregating waste further complicates matters. Some family members properly dispose of waste, while others do not. Ingrained habits and status quo bias pose challenges, as it can be difficult to break established patterns and adopt new habits.

The resistance to waste segregation is fuelled by the perception that it is a high-effort activity with an unclear payoff, coupled with the belief that municipal workers and not households themselves are responsible.

The idea that waste segregation demands extra time and effort, possibly requiring higher salaries for domestic workers, adds to this resistance. Smaller quantities of waste generated by households can also lead to a dismissive attitude.

The absence of convenient waste segregation facilities, like easily accessible bins and flexible waste collection schedules, intensifies the perceived difficulty. Navigating these complexities requires a combination of system-level support and behavioural interventions.

**Making structural changes**

At the macro-level, clear communication from sanitation authorities is vital to ensure that people understand and follow guidelines, emphasising the importance of proper waste disposal and the consequences of non-compliance.

Adequate financial support for cleaning staff at the local level is necessary to maintain an efficient waste management system.

Increasing awareness among sanitation workers about segregation is equally crucial to enhance their communication and ensure adherence to segregation practices. Infrastructure improvements, such as the availability of separate bins and recycling facilities, must also be made to facilitate successful segregation.

Coordination and instructions from resident welfare associations can bring about community efforts, ensuring that everyone is aligned towards the same goal.

Government mandates, penalties for non-compliance and awareness campaigns can play a pivotal

role in encouraging public participation by creating a sense of responsibility and understanding the collective impact on the environment and climate.

**Behavioural change interventions**

Behavioural change at the level of household and individuals, requires different strategies to overcome existing barriers and facilitators. To begin with, there should be intuitive language with clear and descriptive terms like "organic waste", "kitchen and garden waste", "compostable" for wet waste and "recyclables" for dry waste. This reduces the cognitive load at the time of disposal.

In awareness campaigns, the emphasis should be on connecting segregation practice to personal and immediate goals – for example, disease reduction, greener neighbourhoods, safety of stray animals, local pride, instant compost for residents – compared to long term or intangible ones, such as climate change and recycling.

These campaigns should also highlight the impact of non-segregation on the lives of sanitation workers to instil a sense of accountability and responsibility.

At the community level, recruiting "waste champions" to lead efforts within neighbourhoods can help motivate citizens to contribute to better waste management. They can help organise educational programmes for children, neighbourhood clean-up events, thus fostering shared responsibility.

New social norms could also be brought about by using WhatsApp groups to share simplified information on segregation: thumb rules on what goes in which bins, especially when it comes to difficult items such as paper napkins, dry dals, take away packaging, dry flowers and the like while also creating peer pressure for compliance.

Effective waste segregation requires a collaborative effort. A multifaceted approach that combines community involvement and policy adaptability, and uses behavioural change strategies can contribute to generating a positive impact. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

## Water every other day: Bengaluru is drying up and destruction of lakes is the reason

By: M Raghuram

The gardens of Bengaluru, also known as 'garden city', may soon wilt while its citizens wait for water to trickle out of taps. The city is facing the worst domestic water crisis in history.

Over 30 localities inside the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) will receive water on a rotational basis every alternate day, the residents have been informed. That means, each locality will have to manage without water supply for 24 hours at least. And even on the days a locality does receive water; it won't be for longer than 30-45 minutes. This is particularly concerning as summer has already arrived in the city, and there are at least 75-90 days of peak summer ahead.

While narratives and theories doing the rounds indicate many things, including the alleged highhandedness of the water tanker lobby in the city, scientists point out the phenomenal neglect of the city's water bodies and the total absence of conservation.

The city, up until 1961, had 262 lakes, and the last count taken by the city's environmentalists indicates that there are only 81 left. The rest have been claimed by the real estate business for making housing layouts; the Bengaluru Development Authority and BBMP have been held responsible for levelling over 100 lakes directly and indirectly.

Out of the 81 lakes that are identified as 'as lakes,' only 33 are living just because they are located in zones where land cannot be reclaimed for any activities.

The Dharmambudhi Lake, developed by the rulers of Bengaluru, the Hoysalas, Wodeyars and Kempegowda, for more than 500 years of known history, was the first to go in as early as 1969. It was filled up to hold consumer fairs organised by a political party. Later, it became the Kempegowda interstate bus terminus.

These lakes perished mainly due to real estate development, mining and infrastructure. However, due to the whistle-blowers of the city, some of the lakes were saved, including Nagavara, Halasuru and Hebbal, the largest among the 32 lakes classified as 'living lakes'.

The city is now dependent only on the augmented water source at the Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) reservoir in Srirangapatna, built across River Cauvery, which is about 125 kilometres from the city. However, due to a lax southwestern monsoon in 2023, the Cauvery catchment area did not get enough rain and, consequently, the KRS reservoir got only 75 per cent of its usual inflow.

Even as the citizens are holding demonstrations, the tanker water prices have plummeted to Rs 2,000 for a 12,000 litre tanker, which was just Rs 800-1,000 a fortnight ago. "We have a hunch that the government is playing a big game with us. First, the politicians will make deals with the tanker lobbyists and then direct the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board officials to tune down the water availability to nil for days together so that they approach the tanker business owners. We have spent lakhs of rupees on the water in the last three months ever since our taps ran dry in November," said Hanumanthappa, the resident association leader of Jaimaruthi Nagar extension in Bengaluru South.

ways of moving people. This will necessitate creating the right regulations to grow shared mobility and for public transport to shift away from private vehicles, while also creating the right economic incentives to enable people to shift towards electric mobility.

Urban mobility in the future will be shaped by the advent of new vehicle technologies combined with increased digitalisation and automation.

However, the biggest opportunity lies in the developing world. In these geographies, the cities that will house the next few billions are yet to be built. This new wave of urbanisation will be characterised not just by mega metropolises but also smaller cities that will emerge as non-urban regions transform. Currently, cities with less than 100,000 inhabitants house a third of the world's urban population. This figure is expected to grow to 40 percent by 2050 making these medium-sized cities the fastest growing urban agglomerations.

These developing cities present a ripe opportunity for innovation, sustainable development, and inclusive growth. They offer a blank canvas for urban planners, architects, and policymakers to create environments that prioritise accessibility and quality of life for residents. However, for these cities to achieve their potential, sustainable mobility must be baked into the core planning process with the ultimate goal of meeting transport demand in a cost-effective way, without creating motorised systems that will need to be redesigned again.

The century of the cities is also poised to become the age of innovative mobility systems that can enhance both human well-being and environmental sustainability. However, achieving these new urban systems will require human ingenuity and planning to match the rapid pace of technological advancement. (Courtesy: ORF)

Dasarahalli and Rajarajeshwari Nagar zones in North Bengaluru are the worst affected. "Even though all six stages of the Cauvery pipeline corridor pass through our area just across the Bengaluru Mysuru Infrastructure Corridor, still our areas do not get water regularly. In the far end of Rajarajeshwari Nagar, tap water supply stopped in November 2023 and all dug wells and borewells have also gone dry. We are entirely dependent on the tanker water services," said resident association office bearer Ramachandrappa.

Bengaluru is located at 920 metres above sea level, directing the natural flow of water away from the city and into surrounding valleys. The city receives an average of 920 millimetres of rainfall spread over 60 rainy days annually, nourishing two river basins, the Cauvery and Dakshina Pinakini.

With over 200 lakes and tanks, Bengaluru's landscape faces the challenge of diminishing open wells, urging the need for preservation efforts. Moreover, the proliferation of private borewells, estimated at over 400,000, underscores the critical importance of water management in Bengaluru.

In Bengaluru, the city's lakes rely solely on rainwater and surface runoff from their catchment areas, which are the regions where water collects and flows into the lakes. These lakes are interconnected through a network of stormwater drains called kaluves, which transport excess water from higher to lower-elevation lakes, effectively managing floods and conserving water.

Bengaluru boasts of six lake series, including Yellamallappa Chetty, Varthur, Madavara, Byramangala, Puttenahalli and Hulimavu.

Most lakes in Bengaluru are primarily fed by stormwater through their inlets, but they also receive sewage from leaky pipes and streets. To control water levels, overflow weirs or culverts known as kodis are used, while human-made lakes are equipped with bunds or ridges, to create reservoirs.

Many non-governmental organisations (NGO) working on improving water conservation have opined that community involvement is pivotal in preserving Bangalore's lakes. Examples like Puttenahalli and Kaikondrahalli lakes showcase how urban and traditional communities collaborate with government agencies, forming trusts authorised to maintain these lakes. Organisations like Friends of Lakes Bangalore or One Bengaluru for Lakes facilitate citizen engagement in lake conservation efforts, offering support from awareness campaigns to liaising with authorities. Individuals can contribute to lake restoration efforts by organising events like "Kere Habbu", featuring activities for children, organic food stalls and environmental NGOs discussing water issues, birdwatching, competitions and lake walks.

Regular community activities such as cleaning, gardening and tree planting are encouraged, each lasting no more than an hour, according to locals. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)



## Many in Iran are frustrated by unrest and poor economy; Parliament elections could see a low turnout

**DUBAI, Feb 28:** Iran is holding parliamentary elections this Friday, yet the real question may not be who gets elected but how many people actually turn out to vote. Widespread discontent over the cratering economy, years of mass protests rocking the country, and tensions with the West over Tehran's nuclear programme and Iran's support for Russia in its war on Ukraine have many people quietly saying they won't vote in this election. Officials have urged people to cast ballots but tellingly, no information has been released this year from the state-owned polling centre ISPA about expected turnout — a constant feature of past elections.

Of 21 Iranians interviewed recently by The Associated Press, only five said they would vote. Thirteen said they won't and three said they were undecided. "If I protest about some shortcoming, many police and security agents will try to stop me," said Amin, a 21-year-old university student who gave only his first name for fear of reprisals. "But if I die from hunger on the corner of one of the main streets, they will show no reaction." Over 15,000 candidates are vying for a seat in the 290-member parliament, formally known as the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Terms runs for four years and five seats are reserved for Iran's religious minorities.

Under the law, the parliament has oversight over the executive branch, votes on treaties and handles other issues. In practice, absolute power in Iran rests with its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Hard-liners have controlled the parliament for the past two decades — with chants of "Death to America" often heard from the floor. Under parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, a former Revolutionary Guard general who supported a violent crackdown on Iranian university students in 1999, the legislature pushed forward a bill in 2020 that greatly curtailed

Tehran's cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency. That followed then-President Donald Trump's unilateral withdrawal of America from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018 — an act that sparked years of tensions in the Middle East and saw Iran enrich enough uranium at record-breaking purity to have enough fuel for "several" nuclear weapons if it chose. More recently, the parliament has focused on issues surrounding Iran's mandatory headscarf, or hijab, for women after the 2022 death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody, which sparked nationwide protests.

The protests quickly escalated into calls to overthrow Iran's clerical rulers. A subsequent security crackdown killed over 500 people, with more than 22,000 detained. Calls for an election boycott have spread in recent weeks, including from imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi, a women's right activist, who called them a "sham." "The Islamic Republic, with its ruthless and brutal suppression, the killing of young people on the streets, the executions and the imprisonment and torture of men and women, deserves national sanctions and global disgrace," Mohammadi said in a statement. The boycott calls have put the gov-

ernment under renewed pressure — since its 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's theocracy has based its legitimacy in part on turnout in elections. "For heaven's sakes and in support of the homeland, Islam, the supreme leader and beliefs should come before the ballots," Revolutionary Guard leader Gen. Hossein Salami pleaded recently. He insisted Iran's people "will overcome the will of enemy" and that the vote will go down in records as "another glorious political epic." Though ISPA, the polling agency, conducted election surveys in October, its results have not been made public. Figures from politicians and other media outlets sug-

gest a turnout of around 30 per cent. In the 2021 presidential election that brought hard-liner Ebrahim Raisi to power, the turnout was 49 per cent — the lowest on record for a presidential vote. Millions of ballots were declared void, likely from those who felt obligated to vote but did not want to cast a ballot. The 2019 parliament race saw a 42 per cent turnout. Separately, Iranians will also vote on Friday for members of the country's 88-seat Assembly of Experts, an eight-year term on a panel that will appoint the country's next supreme leader after Khamenei, 84. (AP)

*The offensive has devastated much of northern Gaza, killed nearly 20,000 Palestinians, and driven some 1.9 million people - nearly 85% of the population - from their homes*

## Trump defeats Indian-American Nikki Haley in Michigan primary, Biden wins Democratic primary

**WASHINGTON, Feb 28:** Incumbent US President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump won their respective parties' Michigan's presidential primaries on Tuesday, and the two candidates continue marching toward a likely rematch in the November 2024 race for the White House. Trump easily defeated his main rival, Indian-American Nikki Haley, winning yet another early contest and additional delegates — bringing him one step closer to being able to formally secure the Republican Party's nomination.

When last reports came in, Haley had received 28.9 per cent of the votes as against Trump's 66.4 per cent. The New York Times projected that 77-year-old Trump would sweep the Michigan primary with more than 40 per cent of the votes against 52-year-old Haley.

Biden thanked every Michigander who made their voice heard. "I want to thank every Michigander who made their voice heard today. Exercising the right to vote and participating in our democracy is what makes America great," Biden said in a statement.

"Four years ago, it was Michigan's diverse coalition that came together to reject Donald Trump's MAGA extremism and sent me and Kamala to the White House. Because of Michiganders, we've been able to work hand in hand with Governor Whitmer and the incredible Democratic leaders in Michigan's congressional delegation to deliver enormous progress..." he said.

However, a key feature of the Democratic primary in Michigan, which has a significant Muslim

population, as over 14 per cent of Biden's Democratic voters cast ballots for the "uncommitted" as part of their protest against the 81-year-old president for his handling of the Israel-Palestine war.

"Joe Biden is losing about 20 per cent of the Democratic vote today, and many say it's a sign of his weakness in November. Donald Trump is losing about 35 per cent of the vote. That's a flashing warning sign for Trump in November. Since Trump became president in 2016, he lost Michigan Republicans the state House, state Senate, and Governor's mansion.

What was once a beacon for the conservative cause, the Michigan Republican Party is now fractured and divided," Nikki Haley for President campaign's national spokesperson, Olivia Perez-Cubas, said in a statement after the results came out. "Let this serve as another warning sign that what has happened in Michigan will continue to play out across the country. So as long as Donald Trump is at the top of the ticket, Republicans will keep losing to the socialist left. Our children deserve better," Perez-Cubas said.

In New Hampshire and South Carolina, Haley got about 40 per cent of the votes. Next Tuesday primaries will be held in 21 States. Given the current trend, Trump is expected to emerge as the presumptive nominee of the Republican party by March 2. This will result in a rematch of the 2020 elections: Biden vs Trump.

However, according to The Washington Post, both Trump and Biden are facing internal challenges within the party.



"Trump continues to face a faction of Republicans who refuse to back his candidacy despite his chokehold on the nomination. Biden was confronted with a protest movement urging Democrats to vote 'uncommitted' in the primary over his handling of the Israel-Hamas war. Early returns showed that 'uncommitted' was poised to easily garner more than 10 per cent of the vote statewide," the Politico reported.

While for Biden, the main political threat has come from progressives and like-minded voters, for Trump, the threats have been both political and legal.

"His unbroken swing of early state victories has given him a commanding position in Republican politics. But he remains embroiled in court cases stemming from his business practices and his time in office," he said.

Earlier in the day, the Haley campaign said that

it was going ahead with the Super Tuesday fight. "She's in Michigan today and heading to Super Tuesday states across the country over the next week. We must get it right this election!" said the campaign.

In an interview with CNN, Haley said that she has concerns about both Biden and Trump.

"I have serious concerns about Donald Trump. I have even more concerns about Joe Biden. But I don't think either one should be president, and that's why I'm running. And so I'm going to continue to run as long as Americans say they want a choice, as long as Americans say they want someone to vote for. I'm going to continue to do that," she said.

"And what a blessing it is in America that we can. This is not Russia where you've got a dictator that goes and kills his political opponents. This is America where people can have their voices heard. This is America where you can go and be anything you want to be without anyone getting in the way. This is America that was built on faith, family, and country," Haley told CNN.

"That's what I'm trying to do is get us to remember our purpose, get us to remember who we are as Americans in the first place. Not a divided country, not a divided party, not a country sitting in anger, but one sitting in hope and energy and saying that we're going to do this for our kids. That's what I'm going to keep fighting for. I'm not going to think about what's going to happen 10 days, two months, three months from now," she said in response to a question. (PTT)

## SKorean and US troops will begin major exercises next week in response to NKorean threats



**SEOUL, Feb 28:** South Korean and US troops will begin their expanded annual military drills next week in response to North Korea's evolving nuclear threats, the two countries said on Wednesday, a move that will likely enrage North Korea because it views its rivals' joint training as an invasion rehearsal.

In recent months, North Korea has inflamed animosities on the Korean Peninsula with fiery rhetoric and continued missile tests.

While it's unlikely for North Korea to launch full-blown attacks against South Korea and the US, observers say the North could still stage limited provocations along the tense border with South Korea.

On Wednesday, the South Korea and US militaries jointly announced that the allies will conduct the Freedom Shield exercise, a computer-simulated command post training, and a variety of separate field training, from March 4-14.

Col. Lee, Sung-Jun, a spokesperson for South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the allies' drills are designed to bolster their joint capabilities to prevent North Korea from using its nuclear weapons.

He said the allies are to carry out 48 field exercises this spring, twice the number conducted last year, and that this year's drills would involve air assault, live-firing and bombing training.

"Our military is ready to punish North Korea immediately, strongly and to the end in the event of its provocation, and we'll further strengthen our firm readiness through the upcoming drills," Lee said.

North Korea didn't immediately respond to the drills' announcement. North Korea has reacted to previous major South Korea-US military drills with its own missile tests.

North Korea has sharply intensified its weapons testing activities since 2022 in part of its efforts to expand its nuclear and missile arsenals. This year, the North already conducted six rounds of missile tests — five of them reportedly involving cruise missiles — and other weapons launches.

Experts say North Korea believes a bigger weapons arsenal would allow it to pressure the US and South Korea more effectively to make concessions like sanctions relief when diplomacy resumes. They expect North Korea to ramp up its testing activities and other provocations this year as both the US and South Korea head into major elections.

South Korea and the US have responded to the North's testing spree with expansions of their bilateral military drills and trilateral exercises involving Japan. US and South Korean officials have repeatedly warned that any nuclear attack by North Korea against them would spell the end of the North's government led by Kim Jong Un. (AP)

## Rocket fire reported off Yemen in Red Sea in a new suspected attack by Houthi rebels

**DUBAI, Feb 28:** A rocket exploded late on Tuesday night off the side of a ship traveling through the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen, authorities said, the latest suspected attack to be carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The attack comes as the Houthis continue a series of assaults at sea over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip and as the U.S. and its allies launch airstrikes trying to stop them.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center, which oversees shipping in the Mideast, reported the attack happened about 110 kilometers (70 miles) off the coast of the Houthi-held port city of Hodeida. The rocket exploded several miles off the bow of the vessel, it said.

"The crew and vessel are reported to be safe and are proceeding to next port of call," the UKMTO said.

The private security firm Ambery reported that the vessel targeted appeared to be a Marshall Islands-flagged, Greek-owned bulk carrier in the area at the time. Another ship, a Panama-flagged, Emirati-owned chemical tanker was nearby as well, Ambery said.

The Associated Press could not immediately identify the vessels involved.

The Houthis typically take several hours to claim their assaults and have not yet done so for the assault late Tuesday.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over the Israel-Hamas war. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, and an aid ship later bound for Houthi-controlled territory.

Despite over a month of U.S.-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks. Last week, they severely damaged a ship in a crucial strait and downed an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars. The Houthis insist their attacks will continue until Israel stops its combat operations in the Gaza Strip, which have enraged the wider Arab world and seen the Houthis gain international recognition.

The Houthis, a Zaydi Shiite group, seized Yemen's capital in 2014 and have battled a Saudi-led coalition since 2015. Their Zaydi people ran a 1,000-year kingdom in Yemen up until 1962. (AP)

## Germany and Poland say they're not sending troops to Ukraine as the Kremlin warns of a wider war

**BRUSSELS, Feb 28:** European military heavyweights Germany and Poland affirmed on Tuesday that they would not be sending troops to Ukraine, after reports that some Western countries may be considering doing so as the war with Russia enters its third year.

The head of NATO also said the U.S.-led military alliance has no plans to send troops to Ukraine, after other central European leaders confirmed that they too would not be providing soldiers.

The Kremlin, meanwhile, warned that a direct conflict between NATO and Russia would be inevitable if the alliance sends combat troops. "In this case, we need to talk not about probability, but about the inevitability (of conflict)," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Moscow's warning came a day after French President Emmanuel Macron said that sending in Western ground troops should not be "ruled out" in the future, after hosting a conference of top officials from more than 20 of Ukraine's Western backers. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz appeared to have a different view of what happened in Paris. He said the participants had agreed "that there will be no ground troops, no soldiers on Ukrainian soil who are sent there by European states or NATO states."

Scholz said there was also consensus "that soldiers operating in our countries also are not participating actively in the war themselves."

With Macron increasingly looking iso-

lated and opposition politicians in France furiously critical of his suggestion that ground troops might be considered, the French president's government subsequently sought Tuesday to clarify his comments.

French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said there had been discussions but no consensus at the conference about carrying out de-mining and military training operations in Ukraine, away from the front lines.

"It's not sending troops to wage war against Russia," the minister said.

The idea of sending troops has been taboo, particularly as NATO seeks to avoid being dragged into a wider war with nuclear-armed Russia. Nothing prevents NATO members from joining such an undertaking individually or in groups, but the organization itself would only get involved if all 31 members agree.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told The Associated Press that "NATO allies are providing unprecedented support to Ukraine. We have done that since 2014 and stepped up after the full-scale invasion. But there are no plans for NATO combat troops on the ground in Ukraine."

At a meeting in Prague on Tuesday, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said, "Poland does not plan to send its troops to Ukraine." Prime Minister Petr Fiala of the Czech Republic insisted that his country "certainly doesn't want to send its soldiers."

Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico

has said his government is not planning to propose a deployment, but that some countries were weighing whether to strike bilateral deals to provide troops to help Ukraine fend off the Russian invasion.

Fico did not provide details about which countries or what the troops would do in Ukraine. Macron, too, avoided naming any countries, saying he wanted to maintain "strategic ambiguity" and not tip the West's hand to Russia.

NATO as an alliance provides Ukraine only non-lethal aid and support like medical supplies, uniforms and winter equipment, but some members send weapons and ammunition of their own accord, bilaterally or in groups.

A decision to send troops and keep them deployed long term would require the kind of transport and logistics capabilities that only countries like the U.S., U.K., France, Germany and possibly Italy, Poland or Spain could muster.

While ruling out NATO military action, Stoltenberg told the AP "that this is a war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine, blatantly violating international law. According to international law, Ukraine of course has the right to self-defense, and we have the right to support them in upholding that right."

The conference in Paris was held just after France, Germany and the U.K. each signed 10-year bilateral security agreements with Ukraine as its government works to shore up Western support. (AP)

## A bus accident in southern Mali has left at least 31 people dead

**BAMAKO, Feb 28:** At least 31 people were killed and 10 others injured when a driver lost control of a passenger bus in southern Mali on Tuesday, the country's government announced.

The bus carrying Malians and nationals from the West African subregion was en route to Burkina Faso when it "overtuned," said a statement posted on Mali's Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure's Facebook page.

"The provisional toll is 31 killed on the spot and 10 injured, some of them seriously," the statement said. The accident around 5 p.m. local time in Koumantou south of Bamako.

Accidents involving public transport buses are a frequent occurrence in Mali. On Feb. 19, at least 15 people died and more than 46 were injured in a traffic accident between a public transport bus and a lorry in central Mali. (AP)

## A small drone flies into a damaged Fukushima reactor for the first time to study its melted fuel

**TOKYO, Feb 28:** A drone small enough to fit in one's hand flew inside one of the damaged reactors at the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant on Wednesday in hopes it can examine some of the molten fuel debris in areas where earlier robots failed to reach.

Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings also began releasing the fourth batch of the plant's treated and diluted radioactive wastewater into the sea on Wednesday.

The government and TEPCO, the plant's operator, say the water is safe and the process is being monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency, but the discharges have faced strong opposition by fishing groups, as well as a Chinese ban on Japanese seafood.

A magnitude 9.0 quake and tsunami in March 2011 destroyed the plant's power supply and cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt down. The government and TEPCO plan to remove the massive amount of fatally radioactive melted nuclear fuel that remains inside each reactor — a daunting decommissioning process that's already been delayed for years and mired by technical hurdles and a lack of data.

To help fill in that data, a fleet of four drones were set to fly one at a time into the hardest-hit No. 1 reactor's primary containment vessel.

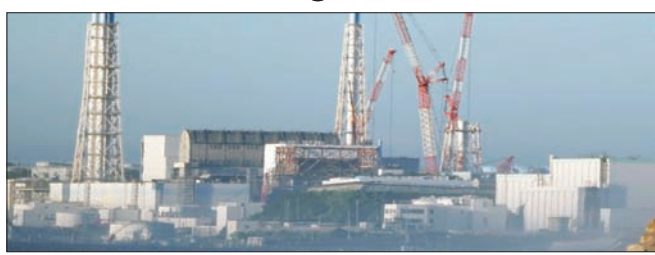
TEPCO has sent a number of probes — including a crawling robot and an underwater vehicle — inside each of the three reactors, but got hindered by debris, high radiation and inability to navigate them through the rubble, though they were able to gather some data in recent years.

In 2015, the first robot to go inside the reactor got stuck on a grate. Some helpful information came from the mission, but the crawling robot had to be abandoned.

Wednesday's drone flight comes after months of preparations and training that began in July at a nearby mockup facility outside of the plant.

The drones, each weighing only 185 grams, are highly maneuverable and the blades hardly stir up dust, making it a popular model for factory safety checks.

It's nearly a square of about 18 centimetres on both sides, 5 centimetres thick, and carries a front-loaded high definition



camera to send live video and a higher-quality images to an operating room.

In part due to battery life, the drone investigation inside of the reactor is limited to a 5-minute flight each.

TEPCO officials said they plan to use the new data to develop technology for future probes as well as a process to remove the melted fuel from the reactor in the coming years. The data will also be used in the in-

vestigation of how exactly the 2011 meltdown occurred.

First, two drones were to inspect the area around the exterior of the main structural support in the vessel, called the pedestal, before deciding if the other two could be sent inside to the area previous probes could not reach.

The pedestal is directly under the reactor's core. Officials hope to film the core's bottom to find out how overheated fuel dripped there in 2011.

About 880 tons of highly radioactive melted nuclear fuel remain inside the three damaged reactors. Critics say the 30- to 40-year cleanup target set by the government and TEPCO for Fukushima Daiichi is overly optimistic. The damage in each reactor is different, and plans need to be formed to accommodate their conditions.

TEPCO's goal is to remove a small amount of melted debris from the least-damaged No. 2 reactor as a test case by the end of March by using a giant robotic arm, but was forced to delay due to difficulty removing a deposit blocking its entry. That months-long postponement comes in addition to its already nearly two-year delay, underscoring the difficulty and uncertainty of the decommissioning process. (AP)



# Manipur commandos hold symbolic protest against attack on officer's home

*Commando units in Imphal West, Imphal East, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Kakching districts stage symbolic arms down protest*

**IMPHAL, Feb 28:** Hundreds of commando personnel of all five districts in the Imphal Valley region on Wednesday held a symbolic 'arms down' protest against the mob attack on the residence of an additional superintendent of police, Amit Kumar Moirangthem and his abduction, officials said.

The police commandos of these districts put down their arms asking for action against Meitei radical group Arambai Tenggol and no hindrance from political executives when the forces act against the outfit, they said.

They are protesting against Tuesday's incident during which a group of Meira Paibis (women volunteer group) and cadres of Arambai Tenggol, a Meitei organisation, stormed into the police officer's residence, abducted him and beat up the personnel guarding him.

The additional SP (operations) was rescued within hours and is currently hospitalised.

The Army had to be called in as fresh tension mounted in Manipur East on Tuesday and four columns of the Assam Rifles were deployed after the senior police officer was abducted.

"Protesting against the attack, the com-



mando personnel of Imphal West district held an arms down protest at their respective complex," an official said.

Those personnel of the commando units in Imphal East, Bishnupur, Thoubal and Kakching districts also followed the move.

"They put down their firearms on the ground in a row as a symbol of protest," he said.

Senior police officials talked to their personnel assuring them that strict action would be taken against the perpetrators.

## Mizoram govt not to increase power tariff in next 5 years



**AIZWAL, Feb 28:** The Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government in Mizoram will not increase power tariffs during the next five years, the state assembly was informed on Wednesday.

State power minister F Rodingiana said the government is making efforts to augment power generation in the state.

"During the five years of the present government, there is no plan to change power tariff for consumers," the minister said.

The ZPM came to power in the state in December last year.

The minister said that Mizo-

ram now has 15 small hydroelectric projects that together generate 38.55 MW of power.

He also said that power generation fluctuates depending on the weather.

Mizoram spends ₹ 33-37 crore a month for purchasing power from outside as the northeastern state requires 156 MW of power during peak hours.

Three hydel electric projects with a total generation capacity of 294 MW and four solar power plants, which can produce 45 MW of power, are in the pipeline. (PTI)

## Congress proposes one-day special assembly session on Manipur crisis



**IMPHAL, Feb 28:** The Congress in Manipur has proposed dedication of at least one day of the assembly session on discussion of the ongoing crisis in the state.

The Manipur assembly session began on Wednesday. The session will have only five sittings.

"There should be a one day special session to discuss the ongoing violence in the state without having any other agenda. Then we can thoroughly discuss the present violence," Manipur Pradesh Con-

gress Committee (MPCC) president, K Meghachandra said on Tuesday.

Addressing the media at the Congress Bhavan in Imphal on Tuesday evening, Meghachandra said that since the assembly would have only five sittings, not much time will be available to discuss the violence that has been plaguing the state for over nine months.

He said that the entire session would be dominated by government's agendas as being the first

session of the year. There would be an address of the Governor besides government tabling the budget.

The government will also introduce some bills during the session. However, Congress MLAs are ready to raise questions related to the ongoing violence whenever there is an opportunity.

He said that the Congress members will take the advantage of question hours, short duration discussions etc.

There were meetings of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) where the strategies to raise the burning issues were discussed.

The MPCC president further urged the government to arrange a live telecast of the session. He said that even though some of the proceedings were telecast in the previous session, it was not done in the last session.

"The session is very important so far as the present violence is concerned. So, let the people understand what is going on in the Assembly session," he said.

MPCC vice presidents, Tilotama Loitongbam, Harehsar Goswami and Vidyabati Senjam and other office bearers of MPCC were also present on the occasion. (NNN)

## Six Myanmar nationals arrested for illegally entering India



**ITANAGAR, Feb 28:** Six Myanmar nationals have been arrested in Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh for illegally entering India, police said on Wednesday.

Anjaw superintendent of police Rike Kamsi said that the six persons were arrested in Yasang village under Walong circle on Tuesday.

During interrogation, the arrested persons claimed that they entered India to collect wild mushrooms, Kamsi said, adding they are civilians hailing from Putao in Myanmar.

Six kg of wild mushrooms and ₹ 68,000 in Indian currency were seized from their possession, the SP added. (PTI)

## Protests in Manipur demanding end of truce with Kuki militants

**IMPHAL, Feb 28:** Sit-in demonstrations staged across the valley districts of strife-hit Manipur on Wednesday demanded abrogation of the Suspension of Operation (SoO) agreement with the Kuki militant groups.

On the same demand, torch rallies were also organized across the valley districts with women clad in red cloths participating in the rallies.

The demonstrations also raised demands like implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and withdrawal of "double standard" Assam Rifles from Manipur.

Besides the demonstrations staged in the localities and villages, vendors of almost all the major markets across the valley also suspended their business for a few hours during the day and staged the sit-in demonstration in their respective markets.

Vendors of all-women-run markets in Imphal's Khwairamband Keithel also joined the demonstration, suspending their business transaction for a few hours.

The demonstrations were staged in response to a call given by Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), the apex body pressing the state government and the Centre to end the SoO agreement with the Kuki militant group.

The COCOMI has been pressing the Centre not to extend the suspension of operation (SoO) truce with the Kuki militant groups, which is due to expire on Thursday.

As a part of the campaign, the committee had on Tuesday appealed to all womenfolk to take out a rally in all villages and localities by donning red clothes from 7 pm onwards.

While giving the call, COCOMI coordinator Somorendro Thokchom had told the media that the Centre still seems to be not taking the situation in Manipur seriously.

He alleged that the Kuki militants are actively taking part in the attack against Meiteis by violating the ground rules of the SoO pact and it has become an open secret. (NNN)

## Myanmar national among 4 held in Mizoram, heroin, ganja seized

**AIZWAL, Feb 28:** At least four persons, including a Myanmar national, were arrested for possessing heroin and ganja worth ₹ 44.3 lakh in two separate operations in east Mizoram's Champhai district, an Assam Rifles statement said on Wednesday.

Acting on a tip-off, Assam Rifles personnel carried out an op-

eration at Zokhawthar on the Mizoram-Myanmar border on February 26 and seized 39 grams of heroin worth ₹ 27.3 lakh from the possession of three drug peddlers, the statement said.

In another operation, the paramilitary force seized 24 grams of heroin worth ₹ 12

lakh and 5 kg of ganja valued at ₹ 5 lakh at Vaikhawlang in Champhai district on the same day, and arrested a Myanmar national for possessing the contraband, it said.

The seized contraband and the four accused were handed over to state police, the statement added. (PTI)

## Workshop on solar-based storages held in Kohima

**DIMAPUR, Feb 28:** A workshop on the uses and benefits of solar-based storages for the remote areas of Nagaland was organized by the North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited under the DoNER ministry with support from the Nagaland directorate of horticulture in Kohima.

In the opening session, director of the state horticulture department, Meyasashi, highlighted the evolution of horticulture in Nagaland over the past 20 years. He noted the significant increase in surplus production of items such as pineapple, apples, oranges, bananas, and vegetables due to various initiatives and schemes implemented by the central and state government. He emphasized the need to address the challenges of marketing and preservation faced by the surplus production, particularly in the context of the perishable nature of fruits and vegetables.

The director also spoke on the importance of post-harvest management interventions and announced the department's focus on exploring different technologies suitable for Nagaland to reduce post-harvest losses. He introduced the concept of utilizing solar energy for cold storage, water pumps, fruit dryers, etc., considering the frequent power fluctuations in remote areas of the state. During the technical session, business officials from Ecozen Cold Storage Solutions, Abhirup Basak and Rohit Bhartwaj, elucidated the use and benefits of solar-based cold storage systems. Also, Anjal Kr Dutta, deputy general manager of Agribusiness at NERAMAC, conducted a special session on post-harvest management.

The workshop saw participation from farmers across the state, officials from the horticulture department and representatives from the North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited, serving as resource persons. (NNN)

## 219 people killed in Manipur violence: Guv Anusuiya Uikey

**IMPHAL, Feb 28:** Manipur Governor Anusuiya Uikey on Wednesday said that 219 people have been killed in ethnic violence in the state since May last year.

Addressing the Manipur Assembly during the commencement of the budget session, she said that 198 companies of central armed police forces and 140 army columns have been deployed along with state forces to maintain law and order in the northeastern state.

She condoled the deaths of 219 people in the ethnic strife and said that an ex-gratia amount of Rs 10 lakh each is being disbursed to the next of kin of the deceased after due verification. The mortal remains of the victims have been handed over to their kin and their last rites have been performed, Uikey said.

The Governor exuded confidence that all stakeholders and people in general will contribute towards the restoration of peaceful coexistence and brotherhood among various communities of the state.

"Manipur has always been and will continue to be a multi-cultural state that respects the diverse identities of the state. The government believes in taking all the people along, irrespective of their identity, in its path of development," she said.

"The state government has been working tirelessly under challenging circumstances to address various complex issues related to the present law and order situation following the violence that started on May 3, 2023," she said.

"Within the first few days (of the violence), evacuation of stranded people on both sides of the conflict was taken up on a war footing. Manipur State Transport Services transported over 4,000 students and stranded civilians to safer places," the governor said.

She said that pre-fabricated houses have been built for displaced people living in relief camps and the

government has also formulated a scheme for the construction and repair of permanent houses that were damaged during the violence.

"Basic analysis of damage assessment has been completed," she said. The Governor said that students staying in relief camps have been linked to nearby schools.

She said that a commission of inquiry chaired by a former chief justice of the high court was constituted by the Centre to investigate the facts that led to the genesis of the present situation.

A peace committee has also been constituted to help establish peace and harmony among various ethnic groups, Uikey said.

"The government is leaving no stone unturned to ensure that justice is delivered to our sisters both in the hills and the valley, who were victims of sexual violence," she said.

Uikey said that the government has handed over 29 cases to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and one to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for independent and transparent probe.

She said that a peace agreement has been signed with the militant outfit United National Liberation Front (UNLF), "which is anticipated to usher in a new era of peace", and encouraged other armed groups to participate in the peace process. On the Centre's move to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with neighbouring Myanmar, she said the decision was taken keeping in mind India's internal security and demographic structure of the northeastern states.

Later, the House condoled the deaths of former Governor P B Acharya, former secretary of Manipur assembly, Ningthoujam Hera Singh, and 10 former members, and observed a two-minute silence as a mark of respect to the departed souls. The budget session of the assembly will continue till March 5. (PTI)

## Arunachal Guv appeals people to vote

**ITANAGAR, Feb 28:** Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) KT Parnaik on Wednesday received his Elector's Photo Identity Card (EPIC) from the state election officials here.

After receiving the card, the governor said voting is a fundamental right which must be exercised by all responsible citizens.

"It is a way to safeguard people's rights and freedom by ensuring that everyone has a voice in the political process," he said.

Parnaik said voting is the cornerstone of democracy and it is essential for ensuring that governments are accountable, responsive, and reflective of the will of the people.

"It is a way for citizens to have a say in shaping the laws and regulations that govern society. Moreover, it is a way for people to feel connected to their communities and have a sense of ownership over the decisions that affect their lives," he added. (PTI)

## Breakthrough of tunnel in Sivok - Rangpo rail project achieved

*Sivok-Rangpo rail link project to connect Sikkim via railways for first time*

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 28:** In a major milestone, the longest tunnel, T-01 of the Adit section of the Sivok - Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP) located in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, has achieved a breakthrough.

With the breakthrough of the tunnel measuring 4224 meters long on Tuesday, mining activities have been successfully accomplished in all the Adit tunnels of this project.

The length of the main tunnel of T-01 is 4224 meters, along with an evacuation tunnel measuring 855 meters situated near the Coronation Bridge in Darjeeling district. The main tunnel traverses through vulnerable and challenging geological and seismic conditions of the Younger Himalayas. Like all other tunnels in the SRRP, to counter vulnerability of the



ground mass, the latest and most sophisticated tunneling technology, i.e., New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) has been used here.

The Sivok - Rangpo new rail link project connecting Sivok in West Bengal and Rangpo in

Dedicated assistance booths to provide support and guidance on crucial matters including healthcare, pension anomalies and ECHS Polyclinic services were established in the rally which, also included a comprehensive range of facilities to address the unique needs and concerns of ESM attending the event. Furthermore, medical specialists and dental specialists from the Army and district civil hospital organized a medical camp to provide medical assistance and provision of medicines to the rally attendees.

Veterans, Veer Naris interacted with the GOC, Red

Shield Division. The GOC conveyed gratitude to the veterans and their families for their sacrifices and services to the nation. He also appreciated the yeomen service by the ESM community to Indian Army during the prevalent security situation in Manipur. He also assured all participants of expeditious redressal of their issues.

Indian Army is committed to ensure that issues of veterans, Veer Naris and war widows, particularly in times crisis in the region are addressed in time bound manner despite the challenges posed by the present situation.

alignment is passing through tunnels. 91.59 per cent of the tunneling work has already been completed.

At present, the final lining has been completed in tunnel T-14 and T-9 and is under progress in tunnel T-2, T-3, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-10, T-11 and T-12. A total of 10.89 km lining has been completed till date. Work in all sections is being carried out round the clock.

This is one of the most prestigious ongoing national projects in India and on completion of this project, Sikkim will be connected via railways for the first time. The rail network, on its completion is aimed to provide alternate connectivity to the state of Sikkim. At present all the activities related to construction of tunnels, bridges and station yards are going on war footing for early completion of the project.



# Himachal crisis: Minister Vikramaditya Singh resigns from Sukhu cabinet, Speaker suspends 15 BJP MLAs

Congress top brass in damage control to save Himachal govt

**SHIMLA/NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** The Congress on Wednesday scrambled to save its government in Himachal Pradesh, amid dramatic developments that included the resignation of high-profile minister Vikramaditya Singh and the suspension of 15 BJP MLAs by the Speaker.

The crisis was triggered by Tuesday's cross-voting by six Congress MLAs in the Rajya Sabha election for the lone seat from Himachal Pradesh.

The suspended BJP MLAs, which included the leader of the opposition Jai Ram Thakur, stayed put in the House for a long time -- in an apparent bid to stop the House from passing Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu government's Budget through voice vote.

The BJP wanted voting on the Budget, which they felt would reveal that the Congress has lost its majority in the state assembly.

But in the afternoon, the crisis was staved off for now as the Finance Bill was passed by voice vote with no Bharatiya Janata Party member being present. Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania then adjourned the House sine die.

Congress stalwart Abhishek Manu Singhvi was defeated by BJP's Harsh Mahajan Tuesday through a draw of lots, after the two candidates bagged 34 votes each.

The result meant that the Congress which had stormed into power in the state just 14 months back, winning 40 seats in the assembly, had failed to reach the halfway mark. The Budget was still pending in the House and the possibility of the opposition BJP bringing a no-confidence



motion then loomed.

The BJP won 25 seats in the House of 68 in 2022. There are three independent MLAs, which were believed to be with the ruling Congress till the cross-voting crisis erupted.

Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur took a delegation to Raj Bhavan around 7.30 am Wednesday, asking Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla to ensure that the Finance Bill was passed only through a division.

In Delhi, the Congress mounted a damage control exercise to stop the possible loss of a party-ruled state just weeks ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge despatched three observers -- Bhupesh Baghel, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and D K Shivakumar -- to Shimla, and the party indicated that it could take some "tough steps".

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said Kharge has asked the observers and AICC in-charge for the state Rajeev Shukla to speak to all MLAs, including those who are disgruntled, and submit a comprehensive report to him soon.

"The Congress will not hesitate to take some tough steps as the party is our priority and will not let the people's mandate be

betrayed in Himachal Pradesh," Ramesh told reporters in Delhi.

Earlier in the morning, Himachal Pradesh Public Works Minister Vikramaditya Singh quit the council of ministers, sending his resignation letter to the chief ministers and the Governor.

Singh, whose mother is Himachal Congress president Pratibha Singh, said, "There have been attempts to humiliate and undermine me from some quarters and in spite of reservations, I supported the government." He is the son of Virbhadra Singh, a former chief minister who died in 2021.

The family has in the past thrown hints that Virbhadra Singh's legacy has not been honoured by the party. Pratibha Singh has also expressed disgruntlement with the manner in which Sukhu has run the state.

Vikramaditya Singh said the 2022 Congress campaign was run in his father's name. "There was no poster, or hoarding or banner which did not carry his picture," he said.

But after the victory when the matter of putting up his statue came up, the government failed to decide the location. "It is not a political but an emotional thing for a son," he said.

"The Congress party had made promises to the people and we owe the responsibility to fulfil those promises and I would decide my future course of action after consulting my supporters," he added.

In the assembly, there was chaos when the House met in the morning with passing the Budget on its list of business for the day. Speaker Pathania suspended 15 BJP

MLAs, including Jai Ram Thakur.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan moved the motion, seeking their suspension for allegedly disrespecting the Speaker. The motion was adopted by voice vote.

The BJP members, however, refused to leave. The Speaker then adjourned the House till 12 pm.

Apart from Thakur, the suspended MLAs are Vipin Parmar, Vinod Kumar, Hans Raj, Janak Raj, Balbir Verma, Trilok Jamwal, Deep Raj, Surinder Shouri, Purn Thakur, Inder Singh Gandhi, Dilip Thakur, Randhir Sharma, Lokender Kumar and Ranvir Singh.

"We are apprehensive that Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania might suspend the BJP MLAs so that the Budget can be passed in the Vidhan Sabha," Thakur had told reporters earlier.

He said the Rajya Sabha election had made it clear that the Congress government was in a minority and demanded the resignation of CM Sukhu.

A group of six Congress and three independent MLAs, who had spent Tuesday night at a guesthouse at Panchkula in BJP-run Haryana after voting against the Congress candidate, too were back in the House.

They were flown back on a helicopter.

As these MLAs entered the House, BJP members greeted them by thumping their desks. They also raised the slogan, "Jai Shri Ram, Ban Gaya Kaam".

On Tuesday, Sukhu had claimed that the MLAs had been "abducted" by the Haryana Police and the CRPF. (PTI)



**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** The Congress top brass on Wednesday rushed former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and DK Shivakumar to Shimla to parley with members of the party which is facing loss of support and risks losing power in the state.

Sources said Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge is learnt to have spoken to former party chief Rahul Gandhi as also general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on the Himachal developments.

Karnataka deputy chief minister Shivakumar decried BJP and called its tactics "worrysome" for democracy.

"As per the directions of the Congress high command, I am reaching #HimachalPradesh. Also there is absolutely no need to indulge in any hearsay, as I am confident that Congress Party legislators will be loyal to the party and stay put with the mandate that has been accorded to them."

"However, what should be questioned and worrisome is the extremes to which BJP is going in terms of acquiring power, deliberately attempting to crush democracy and public mandate in the process," Shivakumar said in a post on X.

Hours after six Congress MLAs voted in favour of the BJP candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls in Himachal Pradesh, Kharge swung into action to pacify the disgruntled lawmakers and sent Hooda and Shivakumar to the state. They are expected to reach Himachal Pradesh soon.

They have been asked to engage with the disgruntled MLAs, including six MLAs, who are learnt to be "disappointed" with the working style of Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and are seeking his replacement.

The Congress government in the state faces an existential crisis after six MLAs crossed sides and are learnt to be in touch with the BJP.

Adding Congress' woes, former state chief minister Virbhadra Singh's son Vikramaditya Singh also announced his resignation from the cabinet and said he has already spoken to Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

Meanwhile, HP Vidhan Sabha Speaker suspended 15 BJP MLAs for misbehaviour and adjourned the house.

The state budget is pending approval in the assembly and the BJP, with the help of Congress rebels, is ensuring that the budget is not passed and is seeking a division of votes.

In a stunning upset for the ruling Congress in Himachal Pradesh, the BJP on Tuesday won the state's lone Rajya Sabha seat with its candidate Harsh Mahajan defeating Congress stalwart Abhishek Manu Singhvi and apparently set the stage for a no-trust motion in the assembly.

The contest tied with both the Congress and the BJP candidates getting 34 votes, indicating that at least six Congress MLAs voted against the party. The result was then declared on the basis of a draw of lots, officials said.

In the 68-member Himachal Pradesh Assembly, the Congress has 40 MLAs while the BJP has 25 legislators. The remaining three seats are held by independents. (PTI)

## Cong-Left allies in different states but oppose each other in Kerala: Jairam

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** With the CPI declaring Annie Raja its candidate from Kerala's Wayanad, the Congress Wednesday said it is in alliance with the Left in different states but they have always and will continue to oppose each other electorally in Kerala.

The Congress's assertion came after Annie Raja, wife of CPI general secretary D Raja, was nominated to contest from the pivotal Wayanad constituency, a seat presently held by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Asked about Annie Raja's candidature, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh told reporters, "The Left parties are very much part of the INDIA group. It has always been understood that this does not preclude group partners from contesting

against each other in different states especially Kerala."

"The Congress and the Left are allies in different states but in Kerala we have always and will continue to oppose each other electorally," he asserted.

Asked whether Rahul Gandhi would contest against her in Wayanad, Annie Raja had said the decision of each party is their prerogative and she cannot comment on anything based on speculation.

The Congress party is yet to announce their candidate in the constituency.

The Communist Party of India (CPI), the second-largest coalition partner in Kerala's ruling Left Democratic Front, has announced the names of its candidates for four crucial seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. (PTI)

## Law panel may propose simultaneous polls in 2029, adding chapter in Constitution

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** The Law Commission is likely to recommend adding a new chapter to the Constitution on 'one nation, one election' and holding the gigantic democratic exercise of simultaneous polls for Lok Sabha, state assemblies and local bodies across the country by mid-2029, sources said on Wednesday.

The Commission, under Justice (retd) Ritu Raj Awasthi, would recommend an amendment to the Constitution to add the "new chapter or part" on simultaneous elections, the sources said.

The panel would also recommend synchronising the terms of legislative assemblies in "three phases" in the next five years so that the first simultaneous polls could be held in May-June 2029 when elections for the 19th Lok Sabha are due.

The new chapter in the Constitution would include issues related to "simultaneous election", "sustainability of simultaneous elections" and "common electoral roll" for Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, panchayats and municipalities so that the three-tier simultaneous polls could be held together "in one go", they explained.

The new chapter being recommended will have power of non-extant to override other provisions in the Constitution dealing with terms of assemblies.

The five-year period in which the terms of assemblies will be synchronised will be spread over three phases. The Commission would recommend that the first phase may deal with state assemblies whose period will have to be curtailed by a few months -- three

or six months.

In case a government falls due to no confidence or if there is a hung House, the Commission would recommend constitution of a "unity government" with representatives from various political parties.

In case the unity government formula does not work, the law panel would recommend holding fresh elections for the remainder of the term of the House.

"Suppose fresh elections are called for and the government still has three years, then polls should be for the remainder of the term -- three years -- to ensure sustainability," a source explained.

Besides the Law Commission, a high-level committee under former president Ram Nath Kovind is also working on a report on how simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha,

state legislative assemblies, municipalities and panchayats can be held by tweaking the Constitution and the existing legal framework.

Along with the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, expected in April-May this year, elections for at least five assemblies are likely to take place, while state polls for Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand are expected later this year.

Bihar and Delhi are scheduled for assembly polls next year, while Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala are scheduled for 2026, and Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Manipur in 2027.

As many as nine states may have assembly polls scheduled for 2028 -- Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Karnataka, Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana. (PTI)

## CBI summons Akhilesh Yadav today in illegal mining case

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** The CBI has summoned Samajwadi Party president and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav as a witness for questioning on Thursday in illegal mining cases, five years after registering the case.

In a notice issued under section 160 of CrPC, the agency asked him to appear before it on February 29 in connection with the case registered in 2019, officials said.

The section allows a police officer to summon witnesses in a probe.

The case pertains to the issuance of mining leases in alleged violation of e-tendering process. The Allahabad High Court had ordered the probe.

It is alleged that public servants allowed illegal mining during 2012-16, when Yadav was chief minister, and illegally renewed licences despite a ban by the National Green Tribunal on mining.

It is alleged that the officers allowed theft of minerals, extorted money from lease-holders and drivers. The CBI had filed seven preliminary enquiries in 2016 on the directions of the Allahabad High Court to probe the case of illegal mining of minor minerals.

The agency had alleged that the then chief minister Akhilesh Yadav's office had cleared 13 projects in a single day, officials said.

They had said Yadav, who also held the mining portfolio for some time, had cleared 14 leases, of which 13 were cleared on February 17, 2013, in violation of e-tendering process.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) claimed that on February 17, 2013, the leases were granted by the district magistrate of Hamirpur, B Chandrakala, after getting approval from the chief minister's office in violation of its 2012 e-tender

policy, which was ratified by the Allahabad High Court on January 29 that year.

The CBI had carried out searches at 14 locations in January 2019 in connection with its FIR against 11 people, including IAS officer B Chandrakala, Samajwadi Party MLC Ramesh Kumar Mishra and Sanjay Dixit (who unsuccessfully contested the 2017 assembly election on a BSP ticket) to probe the alleged illegal mining of minor minerals in Hamirpur district during 2012-16.

Yadav, who was the chief minister of the state between 2012 and 2017, held the mining portfolio during 2012-13 apparently bringing his role under scanner, according to the FIR.

He was succeeded by Gayatri Prajapati, who took charge as mining minister in 2013 and was arrested in 2017 following a complaint of rape by a woman residing in Chitrakoot. (PTI)

## Allegations of pro-Pakistan slogan: Karnataka CM says strict action if found true

**BENGALURU, Feb 28:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Wednesday serious action would be taken against those who allegedly raised 'Pakistan zindabad' slogan inside the 'Vidhana Soudha' if the investigation found the charge to be true.

When Congress workers were celebrating Syed Naseer Hussain's victory in the Rajya Sabha elections here on Tuesday night, it is alleged, some people shouted 'Pakistan zindabad' slogan.

The BJP lodged a police complaint on the issue, and staged protests in several parts of the State, including Belagavi, Chitradurga and Mandya, on Wednesday, condemning the Congress government.

Reacting to the allegation, Siddaramaiah said there is no question of sparing anyone.

"It is not only allegation by BJP, it is also allegation by media", he said referring to the charge that "Pakistan zindabad" slogan was heard after Hussain was declared winner at "Vidhana Soudha".

"If the FSL (Forensic Science Laboratory) report proves that the slogan raised in favour of Pakistan is true, serious action will be taken in this regard. There is no question of protecting those who raised slogans in favour of Pakistan," the chief minister told reporters.

"We have sent the voice report to the FSL. When the

report comes, if it's true that somebody has made a slogan that 'Pakistan zindabad' such a person will be punished seriously", Siddaramaiah said.

"If somebody has raised such a slogan, there is no question of sparing them. If it is true we will take strict action, serious action", he further added.

On the alleged incident taking place in Vidhana Soudha, the seat of state legislature and secretariat, he said: "What difference will it make to those who want to raise slogans?"

Union parliamentary affairs minister Pralhad Joshi warned that a statewide agitation will be launched if the accused are not arrested.

"Instead of condemning the incident, Naseer Hussain is trying to mislead people, saying that somebody is spreading false information, which is more dangerous," Joshi told reporters in Hubballi in north Karnataka.

The minister sought to know the "take" of the Congress president M Mallikarjun Kharge and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on this incident "because Hussain is the 'Shishya' of Kharge".

"I ask the state home minister Dr G Parameshwara to take a serious note of it, otherwise the BJP will launch a statewide agitation," Joshi said. (PTI)

## PM Modi inaugurates projects, lays foundation stone for new ISRO launch complex in TN

**THOOTHUKUDI (TN), Feb 28:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth about ₹ 17,300 crore here and castigated the earlier UPA regime for not "bothering" about Tamil Nadu's progress.

The state is writing a 'new chapter of progress,' and due to the Central government's efforts, modern connectivity in Tamil Nadu is 'on a new high', Modi said after inaugurating the projects.

In a veiled reference to the ruling DMK, he alleged that though newspapers and TV channels wanted to highlight Centre's such efforts "the regime here won't allow them to do so."

"But we won't desist from development work," Modi asserted.

DMK Lok Sabha MP, Kanimozhi and Tamil Nadu PWD Minister EV Velu were on the dais.

Launching India's first indigenous green hydrogen waterway vessel here, Modi said increasing connectivity due to the consistent efforts of the Central Government has enhanced 'ease of living' in Tamil Nadu. Development of maritime



sector also means development of a state like TN. The new projects are an important part of the roadmap for a developed India, he said.

"Whatever I am saying belongs neither to any political ideology nor to my own ideology, it only belongs to development." Apparently targeting the DMK-Congress and pointing to a slew of development projects launched, he said: "I need to tell a truth to people of Tamil Nadu and the rest of the nation. Truth is bitter but it needs to be told...all these projects that I have brought, they were demands of locals for decades."

In an indirect reference to the DMK, he said the Tamil Nadu's ruling party shared power at the Centre during the UPA

regime. However, they were not 'bothered about your progress.' All the development initiatives have been delivered by the 'sevak,' he said in a reference to himself.

Modern connectivity in Tamil Nadu has touched newer heights.

"In the last 10 years, rail infrastructure to the tune of 1,300 km has been developed in Tamil Nadu. Also, 2,000 km of railway lines have been electrified in the same period." Hundreds of flyovers and underpasses have developed for the ease of railways passengers. Also, all modern amenities have been ensured in railway stations. The country is working with 'whole of government' approach.

Railways, highways and waterways might seem different, but all departments have one common objective of ensuring better connectivity, facilities and facilitating better opportunities for industries in Tamil Nadu, the PM noted.

"Today, Bharat's first hydrogen fuel ferry has been launched. This ferry will soon be operating in Kashi's Ganga river also. This, in a way, is a great present from Tamil Nadu's people to the people of Kashi," Modi added. (PTI)

No. EE/MSL-11/NIT/2017-18/Tech/218

Date 28/02/2024

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable Court fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five only. With a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the registered Contractors of Class-III and above category under PWD (Roads Department Assam and Bodoland Territorial Council) according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the work as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00PM on 08/03/2024 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.15 PM.

| Sl. No. | Name of work  | Approximate Tender Value | (Earnest Money Deposit)                   | Cost of Tender Paper | Time of Completion of work                       |
|---------|---|--------------------------|---|----------------------|--|
| 1       | 2   | 3                        | 4   | 5                    | 6  |
| 1       | Construction of Slab Culvert on West Bhutanakuti to Modhupur Link Road under BADP for the 2022-23 | Rs. 14,00,000.00         | (2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category) | Rs. 400.00           | 3 (three) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O. |

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up to 4.30 PM on all working days on 01/03/2024 & 02/03/2024 in the office of the undersigned on submission an application with payment in the form of Bank Draft duly pledged to the undersigned. The Contractors has to submit 2% in case of General and 1% in case of Reserved category as earnest money in the form of FDR/CDR/BC under any Nationalised Bank duly pledged in favour of the undersigned at the time of submission of Tender paper. The Contractor should submitted attested copy of Registration Certificate for the year 2023-24, PAN Card, latest clearance certificate of Income Tax and Sales Tax, GST along with the tenders. In case the office remain closed on day of the tender receiving/opening the same will be received/opened on the next working day.

**N.B.:-**

- Date of receiving application for Tender documents : - 01/03/2024 & 02/03/2024.
- Date of issue of Tender Paper : - 04/03/2024 (up to 4.30 PM)
- Date of receiving of Tender Paper 08/03/2024 (up to 2.00 PM)
- Date of opening of Tender Paper 08/03/2024 (at 2.15 PM)
- Place of opening Tender Paper : - Office of the E.E, PWD Mushalpur (R&B) Division, Mushalpur.

Sd/- (Pulak Das), Executive Engineer,

Mushalpur PWD (R&B) Division, Mushalpur

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1488



# Record 3,300 kg narcotics seized from boat off Gujarat coast; 5 foreigners arrested

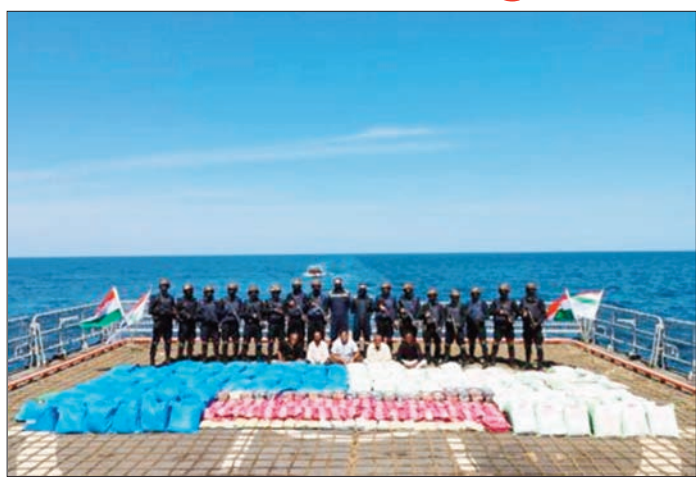
**PORBANDAR/ NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** Indian agencies Wednesday made their highest-ever drugs bust from the sea as they seized 3,300 kg narcotics, which sailed from an Iranian port, off the Gujarat coast and arrested five foreigners from a dhow.

Home minister Amit Shah called the joint operation by the Navy, Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and the Gujarat Police a "historic success" and a testament of his government's "unwavering commitment to making our nation drug-free".

The unregistered fishing boat was intercepted on Tuesday morning at the Arabian Sea from point about 60 nautical miles from the Indian coast and along the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). The Navy deployed its P81 long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft and marine commandos onboard a warship and helicopters.

Almost 3,300 kg of contraband that includes 3,110 kg charas or Hashish, 158.3 kg of crystal Methamphetamine and 24.6 kg of suspected heroin have been recovered from packets that bore the stamp of 'Ras Awad Gosh Co, produce of Pakistan', the NCB said.

The source of the drugs is found to be the Chabahar Port in Iran, the agency said.



NCB director general S N Pradhan told reporters during a press conference in Delhi that the cache could be estimated to be worth anything between ₹ 1,300- ₹ 2,000 crore in the international market.

"This is the biggest offshore narcotics seizure made in the country till date. We have seen that drugs smuggling has increased through the maritime route over the last few years and hence we are jointly working with other government agencies like the Navy, Coast Guard, Customs etc. to intercept such activities."

"The smugglers and drugs operators use the Arabian Sea to exploit the Indian coastline that is

vulnerable. It is part of the grand design to destabilise the country using drugs," Pradhan said.

The last big seizure from the high seas was of 2,500 kg by the NCB and the Navy off the Kerala coast in May, 2023.

NCB deputy director general (operations) Gyaneshwar Singh said the fishing boat has been brought to Porbandar and the five nationals who were onboard have been arrested.

"They could either be Pakistani or Iranians. However, we have recovered no IDs from them. A Thiruvananthapuram satellite phone and four mobilephones have been seized from these men," Singh said.

The DDG said the drugs pack-

ets had the name of a Pakistani food company and hence they "suspect" the hand of that country in mobilising this cache whose destination was being probed.

The traffickers onboard vessels carrying drugs keep in touch with buyers on the land and once they strike a deal, the consignment can land anywhere upto the southern-most tip of India, the NCB officials said.

DDG Singh said this operation was codenamed 'Sagarmanthan-1' and the joint teams have been working on inputs for the "last few weeks".

"This seizure of drugs is by far the largest in terms of quantity, & was possible through collaborative efforts of #IndianNavy's #missiondeployed assets with the NCB," the Navy said in a post on X.

The NCB DG said combating the drugs trafficking was a task as this stockpile has grown in Afghanistan post the installation of a new government there even as Myanmar (on India's eastern side) was a record supplier.

Home minister Shah, in his post on X, said pursuing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a drugs-free Bharat, the agencies have achieved the grand success of making the biggest offshore seizure of drugs in the nation. (PTI)

# Bihar Congress seeks disqualification of two defectors from assembly

**PATNA, Feb 28:** A day after two MLAs of the Congress in Bihar crossed over to the NDA, the party on Wednesday sought their disqualification from the state assembly.

State Congress president Akhilesh Prasad Singh led a party delegation that met Speaker Nand Kishor Yadav and sought disqualification of Siddharth Saurav and Murari Gautam, both of whom sat beside the ruling coalition members in the assembly on Tuesday.

Talking to reporters later, Singh said, "The BJP is misusing its power to offer inducements, and also issue threats through agencies like CBI and ED. We deplore the poaching of our MLAs, one of whom, Murari Gautam, was till recently a minister."

Notably, the Congress ceased to share power in Bihar last month when chief minister Nitish Kumar, who heads the JD(U), made an abrupt return to the NDA.

The state Congress president said the conduct of the two MLAs, was tantamount to "giving up the membership of their party", which violated the anti-defection law.

"The Speaker has said that he will study our representation and take a decision as per rules," added the state Congress chief, who, however, bristled at suggestions that his party could be hit by more defections in the near future.

"You are speculating on the

basis of the absence of some of our members in the House. You should pay attention to an even larger number of BJP MLAs remaining absent from today's assembly session," Singh shot back.

Earlier, Congress legislative party leader Shakil Ahmed Khan said that both MLAs have also been "stripped of the party's primary membership".

Khan also termed the two MLAs as "gaddar" (traitors), likening them to Mir Jafar, the infamous military commander of Bengal who connived with the British during the Battle of Plassey to become the Nawab.

The two Congress MLAs had switched sides along with Sangita Kumari of the RJD. The trio has kept mum over future course of action and none of them was present inside the House during the pre-lunch session on Wednesday.

However, their felicitation inside the assembly premises on Tuesday by deputy chief minister Samrat Choudhary, who is also the state BJP president, is being seen as an obvious signal that they would be joining the saffron party.

Meanwhile, RJD MP and national spokesperson Manoj Jha, whose party has lost four of its MLAs to the NDA camp, said, "We will definitely seek disqualification. I wonder how the Speaker is allowing this to happen on the floor of the House."

Notably, three RJD MLAs -- Chetan Anand, Neelam Devi and Prahlad Yadav -- were allotted seats beside the ruling coalition members a fortnight ago when they also voted against senior party leader Awadh Bihari Chaudhary who got voted out as the Speaker in a no-confidence motion.

Jha also alleged that there has been a groundswell of support for RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, who is on a state-wide tour following the loss of the deputy CM's post as a result of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's abrupt return to the NDA.

He alleged this public support has rattled the BJP which is now taking recourse to the use of money power.

"But they do not realise that the RJD has produced thousands of MLAs since it came into being and cannot be cowed down by such antics," he said.

The ruling NDA at present has 134 MLAs, including the ones accused of defection. The strength of the Mahagathbandhan, which includes RJD, Congress and three Left parties, has dwindled to 108.

The RJD has also lost the status of the single-largest party, with its effective strength falling to 75, three less than that of the BJP even if the defectors are not added to the latter's tally.

The effective strength of the Congress has been reduced to 17. (PTI)

# 'Zero fatality corridor': Crash deaths down by 58.3% on Mumbai-Pune E-way since 2016, says report



**MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** The "zero fatality corridor" initiative has led to a 58.3 per cent reduction in road crash fatalities on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway since 2016 and 32 per cent since 2022, according to a report.

Describing the reduction as "unprecedented", the report stated that this marks a "significant stride towards a safer and more secure roadway".

"Once infamous for recording 151 deaths in 2016, roughly three deaths every 2 km, compared to the 2016 national average of one death per 2 km, the expressway earned the distinction of being one of the deadliest expressways in the country," it stated.

Since the launch of the "zero fatality corridor" initiative for the Mumbai-Pune Expressway (MPEW) in 2016, there has been a marked decline in road crash deaths, stated the report on the project, a joint effort of the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC), the Maharashtra Highway Police (HSP), the Maharashtra Motor Vehicle Department and the SaveLIFE Foundation.

The initiative, it stated, focused on comprehensive interventions spanning the 5Es of Road Safety -- Enactment, Engineering, Enforcement, Emergency Care and Engagement.

The report stated that "as a result of these interventions, the Mumbai-Pune Expressway witnessed a 58.3 per cent decline in road crash deaths from 151 fatalities in 2016 to 63 fatalities (from 56 fatal crashes) up until 31st December, 2023".

"Every fatality on the expressway is a matter of grave concern for the MSRDC. We will leave no stone unturned to ensure we achieve zero deaths on this crucial link between Mumbai and Pune. The MSRDC has implemented various safety measures on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway and this has resulted in the elimination of various types of crashes like run-off crashes, object impact crashes, head-on crashes, and poor visibility related crashes," MSRDC Vice Chairman and Managing Director Dr Anil Kumar Gaikwad said.

Effort to achieve zero fatalities on the expressway is ongoing and the MSRDC is fully committed to achieve this ambitious goal, the senior official said.

The report, released by the SaveLIFE Foundation, highlighted that under the initiative, "hundreds

of interventions" were undertaken across road engineering, traffic enforcement, trauma care and road-user engagement.

More than 3,500 engineering issues were treated, traffic enforcement enhancement issues were enhanced, and emergency care and medical assistance on the expressway were strengthened, including increasing the number of ambulances, upgrading ambulances and training personnel in basic trauma life support, according to the report.

Besides these, critical aspects of road safety were addressed and road users engaged through awareness campaigns, it stated.

On the reduction in road crash fatalities on the MPEW, founder and CEO, SaveLIFE Foundation, Piyush Tewari, said, "This is the result of the multi-agency collaborative approach of the programme. The success seen on this expressway has encouraged authorities across India to replicate this effort to save lives."

"By scientifically understanding the causes of road crash fatalities, over 3,500 road engineering issues were fixed, enforcement was strengthened by police and RTOs, ambulance placement was optimised, and extensive campaigns were undertaken to educate road users commuting on the expressway," he said.

"Most importantly, monthly reviews of the programme were undertaken by the MSRDC, the Maharashtra Highway Police and the Transport Department along with SaveLIFE Foundation to ensure complete alignment and synergy in ensuring that lives can be saved," Tewari said.

He said that the result is a testament to the fact that road crash fatalities can be significantly reduced across Maharashtra as well as the country by taking a concerted and coordinated approach to understanding and resolving road safety issues.

The report stated the creation of a steering mechanism that convened all concerned agencies on a single platform was a "cornerstone of the initiative".

The initiative also saw violations being effectively combated by employing a focused enforcement action plan, speed cameras and vehicle-activated speed signs. Speed traps on the MPEW have issued 13,16,512 challans since their installation in July 2020.

In 2023 alone, 2,17,089 challans were issued, the report stated. (PTI)

# CBI, ED can also arrest Shajahan Sheikh: Cal HC

**KOLKATA, Feb 28:** The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday directed that Trinamool Congress leader Shajahan Sheikh, the main accused in sexual atrocities on women and land grabbing at Sandeshkhali, can be arrested by the CBI, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) or the West Bengal Police. On a prayer by the state's advocate general, the court clarified its order of February 26 in which it had ordered the arrest of Sheikh by the police authority.

A division bench presided by Chief Justice TS Sivagnanam clarified that the court in its February 7 order had only stayed the constitution of a joint special investigation team (SIT) of the CBI and West Bengal Police by a single bench to probe an attack on ED officials.

The division bench directed that it will be "well open to the CBI or the ED also to arrest" the absconding Sheikh, noting that he has been on the run for a substantial period.

ED officials were attacked by a nearly 1,000-member strong mob at Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district on January 5 when they went to search the premises of Sheikh. (PTI)

# Delhi LG stalling implementation of Solar Policy: Atishi

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** Delhi Power Minister Atishi on Wednesday alleged that Lt Governor V K Saxena is obstructing the AAP dispensation's Solar Policy to ensure that it is not notified before the enforcement of the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha polls.

Atishi raised the issue in the Delhi Assembly and also addressed a press conference on the issue.

Sources in the office of Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena denied the charge and accused the Kejriwal government of being "habitual of lying".

"First, the Lt Governor sat on the file. I asked the LG office personally about the policy file. When the file came back with several objections, it went from one officer to another. There is only one objective: to stop the policy from getting notified before the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha polls kicks in," Atishi said.

"Today, LG sir, despite sitting on a constitutional post, is batting from the BJP's side," she alleged during a press conference.

She urged the Lt Governor to not make efforts to delay the policy implementation.

"It is an excellent policy and will lead to a reduction in pollution. Please do not make efforts to delay it," she said.

Earlier, the Delhi Assembly also passed a censure motion over the Lt Governor's alleged obstruction of the policy.

Aam Aadmi Party Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak also accused the BJP-led Centre of stalling the policy implementation.

"The solar policy of the Delhi government is very advanced and progressive. I would invite people from all over the country to study it. The BJP has stopped it. This is a part of their election campaign. They cannot see the people of Delhi being happy," Pathak alleged.

There was no immediate reaction from the LG office. However, sources in the LG office said that he has sought clarity from the Kejriwal government over a provision in the policy that could benefit private players.

"He (LG) has raised questions on some provisions of the pol-

icy... There is no provision under which consumers will get zero electricity bills. Also, there is a provision that could benefit private players and he has sought clarity over it. The Kejriwal government is habitual of lying," a source in the LG office said.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal last month unveiled the Delhi Solar Policy 2024 and said domestic consumers will get zero amount electricity bills and the tariff for commercial and industrial consumers will be halved on the installation of rooftop solar panels.

According to the new policy, a residential consumer can also earn ₹ 700-900 per month after installing rooftop solar panels as the government proposed to provide generation-based incentives (GBI).

Under the Delhi government's existing power subsidy scheme, a residential consumer consuming electricity of up to 200 units every month gets a zero amount bill and he/she gets a 50 per cent subsidy on the consumption of electricity between 201 and 400 units. (PTI)

# Ajmer Dargah demands Hindu Shakti Dal chief's arrest for 'objectionable' remarks

**JAIPUR, Feb 28:** Ajmer Dargah 'khadims' on Wednesday demanded strict action against Hindu Shakti Dal leader Simran Gupta for allegedly calling Sufi mystic Moinuddin Chishti a "rapist" and "terrorist". Sarwar Chishty, president of a body of 'khadims' of Ajmer Dargah, wrote a letter to Ajmer SP demanding Gupta's arrest over his objectionable comment.

"It is very unfortunate and disgraceful that the members of fringe organisation 'Hindu Shakti Dal' deliberately, as per a well-planned criminal conspiracy, made a hate-speech filled with offensive remarks and extremely objectionable defamatory statements against Khawaja Gharib Nawaz within the premises of Ajmer Collectorate campus," Sarwar Chishty said.

He said that astonishingly, concerned authorities did not take any preventive steps or any action against Hindu Shakti Dal members.

"There is a multi-fold rise in rumour mongering, twisted historical facts, misinformation, abusive, insulting and defamatory comments on Khawaja Gharib Nawaz, and Dargah Ajmer Sharif 'khadims' as

well as the Muslim community.

"Shockingly, despite our written complaint along with documentary and electronic evidence, and multiple FIRs, no one has been arrested by police so far for curbing hate speech and maintaining social harmony and peace," he said.

He added that a demonstration will be held if stringent legal action is not taken immediately and the accused persons are not arrested within a week.

Circle officer Dargah Gauri Shankar said that two FIRs have been registered in connection with the statement of Simran Gupta made nearly a week ago and the matter is being investigated.

Hindu Shakti Dal president Gupta had allegedly said Moinuddin Chishti was a "rapist" and "terrorist" and the 'Jannati Darwaja' of the dargah was built after demolishing an ancient Shiva Temple.

Gupta had recently submitted a memorandum to the district administration, demanding a survey of the dargah by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI). (PTI)

# 'Mothers Against Vaping' calls for curb on vapes, e-cigarettes in SE Asia

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** 'Mothers Against Vaping' has urged south-east nations to take action on the WHO's call on them to curb use of new-age gateway devices such as e-cigarettes and vapes, particularly among children and youth.

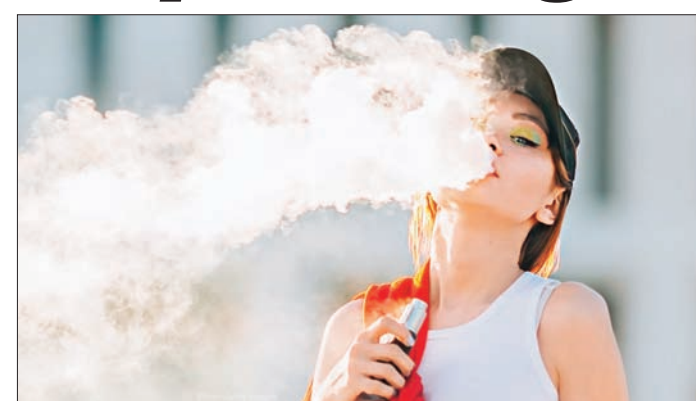
The group is a united front of proactive and concerned mothers who are combating the "escalating vaping crisis" among the youth.

The warning by the World Health Organization against the rise of vaping in the region underscores and reemphasises the urgency to control the viral spread of e-cigarettes and other new-age gateway products, it said.

India has been at the forefront of banning e-cigarettes and other similar new-age gateway devices.

The PECA 2019 legislation has prohibited all aspects of electronic cigarette products, such as production, manufacturing, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage, and advertisement of e-cigarettes, and renders them illegal in the country.

According to 'Mothers Against



Vaping,' India and other nations should prioritise demand reduction strategies.

The collective claimed there is little evidence that e-cigarettes lead to smoking cessation and these devices pose significant health risks to children and youth.

In December 2023, the WHO said that e-cigarettes have not demonstrated effectiveness in quitting tobacco use, with emerging evidence pointing to adverse population health effects associ-

usage, especially among the youth," said Dr Rajesh Gupta, additional director, Pulmonology and Critical Care, Fortis Healthcare, Noida.

According to WHO, the South-East Asia Region has a significant prevalence of smokeless tobacco users, accounting for a massive 77 per cent of the global smokeless tobacco user population.

There are around 11 million adolescent users in the age group of 13-15 years, constituting nearly 30 per cent of the global total.

"The surge in the use of e-cigarettes among young people is not surprising, influenced by a variety of factors including peer pressure and aggressive advertising by manufacturers."

"Beyond the evident physical harm caused by vaping or e-cigarettes, there is a critical concern about the serious mental health impacts such as mood and anxiety disorders, suicidal thoughts and depressive symptoms," said Dr Bhavna Barmii, Clinical Psychologist, Founder, Happiness Studio.

Mothers Against Vaping also drew attention to a survey conducted by the American Heart Association, presented in February 2023. The findings of the survey revealed a concerning correlation between vaping nicotine and THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), the psychoactive component in marijuana and self-reported symptoms of depression and anxiety.

"The long-term consequences of e-cigarettes remain unknown, but studies have already demonstrated serious lung injuries and adverse health effects associated with their use. Without effective control measures, the widespread prevalence of these new-age devices poses a genuine risk, potentially leaving our future generation with lasting health impairments."

"From causing chemical poisoning in users to jeopardising maternal and foetal health, vaping presents a myriad of physical health risks," said Dr Varuna Pathak, former Professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, Gandhi Medical College. (PTI)



# National Science Day celebrations with emphasis on indigenous technologies

## Nation has made significant strides in science and technology: Guv Kataria

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 28: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria emphasised the great significance of National Science Day, stating that it not only commemorates a landmark discovery in the field of science but also serves as a platform to highlight the importance of scientific research and innovation for the socio-economic development of the nation.

Addressing an assembly of the scientific community on the occasion of National Science Day at Assam Administrative Staff College here on Wednesday, Governor Kataria remarked that though National Science Day is celebrated throughout the nation to commemorate the discovery of the Raman Effect by Sir CV Raman, the day holds great significance for the present generation. He highlighted that the celebration of the day is aimed at increasing the interest of the younger generation in science.

Highlighting the significance of National Science Day, the Governor mentioned that the celebration reflects India's journey toward becoming a global scientific superpower. By honouring the past, celebrating the present, and envisioning the future, the occasion plays a significant role in shaping India's scientific progress. It provides an opportunity to encourage people to build a developed nation by exploring and innovating in the field of science and technology for a better tomorrow.

Governor Kataria also noted, "The nation has made significant progress in the field of science and technology. The successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the south pole of the moon and India's strong vaccine development capability during the Covid-19 pandemic are notable achievements." Speaking about Aditya L-1, the Governor mentioned that it has created a new history in space by reaching closer to the sun. "India is making significant contributions to human welfare in various fields such as astronomy, space research, biotechnology, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence," the Governor added.

Speaking about the theme of this year's National Science Day, which is 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat', Governor Kataria stated that under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is achieving new success in the field of science, technology, and technology. To strengthen the foundation of Atmanirbhar Bharat, the government has promoted innovation, entrepreneurship, and startups. Emphasis

is also being laid on making the country self-reliant through science and technology.

The Governor further stated that the nation has a rich history of scientific innovations and discoveries. The world has recognised the country's progress in indigenous technologies. INS Vikrant, the pride of the Indian Navy, is the country's first indigenously developed aircraft carrier. Besides, the Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed many aeronautical systems, missiles, and electronic technologies.

The Governor also emphasised the need to popularise science among the public and inspire students toward scientific discoveries. He urged educational institutions to give more emphasis on organising science exhibitions, workshops, lectures, etc. The New Education Policy 2020 also stresses research and development.

The Governor commended the government for initiating a separate university for science and technology.

It may be mentioned that the Governor also conferred State Science Awards and Parivesh Mitra Sanman to eminent personalities in recognition of their contribution to science and environmental conservation. He conferred the State Science Awards 2022 to Prof Kamalendu Deb Krori (Lifetime Achievement Award, 2022) and Young Scientist Awards 2022 to Dr Moon Moon Devi, State Science Awards 2023 to Prof Kishori Mohan Pathak Lifetime Achievement Award, 2023 (Posthumous), and Young Scientist Award to Dr Debanga Raj Neog. Akash Science & Environment Education Centre Biswanath Chariali also received an award for Promoting Science & Technology, 2023. Additionally, five distinguished individuals were awarded Parivesh Mitra Samman 2023 for their excellent contribution to environmental protection.

Minister of Science, Technology, and Climate Change Department Keshab Mahanta, secretary Science, Technology, and Climate Change Department Laya Madhuri, director, ASTEC Dr Jaideep Baruah, former director of the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology Dr Joyanti Chutiya, along with a host of other dignitaries, were present at the program.

**Our Tezpur correspondent adds:** On the occasion of National Science Day 2024, a popular talk linking the theme of National Science Day 2024, 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat', was jointly organised on Wednesday by the



Tezpur branch of the Assam Science Society in collaboration with the Institution's Innovation Council (IIC), Darrang College, the department of Zoology, and the ZSA Darrang College Unit aiming at making young students aware of indigenous technologies, raising awareness among students, and encouraging students to explore innovative ideas.

Prof Debendra Chandra Baruah, director of IQAC and professor in the department of Energy at Tezpur University, delivered a talk on the topic 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Assam'. During his talk, Dr Baruah emphasised certain key issues, including disparities and economic development, which must be addressed first in Viksit Bharat. "As technology plays a fundamental role in wealth creation, improvement of the quality of life, and real economic growth and transformation in any society, we should keep in mind the accessibility of all people while developing indigenous technology. The conversion of bio-waste into energy and organic fertiliser is a proven practice to promote compressed biogas in northeast India," Dr Baruah said.

The program commenced with a briefing on the purpose and importance of the talk by Dr Rabindra Hazarika, followed by a welcome address by Purnananda Pawe, vice principal of Darrang College, and a brief introduction of the resource person by Dr Juli Bairagi. It was attended by students and faculty members of Darrang College, as well as participants from outside the college, including members of the Assam Science Society.

The program concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Chittaranjan Baruah, secretary of the Society's Tezpur branch and convener of the Institution's Innovation Council (IIC) at Darrang College.

The winners of the essay competition organised on the occasion of National Science Day 2024 on the topic 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047: Indigenous skills and technologies to promote indigenous occupations' were awarded during the program. The essay competition was jointly organised by the Institution's Innovation Council in collaboration with the Assam Science Society, Tezpur Branch, and IQAC-Darrang College, Tezpur.

Simultaneously, DRL Tezpur, the only DRDO laboratory in the NE region, celebrated NSD 2024 with great enthusiasm. The program commenced with an address by the director, DRL, Dr Dev Vrat Kamboj, who described the significance of NSD. Prof (Dr) Karuna Hazarika, principal cum chief superintendent of Tezpur Medical College & Hospital, graced the occasion as the chief guest and delivered a highly inspiring and thought-provoking talk focusing on the connection between philosophy and science in life.

In the program, an oration on a popular science topic was delivered by Dr Vanlalhmuka, scientist at DRL, Tezpur. He deliberated on the various aspects of horizontal environmental genetic alteration agents (HEGAA) technology and its applications in dual (human welfare as well as nefarious) purposes. For his oration, Dr Vanlalhmuka was conferred with a commendation certificate & medal by the secretary, department of Defence R&D and chairman, DRDO.

It is to be mentioned here that National Science Day (NSD) is celebrated every year on February 28 to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' by the great Indian Physicist, Bharat Ratna, Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, for his groundbreaking research work on the scattering of light. He was also awarded

the most prestigious Nobel Prize in Physics in the year 1930 for the 'Raman Effect'. This year's theme of NSD is 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat', which emphasises the importance of self-reliance in science and technology, encouraging the nation to rely on its own capabilities for sustainable growth and progress.

**Our Jorhat correspondent adds:** CSIR-North East Institute of Science & Technology celebrated National Science Day on Wednesday with a day-long program on its premises. This year, the event was organised jointly with the Assam Science Society, Jorhat branch. The day started with a science quiz competition among school students and face-to-face student-scientist interaction. Fifteen students from five different schools in Jorhat participated in the quiz competition with great zeal and enthusiasm, while the student-scientist interaction was open to all. Altogether, more than 80 students & teachers from six schools in Jorhat attended the science day event.

The Science Day function was held at Dr J N Baruah Auditorium, where Dr R K Talukdar, principal of Jorhat Medical College & Hospital, graced the function as chief guest and Vishal Shastri, executive director of A&AA Basin, ONGC, Jorhat, was present as the guest of honour.

Dr Archanamoni Das, president of the Organising Committee, delivered the welcome address wherein she highlighted the significance of Science Day in India. She said that the day is celebrated to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' by Indian physicist Sir C V Raman on February 28, 1928. She also briefed on significant achievements of CSIR which have immensely contributed to the

growth of science & technology such as indelible ink, Amul milk powder, Swaraj tractor, etc.

Delivering the Science Day lecture, Dr R K Talukdar spoke about the importance and role of science in our daily lives. He shared various scientific advancements which have contributed to human civilisation, such as from farming tools to genetically modified foods. He said that life expectancy in India today is about 70.8 years as compared to 30 during the late 1940s, which he attributed to science.

In his speech on the topic, 'Hydrocarbons- Past, Present & Future', Vishal Shastri, gave a comprehensive overview of hydrocarbons and their contribution in transitioning the world from horse-driven carriages to oil & gas-driven automobiles. He delved deeper into the application of hydrocarbons in various sectors such as energy, healthcare, agriculture, etc., and basically all the products used in our daily lives. He highlighted the history of oil & gas exploration in India and its future challenges, mentioning oil prices and environmental challenges of the oil industry.

Addressing the event, Dr V M Tiwari, director of CSIR-NEIST, urged the scientists and students to inculcate independent thinking and expressed the example of the invention of the 'Raman Effect' by Sir C V Raman, which he said symbolises the very theme of this year's Science Day, i.e., 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat'. He emphasised on solution-driven science with a goal to develop local solutions for local problems.

In his speech, Dr R C Boruah, president of Assam Science Society, Jorhat Branch, encouraged the scientists and students to take inspiration from the life of Sir C V Raman and work indigenously in all their scientific endeavours.

On the occasion, Umesh Chandra Borah, chief scientist (retd.) of CSIR-NEIST, and Bhaba Chetia, former employee of HRH Prince of Wales Institute of Science & Technology, Jorhat, and also life members of Assam Science Society were felicitated in recognition of their immense contribution to science & technology.

Later on, winners of the science quiz competition were suitably awarded with prizes and certificates. Balya Bhavan, Jorhat, bagged first prize while Dahotia Higher Secondary School, Jorhat, and Kendriya Vidyalaya, NEIST, received second and third prizes respectively.

The program concluded with a vote of thanks offered by Romen Gogoi, secretary of Assam Science Society, Jorhat branch.

## 96<sup>th</sup> ZRUCC meeting fosters dialogue on railway services

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 28: The 96th meeting of the Zonal Railway Users' Consultative Committee (ZRUCC) took place on Wednesday at the Luitgarh Railway Officers' Club located in Maligaon, Guwahati. The primary objective of the meeting was to facilitate direct interaction with representatives from various sections of society and railway users to gather their views on railway-related services. The committee comprises MPs, MLAs, high officials from the Transport Departments of various states, various passenger associations, merchants associations, chamber of commerce bodies, and special interest groups from various North Eastern states, as well as West Bengal and Bihar, falling within the serviceable jurisdiction of NF Railway. A total of 13 members were present at the meeting, including Members of Parliament (Lok Sabha) Khagen Murmu, and representatives from various stakeholders from all over NF Railway.

## Irate villagers protest against MP Rameswar Teli for alleged neglect of issues

**HT Correspondent**  
DIBRUGARH, Feb 28: Irate villagers of Jokai Mahabir Tea Estate staged a protest against MP Rameswar Teli in Dibrugarh. They accused him of failing to address their problems during his 10-year term.

Jokai Mahabir Tea Estate, located just 21 kilometers from Dibrugarh town, now falls under the newly formed Khowang legislative seat after the delimitation process. Previously, it was under the Moran legislative assembly seat.

The villagers claimed that Rameswar Teli had not visited their village in the past decade. They also expressed disappointment with Moran MLA Chakradhar Gogoi for not addressing their genuine issues.

Around 200 people from Jokai Mahabir Tea Estate participated in the protest against Rameswar Teli, accusing him of neglecting their problems.

Montu Mura, one of the irate villagers, alleged, "In the last 10 years of Rameswar Teli's tenure as Dibrugarh MP, we have not seen him in our village. He didn't come to know the problems our villagers



face. Our area has not seen development, unlike most of the roads in tea garden areas, which were properly constructed. But our village has been neglected."

He added, "The road between Jokai Mahabir Tea Estate and Barbaruah has not been built. When the BJP government prioritised road construction, why has our road remained neglected?"

"We elected Rameswar Teli from Dibrugarh constituency as a representative of our people, but he failed to address the problems of the tea garden people. Our burning issues are never discussed in the parliament. As a representative of the people, Rameswar Teli should address the issue, but he failed to do so during his 10 years in

power," Mura emphasised. The villagers also claimed they were deprived of the Arunodoi and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) schemes.

Meanwhile, the Assam Tea Tribe Students' Association (ATTTSA) held a press conference in Dibrugarh, urging the top BJP leadership to field a fresh face from Dibrugarh constituency for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. They accused Rameswar Teli of failing to address their burning problems and remaining a silent observer.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Rameswar Teli won against his opponent, Pawan Singh Ghatowar of the INC, with a massive margin of over 364,566 votes.

## Awareness meet on child marriage & superstitions held

**HT Correspondent**  
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 28: As per the instructions from the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC), Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of Assam, an awareness program against child marriage, superstition, black magic, and witch hunting was convened by the Environment and Climate Cell of THB College in association with the Extension Cell IQAC (Internal Quality Assurance Cell) THB College. The event took place on Wednesday at Amara High School with Hemlala Damai, a retired teacher, in the chair.

Dr Khanam Kumar Das, head of the department of Assamese, spoke on the occasion as a resource person. In his speech, Dr Das urged the people and students to adopt a scientific temperament in their day-to-day life. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Tulshi Upadhyay, coordinator of the College Environment and Climate cell, explained the dangerous future of a child mother. He also urged the audience not to believe in witches and others which don't have any scientific basis.



**G**irindra Bala Kempral, born on December 19, 1940, in Swarna Bagan, Haflong, breathed her last on January 17, 2024, at Dispur Hospital, Guwahati, at the age of 84. She leaves behind a legacy of resilience, intellect, and profound contributions to her community.

Born into the Khersa family to late Swarna Kumar Khersa and late Phulomoti Khersa, Girindra Bala was the ninth among five brothers and six sisters. From a young age, she exhibited exceptional academic abilities, attending Government Boys' and Girls' LP School, Haflong, and excelling in her studies.

Despite societal pressures, Girindra Bala pursued education alongside familial responsibilities. She married late Birendra Chandra Kemprai at the age of 13, with a commitment from her parents to continue her studies post-marriage. She fulfilled this

## Obituary

promise, achieving outstanding results in her examinations despite numerous challenges.

Girindra Bala's commitment to education extended to her professional life, where she served as a dedicated teacher. She received accolades, including Assam's Best Teacher Award in 1970, underlining her exceptional contributions to the field.

Beyond her teaching career, Girindra Bala was a beacon of spirituality and intellectual curiosity. She translated significant works, such as 'Katha Mrita', from Bengali to Dimas language, leaving a lasting impact on literature and culture.

Her passing leaves a void in the hearts of her family, friends, and community. Girindra Bala Kempral's life exemplified strength, wisdom, and compassion. Her legacy will continue to inspire future generations to pursue excellence and uphold values of knowledge and integrity.

In her honour, a memorial service will be held on March 1, 2024, at her residence in Haflong. She will be dearly missed but forever remembered for her remarkable achievements and the profound impact she made on all who knew her.

## Youth leaders and educators convene to deliberate on civic responsibility

# Neighbourhood Youth Parliament at Morigaon College of Education

**HT Correspondent**  
MORIGAON, Feb 28: The Neighbourhood Youth Parliament was held at Morigaon College of Education on Wednesday. Morigaon Nehru Yuva Kendra, in cooperation with the College of Education, organised the program. Randeep Nandi, a consultant to a voluntary organisation in Nagaon, attended as the keynote speaker.

"The most significant time in human life is youth. As gold becomes vibrant when it melts and the goldsmith shapes it to his liking. The youth will flow like the stream of new India, and this stream will shine the heritage of our country in the minds of the world," said Randeep Nandi. The program was inaugurated by Dr Doli Buragohain, principal of Morigaon College of Education.



Dr Ruksana Rahman, assistant professor at Morigaon College of Education, and Imran Uz Zaman Shah, associate professor and coordinator of the Internal Quality

Assurance Cell, were present as guest speakers. District youth officer, Nehru Yuva Kendra, Bikas Chandra Pradhan, explained the objectives of the program and de-

tails about My Bharat Viksit Bharat @2. The event was attended by Wahidur Rahman, a teacher at Model Higher Secondary School, and Tulsi Deka, a district committee member of Nehru Yuva Kendra. The students of Manikanchan Yoga Sports Association performed a group yoga dance under the direction of yoga teacher Anant Bora, and Nataraj Dance Academy Jajari performed an attractive Sattriya dance. The speaker, Prime Minister, leader of the Opposition, government MPs, Opposition MPs, etc., were seated in the seats of the youth representatives where a 'mock' parliament was performed by the youths. The meeting was conducted by Dhananjay Talukdar, accountant, and program officer, Nehru Yuva Kendra.

## Haflong hosts one day awareness prog on PM Vishwakarma Scheme

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 28: The Br MSME-Development & Facilitation Office, Silchar, in collaboration with the District Industries & Commerce Centre, Dima Hasao, conducted an informative session on the PM Vishwakarma scheme at the District Library Auditorium Hall in Haflong on Wednesday. The event received the esteemed presence of Thai Tsho Daulagup, ACS, principal secretary, NCHAC, who graced the occasion as the chief guest.

The PM Vishwakarma scheme, inaugurated on September 17, 2023, by the Prime Minister of India, aims to extend comprehensive support to artisans and craftspeople whose livelihoods revolve around manual skills and craftsmanship.

The primary goal is to bolster these traditional trades, which encompass a wide range of professions, including boat makers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, garland makers, among others. Beneficiaries of the scheme are entitled to receive e-vouchers worth Rs 15,000 upon completion of a 5-day basic training program. Additionally, trainees will receive a daily stipend of Rs 500 during the training period.

The awareness camp saw participation from assistant director in charge, M Dutta, Br MSME-DFO, along with officials, staff members, and members of the general public.



## Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya organises enlightening event

**HT Correspondent**  
DEMOW, Feb 28: The Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, situated in Demow Barua Changmai Gaon, organised a spiritual conference on 'Pure India, Healthy India, Happy India' at the World Peace Retreat Centre on Tuesday. In the spiritual conference, Rajyogi BK Brijmohan Anand, additional chief secretary of Brahmakumaris from Mount Abu, Rajasthan, was present as the chief speaker. Sri Sri Nani Gopal Deva Goswami, satradhikar of Sri Sri Dakshinpat Satra, graced the program as the chief guest. The program commenced with a welcome felicitation, followed by a 'swagat dance' performed by Kumari Bidisha Behen. Raj Tilok Ji, secretary of Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, Sivasagar, introduced Brahmakumaris, highlighting its foundation in Mount Abu, Rajasthan. Anita Behenji anchored the program.



## We must embed sports science into every layer of athletic framework: Bindra

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** For India to grow into a sporting powerhouse, it needs to develop not just state of the art infrastructure but also adopt scientific mindset, champion shooter Abhinav Bindra said on Wednesday, calling upon coaches to embrace sports science in their training methods.

Bindra, India's first individual Olympic champion, was speaking at the Bharat Sports Science Conclave.

"Coaches as the custodians of athletic progress must embrace sports science to fine-tune their training methodologies to this digital age," Bindra, the 2008 Beijing Olympics gold medalist, said.

"To ascend to the Olympic echelon as a nation, we must embed sports science into every layer of our athletic framework. It is not just the state-of-the-art facilities but the integration of the scientific mindset from the grassroots to elite levels that will catalyze India's growth into a global sporting powerhouse. The importance of starting at the grassroots level cannot be overstated. It is here we must begin to instill a culture of precision analytics, and evidence-based training methods," the 41-year-old added.

The one-day conclave, aimed at supporting high-level research



in high performance and sports training, was organised by TransStadia University, the education arm of TransStadia Education and Research Foundation in association with the National Centre of Sports Science and Research (NCSSR). Sports minister Anurag Singh Thakur said sports science plays an important role in the development of players.

"Elements of sports science are used to support athletes in their training to help them understand their strengths, improve and challenge their strengths toward their goals.

"Sports science has played a crucial role in the success of most major athletes across sports disciplines. So, we are also ensuring the presence of a sports science department at our

National Centers of Excellence in the country," he said.

Bindra reckoned that the gathering at the Conclave is a testament "to the pioneering spirit in the forward-thinking approach of our nation in the realm of sports science." Multiple presentations came up during the Conclave from those who mostly work behind the scenes as mentors to future sports stars. (PTI)

## Bopanna-Ebden, Yuki-Haase pairs advance, Nagal exits from Dubai Tennis C'ship



**DUBAI, Feb 28:** Top seeds Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden entered the men's doubles quarterfinals of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships with a straight set win over the Tunisian-Pakistani pair of Skander Mansouri and Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi here.

Bopanna and Ebden, who won the Australian Open last month, took one hour and 41 minutes to get the better of Mansouri and Qureshi 7-6(4) 7-

6(5) in the round of 16 on Tuesday night.

Bopanna and Ebden, who made their first outing since winning the men's doubles title at the Australian Open, will face Ariel Behar of Uruguay and Czech Adam Pavlasek in the quarterfinals.

Another Indian, Yuki Bhambhani and his Dutch partner Robin Haase also progressed to the quarterfinals, defeating Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik and Adrian Mannarino of France 6-

7(6) 6-3 10-8 in a round of 16 match.

Yuki and Haase will next face the winner of the Belgian duo of Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen and third seed English-Kiwi pair of Jamal Murray and Michael Venus.

However, it was curtains for India in men's singles after the country's top player Sumit Nagal exited in the round of 32. Nagal lost 4-6 7-5 1-6 against Italy's Lorenzo Sonego. (PTI)

## Japan defeat North Korea 2-1 to reach women's soccer tourney at the Paris Olympics

**TOKYO, Feb 28:** Japan defeated North Korea 2-1 on Wednesday to reach the women's soccer tournament at the upcoming Paris Olympics. But not without a tiny bit of VAR controversy.

The first match in the two-game series to determine one of Asia's two qualifiers ended in a 0-0 draw on Saturday in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Japan had three clear standout players who helped book its tickets for Paris.

Japan won the silver medal in the 2012 Olympics but has never won gold in the women's tournament. North Korea last competed in women's soccer at the 2012 Olympics but has never won a medal.

"We want to move forward with the goal of winning a gold medal," Japan coach Futoshi Ikeda said.

Ikeda coached the Japanese women in the 2023 World Cup and saw them lose in the quarterfinals to Sweden.

Hana Takahashi scored in the 26th, but it was Japanese goalkeeper Ayaka Yamashita who scrambled late in the first half to stop a shot that was millimeters from crossing over the line.

Aoba Fujino put the match away with a header in the 76th to give Japan its second.

North Korea's Kim Hye Yong scored in the 80th, chipping the ball over keeper Yamashita as she came off her line. (AP)

## Haaland scores five goals in Man City's 6-2 rout of Luton in the FA Cup

**LUTON, ENGLAND, Feb 28:** Erling Haaland looks determined to make up for lost time.

The Norway striker scored five goals to power Manchester City into the quarterfinals of the FA Cup in a 6-2 win against Luton on Tuesday. It was his eighth hat trick in a season-and-a-half with City and the second time he has scored five in a single game for the club.

Perhaps more significantly, it was evidence that Haaland is fully back up to speed after recently returning from a foot injury that ruled him out for more than a month between December and January. "My fitness is getting back to its best finally," he said. "I feel good. It's an amazing feeling."

Haaland had scored only three goals in seven appearances since making his comeback on Jan. 31.

By his remarkable standards, that represented a relative drought, but he looked back to his devastating best at Kenilworth Road with a first-half hat trick and two more after the break. Four of those goals came from assists by Kevin De Bruyne, who has also missed large parts of the season through injury.

"It's a pleasure playing with him," Haaland said. "I think we know what we both want from each other, we look at each other and it clicks well."

Mateo Kovacic added a sixth for City, while Jordan Clark struck twice for Luton.

Haaland was denied a possible double hat trick when he was replaced by Julian Alvarez in the 77th minute. It was the second time City manager Pep Guardiola substituted the striker after scoring five goals, having taken him off during the 7-0 rout of RB Leipzig in the Champions League last year.

Haaland now has 27 goals in all



competitions for the season after scoring 52 in his first year at the club. His performance and linkup play with De Bruyne will also fuel the belief City can emulate last season's treble of trophies when it won the Premier League title, FA Cup and Champions League.

"We're coming. Exciting times (are) ahead," Haaland said.

The forward completed his hat trick after 40 minutes, having opened the scoring in the third and adding a second in the 18th.

Clark pulled one back for Luton in the 45th and made it 3-2 with another seven minutes after half-time. But Haaland quickly extended City's lead with further goals in the 55th and 58th.

Kovacic completed the scoring with a long range effort in the 72nd.

Newcastle avoided a potential upset at Blackburn but needed penalties to overcome the second-division team.

Goalkeeper Martin Dubravka pushed away Dominic Hyam's spot kick at the end of the shootout to secure a 4-3 win on penalties

after the game had finished 1-1 through extra time.

Anthony Gordon fired Newcastle ahead in the 71st at Ewood Park, but the lead only lasted eight minutes when Sammie Szmodics leveled for Blackburn.

Saudi-backed Newcastle has endured a troubled season in the league and currently sits 10th in the standings after a fourth-place finish last year.

But victory over Blackburn means it is still in contention to win its first piece of major domestic silverware since the FA Cup in 1955.

Abdul Fatawu fired Leicester to a 1-0 win over Premier League team Bournemouth with a stunning extra time goal.

Substitute Fatawu struck in the 105th — curling a shot into the top corner from the edge of the area.

Leicester won the Cup in 2021 but has slumped since then and was relegated to the second division last season. It is aiming to bounce straight back up and showed its credentials with the win at Bournemouth. (AP)

## Renuka set the tone for RCB by controlling Powerplay: Molineux

**BENGALURU, Feb 28:** Renuka Singh has managed to control the Powerplay period by providing early breakthroughs and stopping run-flow with her swing bowling which played a significant role in RCB winning both its games, says team spin all-rounder Sophie Molineux.

Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) are sitting on top of the table with four points. Mumbai Indians (+0.488) also have four points but they are placed second behind RCB who have better NRR of +1.665.

RCB had restricted Gujarat Giants to 107 for seven on Tuesday night with Renuka returning impressive figures of 4-0-14-2. RCB then overhauled the target in 12.3 overs to log their second win on the trot. "Renuka has been incredible in both games and playing

against her for India, she's just so reliable and it's great to be on the same team as her. She swings the ball beautifully at the front and I think she's really set the tone for us in both games," Molineux said.

In their opening game against UP Warriorz, Renuka did not dismiss any batter but conceded only 14 runs in her 3 overs. RCB had

edged UPW by just two runs to begin the tournament with a thrilling win.

"To be able to control the powerplay is a big thing in T20 cricket and she's done that twice now and I can see her continuing to do that," the Australian cricketer said.

Role clarity for every player and adaptability is part of the RCB approach under coach Luke Williams.

In their opening match against UPW, the RCB opted for swing

from one end and spin from the other, while against GG, Renuka Singh and her pace colleague Sophie Devine bowled in tandem up front.

Molineux, who took three wickets herself after Renuka's new-ball burst, said her team has flexibility.

"In T20 cricket as a bowler you need to be really clear on what your strengths are and what you can bring to the team. And I think Luke and all the staff have been really clear with each bowler with what their roles are going to be and also at the same time be willing to adapt like we did today.

"We had a completely different look to our powerplay where we were really pace-heavy. So yeah, I think that's all a part of T20 cricket, especially just being really clear on your own individual plans and where that fits in with the team and being able to change on the fly," Molineux said.

RCB will take on third-placed Delhi Capitals in their next match on Thursday. (PTI)



## Zaheer Khan was someone I used to watch a lot to try and learn from: James Anderson

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** James Anderson, England's greatest fast bowler with an unparalleled longevity and nearly 1000 international wickets, says he has learned a few elements of pace bowling, including reverse swing, from Indian great Zaheer Khan.

At 41, Anderson continues to lead the England attack and is two short of becoming the first fast bowler in the history of the sport to breach the 700-wicket mark.

Spin legends Muttiah Muralitharan and the late Shane Warne are the only bowlers with 700 plus wickets in Test cricket.

"For me, Zaheer Khan was someone I used to watch a lot to try and learn from. How he used the reverse swing, how he covered the ball when he ran into bowl, that's something I tried to sort of develop on the back of playing against him quite a few times here," Anderson told JioCinema.

Zaheer, one of India's finest seamers, played his last Test in

2014 when Anderson was at the top of his game.

Among the current lot of Indian pacers, Anderson is most impressed by Jasprit Bumrah's ability, calling him a "great exponent" of reverse swing.

Asked about Bumrah's match-winning performance in the second Test against England, Anderson said, "With someone of his quality you expect that standard from him. You know that reverse swing can play a big part in India and he's a great exponent of it. He's got good pace and is very accurate, very consistent."

"That yorker we saw to Ollie Pope, he's got that up his sleeve as well. It's not a fluke that he's got to number one in the world. He's a world-class bowler and from our point of view we weren't surprised that he put up a performance like that." The seasoned Englishman added, "There are not many better bowlers than Bumrah, Shami and Siraj. They're world-class bowlers. You

put Ishant Sharma in there as well, and that's a really strong bowling attack." Anderson's longevity in the game can be ascertained by the fact that his current England teammates such as Shoaib Bashir and Rehan Ahmed were not even born when he made his Test debut way back in 2002.

Having played 186 Tests and 194 ODIs over the last 22 years, Anderson's desire to be competitive remains intact.

On comparing his longevity to other sporting legends, Anderson said, "Yeah, I guess you do look at things like that, but to be honest, I just go with the feel of me and my body. I don't feel like I'm 41 years and 200 days old. You know, I still feel young."

"I can keep up with the young guys in training. I can still bowl the speeds that I want to. I can still deliver the skills that I want to. So, for me that's the most important thing. Age is just a number and it's pretty irrelevant from my thought process." When the



**Asked about Bumrah's match-winning performance in the second Test against England, Anderson said, "With someone of his quality you expect that standard from him. You know that reverse swing can play a big part in India and he's a great exponent of it**

discussion turned to reverse swing, Anderson said the art remains relevant even in an age dominated by T20 cricket.

"I don't think it's dying. Because of the growth of white-ball cricket in recent times, the focus has moved to change of pace and different deliveries like yorkers, and things like that."

"But for me, in Test cricket, we've seen throughout this series already that swing can play a big part."

"The way Bumrah's bowled, I think, has been amazing to watch. That reverse swing spell

in the second Test was one of the best you'll see. For me, I think there's still people out there wanting to learn the skills and it's not easy to do." With star batter Virat Kohli skipping the ongoing Test series due to personal reasons, Anderson said he missed bowling to the Indian maestro with he had had some fascinating duels.

"You always want to play against the best players. And it's been a shame that he's not been a part of the series. We have had some great battles over the years." (PTI)



# Rohit, Virat remain in top bracket; Kishan, Iyer dropped from BCCI central contracts



**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** Skipper Rohit Sharma and star batter Virat Kohli retained their place in the

top bracket but the out-of-favour duo of Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer were excluded after ignoring

the directive to play Ranji Trophy as the BCCI unveiled its centrally-contracted players for this year on

Wednesday. Rohit, Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah and Ravindra Jadeja figured in the A plus category, the highest bracket of the BCCI's central contracts list.

"Please note that Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan were not considered for the annual contracts in this round of recommendations," said the BCCI in a statement.

"The BCCI has recommended that all athletes give precedence to participating in domestic cricket during periods when they are not representing the national team," the statement added.

Six cricketers feature in the A category, including R Ashwin, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, KL Rahul, Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya.

Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel and Yashasvi Jaiswal have got B category contracts.

As many as 15 have been handed C category contracts in-

cluding Rinku Singh, Tilak Verma, Ruturaj Gaekwad, Shardul Thakur, Shivam Dube, Ravi Bishnoi, Jitesh Sharma, Washington Sundar, Mukesh Kumar, Sanju Samson, Arshdeep Singh, KS Bharat, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan and Rajat Patidar.

The selection committee has also recommended fast bowling contracts for Akash Deep, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Umran Malik, Yash Dayal and Vidwath Kaverappa.

Akash Deep had impressed on debut in the recent fourth Test against England, which India won to seal the series.

In a departure from the norm, the BCCI this time has not mentioned the remuneration of the players across the four categories.

Cricketers are normally paid ₹ 7 crore per annum in A plus bracket, ₹ 5 crore in A, ₹ 3 crore in B and ₹ one crore in C category, over and above their match fees. (PTI)

## Jaiswal rises to 12<sup>th</sup>, Jurel to 69<sup>th</sup> in ICC Test rankings



**DUBAI, Feb 28:** India's latest batting sensation Yashasvi Jaiswal advanced towards a top-10 spot in the ICC rankings for Test batters by climbing three spots to 12th while his compatriot Dhruv Jurel leapfrogged 31 places to 69th on Wednesday.

Jaiswal, who started the series in 69th position, continues his ascent to the top after scores of 73 and 37 in the fourth match of India's ICC World Test Championship series against England in Ranchi.

Player of the Match Jurel's scores of 90 and 39 has jumped a whopping 31 places while former England captain Joe Root is back in the top three.

Root, a formerly top-ranked batter, struck an unbeaten 122 in the first innings in Ranchi to move up two places to third position. He also moved up three spots to fourth among all-rounders.

Senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin's five-wicket haul in the second innings has helped him narrow the gap with top-ranked Jasprit Bumrah to 21 rating points at 846 after the fast bowler was rested for the Ranchi Test.

Wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav moved up 10 places to the 32nd

spot and England's Shoaib Bashir, who climbed 38 places to 80th, have also attained career bests.

Opener Zak Crawley entered the top 20 for the first time after scores of 42 and 60, while a bunch of spinners have also prospered in the latest weekly update.

The T20I Rankings see Australia batter Travis Head move into the top 20 for the first time after scores of 24, 45 and 33 in the series against New Zealand.

Tim David's quickfire 31 off just 10 balls in the first match see him move up six places to 22nd and past the 600-point barrier for the first time in his career.

The top six bowlers are unchanged, with Josh Hazlewood the only new one in the top 10 after finishing with figures of 4-1-12-1 in Auckland. In the ODI rankings, the biggest mover has been Namibia's Bernard Scholtz, whose hauls of four for 31 against Nepal and two for 15 against the Netherlands in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 Tri-Series in Kirtipur have lifted him to 11th position and 642 ratings points, the highest position and points tally ever achieved by a Namibia player in ODI cricket. (PTI)

### Muzumdar looks to create fast bowlers pool from WPL ahead of T20 WC

**BENGALURU, Feb 28:**With just seven months left for the Women's T20 World Cup to begin in Bangladesh, India head coach Amol Muzumdar is keen to identify and build a pool of fast bowlers from the on-going Women's Premier League.

The Indian pace unit looks a bit thin after the retirement of legendary Jhulan Goswami and moving on from veteran Shikha Pandey. Currently, the Indian pace bowling is marshalled by Renuka Singh, Pooja Vastrakar, Titus Sadhu and Amanjot Kaur.

"Four fast bowlers played the last series (against Australia). I want to create a pool of fast bowlers (from the WPL). It makes a lot of difference if you strengthen the bowling attack," Muzumdar was quoted as saying ESPN-Cricinfo.

"I would want another pool of 20-25 players to create a bench strength for the Indian team," he added. The ninth edition of the Women's T20 World Cup will be held in September-October in Bangladesh.

Muzumdar had taken over as India coach last year ahead of home series against England and Australia. While India won the Tests against the visitors, they lost the T20I and ODI series.

Muzumdar was also delighted to see frontline Indian batters such as Shafali Verma, S Meghana and Richa Ghosh among runs ahead of the marquee event later this year.

"There is an upscale movement in India's batters. The confidence from those two series against England and Australia is on display (here) because of how they performed there." (PTI)

## Conway out, Ravindra in for New Zealand ahead of 1st test against Australia

**WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND), Feb 28** Devon Conway has been ruled out but Rachin Ravindra has been cleared to play for New Zealand in the first cricket test against Australia starting at the Basin Reserve on Thursday.

Conway suffered a thumb injury while keeping wicket in the second Twenty20 international between the teams on Friday last week. While initial scans suggested there was no fracture, additional tests in Wellington in recent days have found there is damage to Conway's left thumb.

Conway will have further tests later in the week. Meantime, Will Young open the batting with Tom Latham in Conway's place.

Henry Nicholls, who was dropped from the New Zealand team ahead of its two recent tests against South Africa — both victories — has been recalled to provide reinforcement for the batting lineup.

"It's disappointing for Devon to be ruled out on the eve of an important match," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said.

"He's a class player batting at the top of the order for us and I



know he was really looking forward to this series."

Ravindra missed the second and third Twenty20s against Australia with a slight knee injury but is fit to play from Thursday. He scored a maiden double century in the first innings of the first test against South Africa. Daryl Mitchell is also available after missing the South Africa series

with a foot injury.

Captain Tim Southee said New Zealand will settle on its match lineup after assessing conditions at the Basin Reserve where the pitch usually is green at first but good for batting. New Zealand will decide whether to go into the match with four seamers or to include spin-bowling allrounder Mitchell Santner.

New Zealand left Santner out of its lineup for the second test against South Africa at Hamilton, using four seamers.

"I think in hindsight, we probably got that wrong the way that the pitch did behave," Stead said. "We've certainly got Mitch Santner here as that option and we'll certainly consider him as well."

Australia captain Pat Cummins has named an unchanged starting XI for the test.

Cummins confirmed Wednesday there would be "no surprises" in the starting XI, with Australia picking the same team that lost to the West Indies in the second test in Brisbane last month.

"It's always nice to have a full contingent to pick from," Cummins said. "I doesn't feel like we need to reinvent the wheel."

The two-test series against Australia will be one of the few occasions New Zealand has a faced a full-strength Australia lineup. New Zealand and Australia only rarely meet in test series and Australia at times has not fielded its best team.

New Zealand currently is first and Australia third in World Test Championship standings. (AP)

## Arjun wins back-to-back trials, Ashi betters world record

**BHOPAL, Feb 28:** India's top rifle shooters continued their impressive showing at the national selection trials as Paris Olympics quota holder Arjun Babuta won back-to-back competitions and triple Asian Games medallist Ashi Chouksey bettered the world record enroute to her win here on Wednesday.

Arjun shot 252.5 in the men's 10m air rifle T4 finals, just 1.2 short of Divyansh Singh Panwar's world record (253.7), which he had equalled on Tuesday before winning the T3 trials.

Tamil Nadu's Sri Karthik Sabari Raj (252.2) improved upon his third place in the T3 match to finish second, while Rajasthan's Yash Vardhan came in third with a score of 230.8.

In the women's 25m air pistol T4, former Asian Games champion Rahi Sarnobat finished first with a score of 33 in the finals, having scored 583 in the qualifications. Punjab's Jaspreet Kaur was in second place with 30 hits, while Air India's Annu Raj Singh (27) was third.

Local star Ashi then set the ranges on fire with

a sizzling qualification round in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions T4 competition. She dropped just one point in the second prone position and just two in the final standing position to post a jaw-dropping 597.

Ashi was a point clear of the current world record held jointly by Norway's Jenny Stene and USA's Sagen Maddalena.

She took that confidence to the final posting a facile win, her 461.8 placing her way ahead of Kerala's Vidarsa Vinod's 457.5. (PTI)

## RAHUL STILL FEELING SORE WHILE BATTING IN NETS, UNLIKELY FOR DHARAMSALA TEST

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** Senior India batter K L Rahul is unlikely to feature in the fifth and final Test against England in Dharamsala as he continues to feel sore in his right quadriceps.

Rahul became unavailable after the series-opener in Hyderabad in January but as per BCCI, he was 90 per cent fit before the third Test in Rajkot earlier this month.

Rahul has now travelled to London to get an expert opinion on his injury and with the series in the bag, the Indian team management will not take the risk of playing him in the Dharamsala Test beginning March 7.

He needs to be fully fit before the IPL where he will lead Lucknow Super Giants and is expected to bat in the middle order to bolster his chances of making the India squad for the T20 World Cup in the USA and the Caribbean.

"It is more to get an expert opinion (travel to London). He experiences a bit of pain (right quadriceps) while batting. It is to ensure that he recovers fully as he is a player that team needs long-term."

"There is so much competition coming his way -- IPL, he could also be in the T20 World Cup mix. Then we have some important Test series against New Zealand, and Australia later in the year. So, it is better to give him time to recover properly than rushing him," an IPL source told PTI. It is the same quadriceps injury that had sidelined Rahul for almost four months last year.

Having got injured during the IPL, Rahul returned to action with the Asia Cup in September and made instant impact. In the more recent Test tour of South Africa, Rahul was the only century maker from India in the drawn series.

His absence from the final Test means Rajat Patidar will remain with the squad but the MP batter can't be sure of his place in the playing eleven, having aggregated only 63 runs in six innings.

There is a possibility that Patidar will make away for Devdutt Padikkal in Dharamsala.

India's premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who was rested for the Ranchi Test, is expected to lead the attack at the HPCA Stadium. The series is sealed but every Test match offers crucial World Test Championship points and Bumrah can play a big part in the cooler climes of Dharamsala. India are second in the standings with five wins, two losses and a draw. New Zealand lead the table with a winning percentage of 75 but they have only played four Tests. (PTI)



## Turmoil in hockey: HI head Tirkey, secretary Bhola Nath Singh deny rift in joint statement

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey and secretary general Bhola Nath Singh on Wednesday denied outgoing CEO Elena Norman's assertion of a rift between them, saying that they are "united" and working in the best interest of the sport.

Norman resigned on Tuesday and in an interview to PTI she alleged that there was factionalism in the body. The 49-year-old Australian suggested that Tirkey and Singh were at loggerheads and also complained of a difficult work environment.

In a joint statement, Tirkey and Singh rejected Norman's claims.

"Recently there have been statements by outgoing officials published in the media, claiming that there are divisions within the organisation. This is not correct. We remain united in working together, and as always in the best interest of the sport," the two said.

"Hockey India is an autonomous and professional body dedicated to the development of Indian hockey. Our primary objective as an organisation has been and continues to remain the welfare and progress of the sport of hockey and our athletes."

Norman's resignation was the second blow to HI in the last few days after the Indian women's hockey team coach Janneke

Schopman resigned, also complaining of a difficult work environment. Schopman had accused HI of giving step-motherly treatment to women's hockey.

Tirkey and Singh said HI has always treated all teams and players equally and also claimed to have built an environment of equality in the organisation.

"We have built our ethos around equity and equal opportunities right from the grassroots levels across states as well as on a national level," their statement read.

"In this spirit, our entire focus remains on growing our talent, ensuring all hosted events are conducted with utmost professionalism and our national teams are receiving the best support to support their performance at the global stage."

Norman began her tenure as the federation's first CEO back in 2011 with Narinder Batra as the head. After resigning, she stated that it was difficult for her to continue given the bickering inside HI.

"There are two factions in Hockey India. There is (President) Dilip Tirkey and I and there is (Secretary) Bhola Nath Singh, (Executive Director) Cdr. R K Srivastava and (Treasurer) Sekar J Manoharan," she said.

"There are guys who want power and then there is (HI Presi-



dent) Dilip (Tirkey) who is a nice guy, only after betterment of Indian hockey," she explained.

Tirkey and Singh said their focus is now on rebuilding the women's team, which failed to qualify for the Olympics, and helping the men's side that is due to

compete in the quadrennial showpiece in Paris this year.

"We will continue in this pursuit of excellence and rebuild the women's team with a fresh approach to providing the right infrastructure and training to enhance their performance," they stated.

"In addition to this, we are cognisant of this being an Olympic year and are dedicated to aide the National Men's Team with the required support to stand on the podium yet again in the forthcoming Olympic Games in Paris this year." (PTI)