UK extends visas for **Ukrainians amid warin Europe** 

PML-N, PPP fail to reach consensus on power-sharing formula

Pak increases telecom towers in PoK to help terror groups: Officials

Double engine govt means 'double blow' to unemployed: Rahul slams BJP



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DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG

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PRICE ₹8

**Modi Sarkar** ki Guarantee Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

### **Prosperity of farmers**

1 lakh 25 thousand PM Kisan Samriddhi Kendras developed as one stop shop; Farmers are getting modern facilities and information close to home



#### HTBRIEFS

#### VP two day visit ITANAGAR: Vice President

Jagdeep Dhankhar will arrive here on February 20 on a two-day maiden visit to Arunachal Pradesh. The vice president will attend the 38th Statehood Day celebration at Indira Gandhi Park here besides other official programmes, official sources said. Dhankhar will also attend the state award ceremony at Raj Bhawan on February 21. Meanwhile, Capital Deputy Commissioner Talo Potom in an executive order has promulgated 144 CrPc within a radius of 500 metres around Raj Bhavan here from Saturday, apprehending disturbance of public peace and tranquillity. The order has prohibited the assembly or gathering of more than four persons. It, however, exempted government officials, security forces and invitees to the said programme. The prohibitory order would remain in force till February 21.

#### **UPPL** party

KOKRAJHAR: Bringing a surging message of gaining up mass momentum of UPPL party, social activist Birkhang Boro formally joined the ruling party United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) along with his over thousand supporters at a programme held at Habrubari playground under Dotma constituency in Kokrajhar district on Sunday. He comes from the greater Dotma area by profession of businessman. Boro, and several hundred new members from different political parties and social organisations, including BPF,AAP, Manav Seva Sangha have joined the UPPL party amidst presence of Raju Kumar Narzary, UPPL general secretary, senior party leaders.

#### Best director

SHILLONG: Meghalaya-based filmmaker, Simi Khongtiang, won the "Best Director" Award for her film 'Ka Chithi' at the Prag Cine Awards, 2024, North East India. The event was held in Jorhat on February 16, 2024. Her film in the Jaintia language was nominated in three categories, namely, "Best Film", "Best Actor (Female)" and "Best Director". "This is certainly a proud moment for the 'Ka Chithi' family.

## **Conrad bats for ILP to** tackle CAA 'spillover effect'

Schedule 6 exempts Meghalaya from CAA ambit

SHILLONG, Feb 18: Concerns of Meghalaya over the Citizenship Amendment Act have been addressed as most areas of the state come under Schedule 6, which is exempted from the citizenship law, chief minister Conrad Sangma said, even as he added that the Inner Line Permit should be extended to the state.

In an interview to PTI, Sangma, who also heads the National People's Party (NPP), expressed concern over 'spillover effect' in the state if the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is implemented, and stressed on the requirement for Inner Line Permit (ILP), which

will restrict the entry of outsiders.
Asked about the CAA, which has faced opposition in the state that shares more than 400-km-long border with Bangladesh, Sangma said their concerns have been addressed as it excludes Schedule 6 areas. "When the CAA had come out in the first draft, there was no provision of exemption for any state. After we raised the concern, we met the home minister, we met other leaders, then there was a revisit in the entire draft and they



came up with a provision where Meghalaya and other areas with Sixth Schedule and ILP were ex-

empted," Sangma said. "In every area in Meghalaya, except a few square metres in Shillong... a small area which we call the European ward, is the only area which is a non-scheduled area. Majority of the state is a scheduled area. Once an exemption is there, we don't have any concerns. So our concerns have been addressed," Sangma said.

"We have just requested the Government of India if we can still have the ILP... Because whatever happens in other states could have a spill-over effect here, we have requested for that. We are happy that the Government of India exempted Meghalaya. We have asked if the non-scheduled area can also be exempted, though it is very very small," he said. He also mentioned a resolution passed by the state Assembly to extend the ILP to the

### Tension grips Karbi Anglong and WKA amidst social unrest

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 18: The atmosphere in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts remained tense yet manageable, with no major incidents reported, although the prices of essential commodities have surged by over 100 per cent.

Both hill districts are experiencing an unofficial shutdown, as no specific organisation has claimed responsibility for the bandh. Commercial activities have ground to a halt, with private vehicle movement no-

The current state of affairs stems from an attack on the evening of February 15 targeting activists from the Karbi Students Association (KSA)

The assault occurred at Kheroni Sariali as the activists were returning from a protest demonstration against the demands of the Rachnatmak Nonia Sanyukta Sangh (RNSS) regarding land rights on Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) and Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR).

Despite the prevailing tensions, the popular weekly market in Diphu, known as the Sunday Market, commenced operations. However, prices of perishables, particularly tomatoes, surged from ₹ 20/- per kg to ₹ 50/- per kg, marking a staggering 150 per cent increase. (CONTD. ON PAGE-7)

## 10 coal miners abducted by suspected militants in Arunachal

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Feb 18: In a significant development, at least 10 coal miners working at the coal mine in the Finboro area of Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, were reportedly abducted on Sunday by suspected cadres of The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I).

Speaking on the incident, Tinsukia Superintendent of Police (SP) Abhijit Gurav stated that the abduction occurred in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

"We are yet to confirm the exact number of people abducted, but it has been confirmed that some individuals working in the Finboro area were taken. It's unclear whether workers from Assam were among those abducted. We hope to have more clarity soon,'

Further, sources claimed that a group of suspected militants, consisting of seven members, abducted the workers at gunpoint and transported them in a dumper to Old Longtoi, a remote area in Arunachal Pradesh. One of the abducted individuals has been identified as



Gyan Thapa. "The security forces have initiated a large-scale search operation to locate the abducted workers," the sources added

However, the motive behind the abduction by the militant groups is yet to be ascertained.

"Tirap, Longding, and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh have been heavily affected by insurgent activities due to their proximity to Myanmar. Many militants, (CONTD. ON PAGE-7)

### UNLF(P) cadres involved in violence in Manipur despite ceasefire, say officials

NEW DELHI/IMPHAL, Feb 18: Security agencies have voiced concerns over the escalating violence in Manipur perpetrated by the banned United National Liberation Front (UNLF) despite the armed group signing a ceasefire agreement with the Union government last November, officials said on Sunday.

Led by Kh Pambei, the UNLF (P) became on November 29, 2023 the first Meitei armed group in the Imphal Valley to enter into a ceasefire agreement with the government and agreed to renounce violence.

However, officials said the group has failed to disclose the number of its cadres who were supposed to be kept in a secure area, and they have not surrendered their weapons either.

Reports also indicate the group's members have been setting up camps in the outskirts of areas predominantly inhabited by the Kuki population with an aim to target the tribal, the officials said.

They said that based on the

ground reports, security agencies have observed the UNLF (P) cadres have been engaging in violent activities against both security forces and the general public.

The officials said the cadres were involved in looting arms and ammunition from the 5th India Reserve Battalion (IRB) at Chingarel in Manipur East on February 13.

Following this incident, the police arrested six individuals, including two UNLF cadre and the case is now likely to be transferred to the CBI for further investigation.

(P) cadres in various areas such as Moirangpurel, Tumukhong and Itham have raised concerns, with reports indicating they were carrying reconnaissance activities for establishing camps in Moirang-

The recent sightings of UNLF

purel and Itham. On February 7, 2024, UNLF (P) cadre allegedly opened fire at Moirangpurel on vehicles heading towards Churachandpur, a district dominated by the Kuki community. (CONTD. ON PAGE-7)

#### **Jaishankar meets Chinese counterpart** in Germany

BEIJING/MUNICH, Feb 18: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi have met briefly in Germany on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, their first meeting in more than six months. Video footage from the Munich Security Conference showed Jaishankar and Wang having a brief chat on the sidelines of the prestigious event attended by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other top diplomats from across the world.

However, there is no official word on the gist of their discussion

This was the first meeting between the two leaders in over six months. The two last met in July in the Indonesian capital Jakarta at the ASEAN Regional Forum.

The India-China relations have remained frozen since May 2020 when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) amassed troops in eastern Ladakh led to a deadly clash. Since then both countries have held 20 rounds of corps commanders-level talks and agreed to pull back forces at four points.

India is pressing the PLA to disengage from the Depsang and Demchok areas, maintaining that there cannot be restoration of normalcy in its relations with China as long as the state of the borders remains abnormal. Wang along with Jaishankar and a host of ministers from various countries attended the Munich Security Conference, an important forum for the exchange

of views by global policymakers. Wang in his address to the conference on Saturday said protectionism and concerns about security have impacted the world economy, while unilateralism and bloc politics have dealt a heavy blow to the international system, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. (PTI)

### Opposition lacks road map for 'Viksit Bharat', only BJP can deliver it: PM Modi

Modi asserted on Sunday that the BJP's return to power with a strong mandate is the first condition for India to realise its big goals as he exhorted thousands of party members to work with renewed energy, vigour and enthusiasm for the next 100 days to ensure a big victory

Addressing nearly 11,500 BJP delegates from across the country at Bharat Mandapam here, he said he is seeking power not for "satta bhog" (enjoying power) but for the country's benefit, and slammed the opposition, especially the Congress, saving they make all kinds of false promises but lack a road map for making the country developed. This is something only the BJP can do, he said, exuding confidence about his return to power while noting that many foreign coun-

NEW DELHI. Feb 18: Prime Minister Narendra tries have invited him for engagements in July, August and September. This suggests that these countries also know that "aayega toh Modi hi" (Modi's re-election

> In his 65-minute valedictory speech at the BJP's national convention ahead of the Lok Sabha elections expected in April-May, the prime minister stuck to the message of the country's growth and rising global standing besides his government's measures for empowering every section of society, especially the poor.

He asked BJP members to connect with all sections of society, including those who have not been inclined to the party, saying they have to earn the trust of everyone. When everyone makes an effort, then the BJP will win more than 370 seats and the NDA led by it 400-plus seats in the 543-member (CONTD. ON PAGE-7)

### Tribal body urges govt employees to refrain from going to office over cop's suspension

IMPHAL, Feb 18: The Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) has urged government employees in Manipur's Churachandpur district to refrain from attending work from Monday over the suspension of a head constable who was allegedly seen with armed men in a video grab.

The tribal outfit has made the call to press for its demand for the revocation of the suspension of head constable Siamlalpaul and "immediate replacement" of superintendent of police Shivanand Surve and deputy commissioner Dharun Kumar.

At least two people were killed and 30 injured in firing by security forces after a mob barged into a government complex housing the SP and DC offices, torched vehicles and ransacked government property in Churachandpur, hours after the suspension of the



head constable on February 15. "More than 24 hours have passed since the ITLF gave an ultimatum to cancel the suspension order of

head constable Siamlalpaul (CONTD. ON PAGE-7)

The conference targeted a wide range of audience and participants from across the globe

## International meet moots collaborations for skilling North East youths

GUWAHATI, Feb 18: Collaborations with foreign institutions for developing skills in youths of the North Eastern region in the electronics and IT sector and aligning their education with industry needs were mooted during an international conference here on digital technologies, an official release said on Sunday.

The importance of international internship and leveraging online platforms and smart classroom concepts for the maximum benefit of the students were also explored during the twoday meet, which concluded on Saturday.

The conference targeted a wide range of audience and participants from across the globe covering researchers, academicians and industry professionals, the release said



In his keynote address, Prof Rajeev Ahuja, director of IIT Ropar, underlined the significance of interdisciplinary collaboration, emphasising the collective strength that emerges when di-

verse expertise converges towards shared goals. During the discussions at the conference organised by the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), Karel Sterckx from Bangkok University spoke about collaboration models in Thailand and the varsity's internship programme.

He emphasised the importance of international internship programs in exposing students to diverse cultural and engineering perspectives.

Sterckx also highlighted the benefits of hosting students from different countries, including India, and the opportunities for collaboration that arise from such exchanges. Nitin Kumar Tripathi, acting vice-president for Academic Affairs at the (CONTD. ON PAGE-7)

### Centre 'deactivating' Aadhaar cards to stop people from getting welfare scheme benefits: Mamata

SURI (WB), Feb 18: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday alleged that the BJP-led central government "deactivated" Aadhaar cards of people in the state ahead of the Lok Sabha polls to stop them from availing the benefits of various social welfare schemes.

Speaking at a public distribution programme here in Birbhum district, Banerjee said her government would continue with the state-run welfare programmes irrespective of the beneficiaries not having an Aadhaar card.

'Be careful, they (BJP-led Centre) are deactivating Aadhaar cards. Several Aadhaar cards have been made inactive in many districts of Bengal. They are doing this so that people do not get benefits of schemes like 'Lakshmi Bhandar' through bank transfer and free ra-

tion before the polls," she claimed. "My clear instruction to the chief secretary is to ensure that people are not deprived of the benefits even if they do not have active Aadhaar cards. People of

Bengal need not be worried. I am there for you," the CM said. She alleged that Aadhaar cards of 50 people at Jamalpur in Purba Bardhaman district and several others in Birbhum, North and South 24 Parganas as well as in North Bengal have been "delinked"

"If I get to know that they (BJP-led Centre) have a hidden agenda behind deactivating Aadhaar cards, I will not allow a single scheme to be linked with those documents," she said.

"First, the Union government asked people to obtain Aadhaar cards, even for admission to schools. And now, it is deactivating the unique identity numbers without informing you... How many such cards do people need? What will they do with so many of these?" the chief minister said.

Banerjee also directed the chief secretary to launch an online portal where people, "whose Aadhaar cards have been deactivated", could lodge their complaints. She said that if banks don't allow transactions for customers without Aadhaar cards, (CONTD. ON PAGE-7)

THE HILLS TIMES

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## Regulatory compliance cannot be 'optional' for companies: Chandrasekhar

RBI action on Paytm Payments Bank

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: The Reserve Bank's regulatory action on Paytm Payments Bank has drawn the attention of fintech firms to the importance of complying with laws, Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has said.

The minister stressed that regulatory compliance cannot be "optional" for companies, rather it is an aspect every entrepreneur must pay full attention to.

In an interview to PTI, Chandrasekhar - the minister of state for electronics and IT - said the issue of Paytm Payments Bank is a case where a hard-charging and aggressive entrepreneur has failed to realise the need for regulatory compliance, and that no company can get away if it is non-compliant

Any company, be it from India or abroad, big or small, has to abide by the law of the land, the Minister asserted amid the unfolding Pavtm Pavments Bank Ltd (PPBL) crisis.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has barred PPBL from accepting new deposits from March 15, and ruled out any review of its action against the company.

Chandrasekhar said the notion that RBI action on PPBL had rattled fintechs, was not a correct characterisation. The politician, entrepreneur and technocrat disagreed that the Paytm Payments Bank issue had raised worries about detrimental consequences for the entire fintech industry.

"And this notion that RBI... the regulator's action against Paytm Payments Bank has rattled fintech is... I don't think that's a correct



15, giving 15 more days to the em-

battled company to close most of

its operations, including deposit

RBI has cited persistent non-

compliances and continued mate-

rial supervisory concerns, for the

quently asked questions), issued on

Friday, clarified that Paytm QR

code, Paytm Soundbox or Paytm

POS terminal will continue to

work after March 15, if it is linked

Fintech firm One97 Communi-

cations -- owner of the brand

Paytm -- meanwhile said it has

shifted its nodal account to Axis

Bank from Paytm Payments Bank

- a move that will allow continuity

of Paytm QR, Soundbox, card ma-

chine after the March 15, deadline

set by the central bank. The nodal

account of Paytm is like a master

account in which all its customers,

was a startup once and an entrepre-

Chandrasekhar said he himself

merchant transactions are settled.

to other banks instead of PPBL.

RBI in the list of FAOs (fre-

and credit transactions.

regulatory action.

"I think it has drawn the attention of fintech entrepreneurs, to the fact that you also have to know how to comply with the law. Regulatory compliance is not an optional thing for any country in the world, certainly not in India, and it is something that they (entrepreneurs) should pay more attention to," he said.

Chandrasekhar further said that entrepreneurs typically tend to get so sharply focused on what they're building, that at times, they may lose sight of rules that have been laid down by regulators.

PPBL is an associate of One97 Communications Limited.

One97 Communications holds 49 per cent of the paid-up share capital (directly and through its subsidiary) of PPBL. Paytm Founder and CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma has a 51 per cent stake in

RBI has advised customers and merchants of PPBL to shift their accounts to other banks by March

He said entrepreneurs and startups have a 'genetic flaw' that they get focused on what they're building and sometimes forget to understand there are some rules that have been laid down by the regu-

"So I will put this down to that type of an error where a hardcharging entrepreneur, believes in himself, is building a company successfully (but) fails to realise that there are some regulatory do's and don'ts and there can never be a situation whether it's a social media company, or a fintech company, where somebody is not compliant with the law and expects to get away with it," the minister

An engineer by qualification, Chandrasekhar has worked in a team at PC chip maker Intel that developed pentium processors. In 1994 he started his journey as entrepreneur with his telecom services company BPL Mobile and exited from the company in 2005. Thereafter he set-up his investment and financial services firm Jupiter Capital.

"I have said all along and this is a position of the government of India, regardless of where you come into the digital economy from India or abroad, whether you have a big or a small firm in the digital economy, FinTech or AI, the rules in the law of the land has to be complied with.

In the FinTech space, the regulator who lavs down the rules is the RBI. So, you have to listen to the RBI and you have to comply with the RBI," the minister said. (PTI)

### Two full-blown multi-billion dollar semiconductor plants coming up: MoS IT

ductor fabrication plants are going to come up in India very soon entailing multi-billion dollar investment besides several chip assembly and packaging units, Minister of Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said.

In an interview with PTI, the minister confirmed that the two projects include a USD 8 billion proposal submitted by Israel-based Tower Semiconductors and the other from Tata Group.

"I am happy to share this with you and you are probably the first one I'm sharing this with. In the near term, two full-blown fabs are going to come up in India. These are going to be multi-billion-dollar fabs in the 65, 40 and 28-nanometer technology and there are going to be a host of other packaging proposals that we are evaluating," Chandrasekhar said.

He was responding to a question on USD 8 billion investment proposal submitted by Tower Semiconductors and the status of India's semiconductor

The minister said that the project will be approved in the third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi if they are not cleared before the upcoming general elec-

"I can safely tell you that the names that you mentioned have submitted these big, very credible, very significant investment proposals. There are other announced proposals by Tata as well in the fab. We see this happening in a very, very quick short term," Chandrasekhar said.

The government has received four proposals for setting up semiconductor manufacturing plants and 13 for chip assembly, testing, monitoring and packaging (ATMP) units.

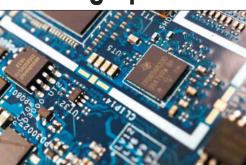
The proposals are in addition to a ₹ 22,516-crore chip assembly plant being set up by US-based mem-

ory chip maker Micron in Gujarat. The minister said India's semiconductor story is very akin to that of electronics in the country.

He said that the government before 2014, the UPA government, ignored electronics and for 75 years, India was a "classic case of missed opportunity" in semiconductors

"In 2012 Intel wanted to set up a plant here, and they found no support and they walked away. When the prime minister launched this (semiconductor) program in 2020 January, we knew we had to work very fast, and smartly and we had to in essence play catch up for the last 75 years of lost opportunity.

"We have made significant progress in a broad spectrum of areas: semiconductor design, startups, re-



search, talent, packaging and fabrication," Chandrasekhar said

According to government data, domestic electronics manufacturing increased over four-fold to ₹ 8.22 lakh crore in the last 10 years.

In FY 2013-14, electronics manufacturing was ₹ 1,80,454 crore (USD 29.8 billion) and has grown significantly to ₹8,22,350 crore (USD 102 billion) in FY 2022-23, which is further expected to grow up to ₹ 23,95,195 crore (USD 300 billion) by 2026.

Chandrasekhar also wrote a letter to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman before the budget to reduce import duty on electronic components to facilitate the growth of exports from the country.

The minister said he learnt from his former boss and ex-CEO of Intel Andrew Grove's book, "Only the

"I believe in being paranoid. I believe that as a nation, we should never take our leadership for granted. The letter that I wrote to the finance minister, unfortunately, we mischaracterized like some. In reality, it was a letter that effectively pointed out the big opportunity India had to move from import substitution-led manufacturing, to export-led manufacturing," Chandrasekhar said

He said the global value chain supply of electronics is shifting from being predominantly based in China to now looking for more hubs.

"India has played a big role in that shift in the last five years. India will play a big role in the coming five years to a decade. Electronics manufacturing, we were almost absent. To put it in the words of Tim Cook (Apple CEO). Three years ago there were no Apple phones being manufactured in India. We were importing 100 per cent of all mobile phones. Today we are exporting USD 10-12 billion of Apple and Samsung mobile phones," the minister said.

He said that the growth has been spectacular. (PTI)

### **Himalaya Optical opened** it's 5th premium store

GUWAHATI, Feb 18: With an aim to give 'Perfect Vision' to all eyes, Himalaya Optical had started its journey back in 1935 and made a name as one of the renowned Optical retailers in the country. With 4 stores in Guwahati. Himalaya Optical is all set to open its 5th brick and mortar store at Six Mile in Guwahati. The ever changing needs and expectations of the customers is making it essential for a big brand like Himalaya Optical to cater to those needs and give seamless experience to all the patrons. This new store marks another milestone in the brand's illustrious journey, further expanding its presence in the vibrant city.

The store has an amalgamation of exclusive brands and luxury brands. Our selection showcases the pinnacle of over 60 international brands, including Lindberg, Mont Blanc, Cartier, Gucci, Prada, Tom Ford, and many more. Apart from these eyewear collections a wide range of contact lenses and high quality ophthalmic lenses will also be there. Known for providing best quality and accurate eye check-up done by experienced optometrist, the store has the latest high-end technology for eye-testing. The professional optometrist will be available round the clock during the operational hours. Himalaya Optical remains unwavering in its commitment to addressing the most discerning eye care needs of its customer, providing a truly lavish 360-degree eye test, meticulously conducted by their team of world-class, highly-trained optometrists. We have the Visio office which is the advanced system in optometry and ophthalmology for measuring and analysing various aspects of vision and eye alignment. It's often used to assist in the fitting of eyeglasses, contact lenses, and other vision-related services to ensure the most accurate and comfortable vision correction.

The inauguration of the Six Mile store will be graced by the esteemed presence of Shri Ashish Jalan & Shri Mukesh Achantani, their business associate for Assam.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Jalan, said, "The brand always wants to reinvent its ways to give the best experience to its patrons. From housing all latest trendy eyewear to using latest technologies for accurate eye testing, we always want to be ready for the changing markets and its demands." Though it has been more than 85 years that Himalaya Optical is there in this Optical Retailing business, every new store launch is a new beginning. Resting on the four pillars of perseverance, loyalty, grit and relentlessness the brand is all set to move forward and expand remarkably.

### **CBIC** issues revised guidelines for reporting arrest, smuggling incidents

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: The Central Board Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has revised guidelines for reporting of arrests, smuggling and commercial frauds by customs officers, as it looks to enhance risk-based targeting to nullify fraud attempts by syndicates.

In an instruction to field officers, the CBIC said that the arrest and incident reports of smuggling and commercial frauds are not being shared or are sporadically shared by the customs zones.

In some cases, the arrest report many times contains description/details that are insufficient as input for enhanced risk

As per the revised guidelines of CBIC, the Chief Commissioner/Director Generals of a customs zone would be required to send the arrest report through email to the CBIC within 24 hours of the arrest of an individual.

The arrest report would contain details of nationality and the details of offence

**NEW DELHI. Feb 18:** The domestic two-wheeler industry

is expected to witness a double-digit revenue growth next fiscal

with demand for premium models anticipated to gain further

momentum, according to Hero MotoCorp CEO Niranjan

total income of Rs 10,031 crore in the October-December quar-

ter this fiscal, also expects the entry level segment to do better

The country's largest two-wheeler maker, which reported a

"As far as the demand is concerned, as we have been saying,

He noted that in the domestic two-wheeler space there is a

Gupta stated that the entry level bike vertical, which has seen

"So, it's not just about the top end of India which is growing,

muted sales over the last few years, is also on a recovery path.

shift taking place towards premiumisation with buyers looking

we do expect the industry to grow double digit on revenue in

the coming year at the least," Gupta said in an analyst call.



committed by the individual who has been arrested. It would also contain details of seizure of goods by the authorities in quantity as well as in terms of market value. In cases where arrests have not been made by the Customs officer, an incident report related to smuggling and commercial frauds has to be sent "immediately" to the CBIC by the juris-

Expect 2W industry to see double-digit

Observing that customs commissioners are "expected to be up to date" with respect to smuggling and commercial fraud cases under his/her jurisdiction, the CBIC said the incident report should describe the modus operandi, including flight/ vovage/cruise number and the customs declaration document name.

The report should also mention the country of origin of the goods and the

"The collection and integration of a proper database is very much required for the purpose of prevention of smuggling through early detection of entities involved and by understanding their adjusting modus operandi.

"The expeditious updating of databases is imperative for achieving the optimum risk based targeting across zones. This agility nullifies tactics that the syndicates adopt across zones or modes of carriage or routes," the CBIC instruc-

### Hybrid mutual funds scheme gain popularity, attract ₹ 20,634 cr in Jan

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: Hybrid six months. "The main reason for mutual fund schemes have been gaining popularity among investors, attracting ₹ 20,634 crore in January, marking a 37 per cent surge from the previous month, largely due to their appeal as an alternative investment option postchange in taxation laws for debt funds. With this, total inflow in the category reached ₹ 1.21 lakh crore in the April-January period of the current financial year (FY24).

However, hybrid schemes saw outflow in the same period of the preceding financial year.

Hybrid funds are mutual fund schemes that typically invest in a combination of equity and debt securities and sometimes in other asset categories such as gold.

The category has been attracting regular inflows since April 2023, after a change in taxation for debt funds that kicked off in the same month. Before that, the segment saw a net withdrawal of ₹12,372 crore in March last year.

According to the latest data with the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi), hybrid schemes witnessed an inflow of ₹ 20.637 crore in January, which was higher than ₹ 15,009 crore inflow seen in December.

The two categories of hybrid funds that attracted most funds during the month under review are arbitrage funds and multi-asset allocation funds. Out of the ₹20,637 crore inflow in hybrid funds in January, arbitrage funds witnessed an inflow of ₹ 10,608 crore, while for multi-asset allocation funds it was ₹ 7,080 crore.

Moreover, around 50 per cent to 70 per cent of the allocation in the hybrid category has been going towards arbitrage funds in the last

the increase in flows in this category is that they are being looked at as an alternative post-change in tax laws. "Currently, arbitrage funds are sitting at a spread of around 8 per cent making it an attractive investment opportunity, especially on a post-tax basis, Feroze Azeez, Deputy CEO, Anand Rathi Wealth Ltd, said.

Besides, the multi-asset category, offering easy diversification, has become the investors' choice.

In terms of folios, the segment added 3.36 lakh hybrid folios in the month under review, taking the total to 1.31 crore, representing a share of 7.7 per cent on the total folios of 16.95 crore.

Hybrid funds appeal more to investors with a moderate or lowrisk profile. These funds are good investment options as they reduce the volatility associated when participating in equity markets while simultaneously providing stability in the fixed-income market.

Market analysts believe that investors are looking to invest a portion of their fixed income exposure through hybrid funds after the change in taxation for debt funds.

Under the new rules that kicked in from April 1, 2023 debt mutual funds held for more than three years will no longer enjoy indexation benefits. Indexation takes into account inflation during the holding period of a mutual fund unit and consequently increases the purchase price of the asset and this reduces the tax.

The inflow has pushed the Average Assets Under Management (AAUM) of hybrid schemes by a staggering 40 per cent to ₹ 7 lakh crore in January-end from ₹ 5 lakh crore in April. (PTI)

### Power consumption grows 7.5% to 1354.97 bn units in FY23-24 from Apr-Jan

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power consumption increased 7.5 per cent on-year to 1354.97 billion units (BU) in the April-January period of this financial year, indicating an uptick in economic activities across the country.

Power consumption in the country has increased to 1354.97 billion units (BU) in the April-January period of this financial year, from 1259.49 BU in the April-January period of fiscal 2022-23, according to government data. It was 1505.91 BU in the entire fiscal year of 2022-23, the data showed.

Experts believe the 7.5 per cent growth in power consumption in the country clearly shows a perk up in economic activities in the first 10 months of this fiscal year.

They said power consumption grew in August, September and October, mainly due to humid weather conditions, and a pick-up in industrial activities ahead of the

festive season Experts are predicting a steady power consumption growth due to improvement in economic activities and cold wave conditions in February. They are of the view that India will have a steady growth in power consumption as well as demand during the current fiscal

The National Statistical Office has pegged Indian economic growth at 7.3 per cent in 2023-24 over and above the provisional growth rate of 7.2 per cent during the last financial year in its first advance estimates released earlier in January. Power consumption in January rose 5.4 per cent to 133.18 BU, compared to 126.30 BU, the

data showed. The peak power demand met -the highest supply in a day -- rose to 222.32 GW in January 2024. The peak power supply stood at 210.72 GW in January 2023 and 192.18 GW in January 2022.

Experts said that power consumption as well as demand improved in January as mercury fell sharply in the month, especially in North India.

The cold wave resulted in increased use of heating equipment like heaters, blowers and geysers which led to increase of power demand as well as consumption.

The power ministry had estimated the country's electricity demand to touch 229 GW during the summer in 2023. The demand did not reach the

projected level in April-July due to unseasonal rains. The peak supply, however, touched a new high of 224.1 GW in June before dropping to 209.03 GW in July. Peak demand touched 238.82

GW in August. In September 2023, it was 243.27 GW. The peak demand was 222.16 GW in October, 204.77 GW in November and 213.62 GW in December 2023.

Industry experts said power consumption was affected in March, April, May, and June last year due to widespread rainfall. (PTI)

revenue growth: Hero MotoCorp you can see aspirations of people growing," Gupta stated. He noted that demand in the rural areas has improved con-

> "At the bottom of pyramid, the heavy capex spend that's been happening, the digital inclusion that's been happening, the hospitality industry that you can see clearly which is lifted up, it's actually lifting the sentiment of the consumers of the bottom end," Gupta said.

> He further said: "We clearly see the positive signals which are emanating from the rural sector as well and we will see in the coming quarters growth picking up from that segment." Elaborating on the company's plans to upgrade sales outlets to sell premium segment models, he noted that the two-wheeler major has already upgraded 300 dealerships in the country so

"By March end we'll have 400 (upgraded sales outlets), and next year we'll cross 500 2.0 stores (upgraded outlets) along with 100 Premia stores," Gupta stated. (PTI)

IHCL 'very pleased with the financial performance of all spiritual destinations

### IHCL looks to strengthen leadership position in spiritual tourism

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: Tata group hospitality firm Indian Hotels Company Ltd is looking to strengthen its leadership position in spiritual tourism, developing properties in noted locations in India with spirituality expected to play a more significant role globally, according to a top company official. The company currently has 66 hotels either operational or under development at spiritual destinations, including the latest hotspot Ayodhya, and will continue to grow the portfolio.

"I think spiritual destination and spirituality is going to play a more significant role across the globe. Not just for us, but generally for the world population, a very important role and I'm glad to say that we are at the forefront of it." company Managing Director & CEO Puneet Chhatwal told PTI. On why the company sees a

huge opportunity in the segment, Chhatwal said, "spiritual destinations are a safer bet because people in good or in bad times go to get the blessings of the Lord, whether it's any kind of good, bad, sad or happy event happening. That's a part of our culture. That's a part of



ance of all spiritual destinations".

When asked about expanding the network in spiritual destinations, he said, "We have 66 hotels either opened or under development and that will keep growing. He further said, "in Ayodhya

also we have signed three contracts. We will be opening our first one in one year from now, and the other two will follow."

Stating that all these are work in progress, Chhatwal said, "We are already present in 50-plus spiritual destinations... and maybe all of the brands put together may not add up to 50-plus destinations like we have." From properties under Vivanta and Ginger brands at Katra, Vaishno Devi in North India to Taj at Tirupati, where a second property would be added, he said IHCL's spiritual destination portfolio almost runs across the length and breadth of the country.

"Even in places like Guwahati, we were almost the first ones to go there and spend our own money, that is IHCL's investment that went into it. We serve a lot of spiritual destinations and it's been a part of the strategy...," he said. (PTI)



## **Excitement mounts as new model** college set to open in Sonitpur

CM Himanta to inaugurate college building in March



**HT Correspondent** 

TEZPUR, Feb 18: Sonitpur district is abuzz with excitement as preparations are underway for the formal inauguration of the much-anticipated Government Model College in the Balipara-Mansiri area under the jurisdiction of Chariduar Police Station.

Scheduled to be officially inaugurated by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in the first week of March, the college marks a significant addition to the higher education landscape in the district.

The Government Model College, Balipara, sanctioned by the Government of Assam under order no ecf. 291750 dated July 31, 2023, with a focus on Arts stream, has created 18 assistant professor positions across six

Dr Ranjan Kalita, principal of Rangapara College, has been entrusted with the additional responsibility of serving as the in-charge principal of the new Government Model College in Balipara, ensuring the seamless functioning of academic and administrative operations.

"Students have been admitted for the BA first semester for the academic session 2023-24.

Presently, the college is operating from the Rangapara College campus, with civil works on the college building completed by the Public Works Department (PWD), poised for formal inauguration by the chief minister in the first week of March," stated Dr Kalita.

In a significant development

enhancing the academic prowess of Balipara Government Model College, 14 out of 17 newly appointed assistant professors have joined the institution, injecting a wave of enthusiasm into the fac-

Notable additions include Dr Manisha Bordoiloi, Dr Masuma Firdaus, Moushumi Pathak, Biswajit Saikia, Rajen Timung, Bhargav Das, Amanisha Borah, Biki Boro, Bismita Deka, Priyanka Sarkar, Hemanga Gogoi, Sushma Das Biswas, Jyotisikha Bhuyan, and Dikhya Rani Gogoi, with the remaining three teachers set to join next

Simultaneously, three newly appointed assistant professors, Bikhipta Saikia, Priyadarshini Baruah, and Shivam Yadubonshi, have commenced their roles at Rangapara College.

Deba Kumar Mishra, district collector of Sonitpur and chairman of the Governing Body, along with Dr Ranjan Kalita, principal of Rangapara College & Government Model College, expressed their delight at the recruitment of the new assistant professors, underscoring the institutions' commitment to fosteran environment of

With these accomplished professionals on board, Government Model College, Balipara, and Rangapara Colleges are poised to embark on an enriching academic journey, ensuring a brighter future for their stu-

continuous growth and learning.

FIR against additional secretary Jitendra Gupta and two other officials

### CBI filing FIR against Nagaland officials was on expected lines: NPCC

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 18: The Nagaland

Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) said the recent filing of an FIR by the CBI against additional secretary of the Nagaland agriculture department and two other highranking officials working in the Fostering Climate-Resilient Upland Farming System (FOCUS) project in the state in a bribery case involving more than ₹ 2 crore was on expected lines considering the "stranglehold" of corruption at all levels of governance in the state authored and patronised by the 'morally bankrupt" oppositionless state government.

The CBI filed the FIR against additional secretary Jitendra Gupta and two other officials working in the FOCUS project for allegedly receiving bribes of more than ₹ 2

According to reports, the central agency had filed the FIR against the trio following a complaint from the air intelligence unit of the income tax department that they were travelling from Dimapur to New Delhi in a flight on December 17, 2023,



allegedly with huge cash.

In a release issued by its communication department on Sunday, the NPCC lauded the welcome intervention of the law enforcement agency in the case. However, it said, it is nowhere near enough because what is being witnessed is just the tip of an all-pervasive mammoth iceberg of cancer eating away at the rights and wellbeing of the common people of Nagaland, one painful bite

"The rot is systemic, entrenched,

and starts at the top, necessitating a troubleshooting exercise at a scale much more proportionate than the one under play now," the NPCC

Strongly condemning what it called the vulgar fallout of corruption unfolding before "our eyes", the Pradesh Congress Committee called upon the powers that be to mend their ways lest the "culture of decadence and ineptitude that they so shamelessly espouse now drags us all down to a point of no return"

### RPF apprehends 6 persons involved in passenger belongings theft

**GUWAHATI, Feb 18:** The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of NF Railway, while conducting regular checks and drives within the zone from February 13 to 16, 2024, apprehended 6 persons involved in the theft of passengers' belongings.

During these checks at different stations and on trains, they successfully recovered valuables worth approximately ₹ 72.5 thousand from trains and railway stations at Guwahati, Dimapur, Kishanganj, Katihar, Alipurduar, New Jalpaiguri, etc.

All the apprehended persons, along with the recovered valuables, were handed over to the respective In-charge of GRP for further legal ac-

In a recent incident on February 16, 2024, RPF of Alipurduar jointly with CPDS and CIB teams of Alipurduar conducted checking on train no 02517 UP (Kolkata-Guwahati Special) and apprehended one person with two stolen mobile phones worth around ₹ 20 thousand.

On the same day, the RPF team of Guwahati jointly with the CIB team of Guwahati conducted a check at Guwahati Railway Station and apprehended one person with two stolen mobile phones worth around ₹ 10 thousand.

On February 15, 2024, the RPF one person with two stolen mobile train journey.

PTI in an interview.

phones worth around ₹ 9.5 thousand

On February 14, 2024, the RPF team of Katihar (East), jointly with the CPDS team and GRP of Katihar, conducted a check at Katihar Railway Station and apprehended one person and recovered one stolen lady purse containing cash worth ₹ 3 thousand. On the same day, the RPF team of Kishanganj, jointly with the CIB team of New Jalpaiguri, conducted a check at Kishanganj railway station and apprehended one person and recovered one stolen mobile

phone worth around ₹ 15 thousand. On February 13, 2024, the RPF team of Dimapur conducted a check on train no 15666 DN (BG Express) at Dimapur Railway Station and apprehended one person and recovered one stolen mobile phone worth around ₹ 15 thousand.

During the month of January 2024, the RPF of NFR arrested 30 persons involved in the theft of passengers' belongings and recovered 40 mobile phones, 1 laptop & cash, etc., totaling around ₹ 6.52 lakhs. All the apprehended persons, along with the recovered valuables, were handed over to the respective in-charge of GRP for further legal actions.

The RPF of NF Railway is always ready to provide services to extend guidance and assistance to rail users besides their task of ensuring security for passengers. Kallway passengers while escorting train no 15657 UP can dial 139 (toll-free) if they come (Brahmaputra Mail), apprehended across any problems during their

### Conflict erupts during Ali Aye Ligang celebrations

**HT Correspondent** 

DEMOW, Feb 18: The tranquil evening of February 15 in Borguri Mising Gaon near Demow was intended for a jubilant celebration of Ali Aye Ligang, a cherished cultural event. However, the atmosphere turned tense as a section of guardians residing in Borguri Gaon and its surroundings expressed apprehensions regarding the timing of the event, coinciding with the ongoing HSLC and HS Final Examinations 2024.

In response to the concerns raised, the Nitaipukhuri Outpost was promptly alerted. Subsequently, Nitaipukhuri Police ar-

rived on the scene, urging the organisers to bring the festivities to a halt. Unfortunately, what began as an attempt to address community concerns quickly escalated into a situation marked by heated verbal exchanges and disorder.

The intervention of the Demow Police was necessary to restore order and diffuse the escalating tensions. However, the aftermath of the incident revealed deeper rifts within the community. Reports emerged of physical altercainvolving

officer-in-charge (OC) of the Nitaipukhuri Outpost, who allegedly clashed with a prominent BJP leader from Borguri and several youths associated with the event's organising committee.

The following day saw a show of discontent as supporters of the BJP gathered at the Nitaipukhuri Outpost, demanding accountability and stringent action against the OC. The incident has cast a shadow over the tranquility of the community, prompting discussions about the need for better communication and conflict resolution

In the wake of the turmoil, plans are underway to transfer the OC of Nitaipukhuri Outpost to the Haluwating Police Station.

### Sivasagar District Senior **Citizens' Conference held**

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 18: "Vivekananda lived only 39 years, Anandaram Baruah lived only 35 years, and hence we should not measure our lives only by calendar years," said Suresh Saikia, president of the All Assam Senior Citizens Association, while addressing the Senior Citizens Annual Conference held at Peoli Phukan Stadium on Sunday under the aegis of the Sivasagar District Senior Citizens' Association. Members from 15 regional committees joined the conference.

In the forenoon session, traditional sports were held, inaugurated by Manik Rajkonwar, vice president of the All Assam Senior Citizens' Association. The Gaurisagar team won the tug-ofwar contest, defeating Rajgarh. In the women's section, Sivasagar defeated

The open session was presided over by Deven Chandra Baruah, while secretary Dilip Saikia initiated the proceedings. Earlier, traditional sports and games were inaugurated by Manik Raikonwar, vice president of the association. Radio artist Dilip Das, Manoj Kr Borthakur, Bijumoni Dutta, Anju Sadhanidar, Ranju Phukan, and Haren Buragohain performed modern songs. Robin Borthakur, Jaya Dutta Bhunya, and Yasmin Ara Rajjak recited poems. Indra Bailung, Suresh Chetia, Ajit Khataniar, and Tilak Das performed

### Reconsider FMR scrapping, fencing at India-Myanmar border

**HT Correspondent** 

**DIMAPUR, Feb 18:** With the cries growing louder in the Northeast against the Centre's decision to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and fence the India-Myanmar border, leaders of indigenous people's organisations of four states of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Assam came together to raise a common voice to push for reconsideration of the decision. Besides the leaders of the indige-

nous communities, political parties of Nagaland, including ruling Nationalist Democratic Party, Naga People's Front and Rising People's Party and other individuals gathered at a symposium on India-Myanmar border issue, organised by the Nagaland Indigenous People's Organisation, here on Friday night to deliberate on the Centre's decision. Various speakers put forward their suggestions and called for a common platform of the indigenous people of the Northeast to push the Centre for reconsideration of the decision. A 12-member core committee, comprising members from the indigenous tribal organisations, was also formed at the meeting to press the government of India to revoke its decision. The meeting also decided to write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to apprise him how the scrapping of the FMR and border fencing is going to impact the people of the region, especially those living in border areas.

As per the draft representation to be sent to the PM, the move to repeal the FMR and fencing the border was not only impractical but also dehumanizing

"The decision to do away with the FMR and erect border fencing is not only impractical and dehumanizing to the communities living on both sides of the border but also such an approach may only diminish the prospects for peace and wellbeing in the restive region," it said.

"The security argument that your government has used to justify the removal of FMR stands in contradiction to the diplomatic and strategic outreach with the neighbouring

violates the indigenous rights of the border communities. We strongly oppose the security-centric approach to border management," it

The draft representation stressed that as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), India's approach to the indigenous peoples in the Indo-Myanmar border must be guided by the principles of the

Also, underlining that the collective aspiration of the indigenous communities of the NE should not be ignored, it sought to urge the PM to explore other measures to urgently address the present concerns of the indigenous people to consolidate the efforts towards building peace and amity "that is so vital for all-round human and economic development in this strategically sensitive border region".

The organisations of indigenous communities such as Kuki Inpi Manipur, Zo Reunification Organisation (Mizoram), Kuki Inpi Nagaland, Indigenous peoples of Mung-Dun-Chun-Kham, Assam, North East India, Manipur Naga Youth Organisation, Nagaland GB Federation, Nagaland Tribes Coun cil, Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation. Senior Association Nagaland, United Naga Tribes Association on Border Areas, Project Constitutional justice, The Naga Rising, Chakhroma Youth Organisation among others attended the meeting. Today's gathering also included political parties like the NPF, NDPP and RPP and former bureaucrat KK Sema, former MP C Apok Jamir and NPF MLA Kuzholuzo Nienu.

Former Indian ambassador to Myanmar Gautam Mukhophadhyaya also took part in the discussion on invitation. He said the existing Indo-Myanmar border has been largely accepted by the crossborder populations so long as the FMR remained in effect. However. once removed, further risk lurks in the form of counter-territorial claims from both sides of the imaginary border, he stated.

### Congress' Yatra may not fetch votes: Conrad Sangma SHILLONG, Feb 18: The Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which

passed through several northeastern states, has created a "big media buzz" but may not fetch the party votes, Meghalaya Chief Minister and National People's Party president Conrad Sangma has said. "I don't think they will get the outcome that they desire," he told

The amount of energy and resources that the Congress has put in for this Yatra "may not convert into real votes and real seats," Sangma

The Yatra, led by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, began from Manipur on January 14 and crossed Meghalaya on January 22. It covered five of the eight northeastern states ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. due in April-May.

Sangma said, "When you do something, whatever energy you put, will obviously have some impact in one way or the other. The question is how much impact it will have. The amount of energy that has been put into this Yatra, would it fructify into equivalent amount of votes being changed or coming in favour of Congress party...I doubt it." "Yes, it's a big media buzz but winning election is more than just a

Sikkim CM participates in fun run

GANGTOK, Feb 18: Sikkim chief minister Prem Singh Tamang

and his cabinet ministers on Sunday participated in the 2 km (fun

To 'West Point Sarthi' run was organised to mark the inauguration

Around 1,800 runners from all over the country including model

Speaking at the inauguration of the multi-level parking complex,

the CM said "I am thrilled to take part in the Sikkim Sarathi run

hosted in Gangtok today. The impressive turnout of people from

various age groups reflects the community's dedication to health

and fitness and I extend my congratulations to all participants and

Speaking to PTI, Kumar Manish, Vice President, Mesaso Infra-

The project was developed under the PPP model between West

structure Pvt Ltd, said the multi-level parking complex will solve

Gangtok's parking problem as it will accommodate 400 vehicles.

Point and Gangtok Smart City Development Ltd. (PTI)

run) organised by Gangtok Smart City Development Ltd.

Milind Soman participated in the 10 km run.

of the multi-level parking complex in Gangtok this morning.

Yatra. The Congress has a lot of issues internally, organisationally, and there are so many factors that need to be resolved. The Yatra is going on, and so many people are leaving the party. It is reflecting that there is a concern that they need to address, that they have to get their house in order in one way," he said. Congress' Vincent Pala is the MP from Meghalaya's Shillong con-

stituency, while NPP's Agatha Sangma is the MP from Tura. The NPP has announced the candidature of state minister Ampareen Lyngdoh from Shillong this time. Agatha Sangma will fight again from

Asked if the NPP may win the Shillong seat this time, Sangma said, "We never take election lightly, we are working very hard. We never take our opponent easy. It's going to be tough, we will work hard and people will give our candidate an opportunity to represent them in the

### NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati hosts 'Anand Mela' Former librarian Two day event showcases local flavours, handicrafts, and talent

**HT Correspondent** 

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 18: National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Bongaigaon Salakati, in collaboration with the Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, successfully organised a vibrant two-day 'Anand Mela' on Saturday and Sunday, under the theme 'NTPC Illuminating Lives' at the NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati complex in Kokrajhar.

The Mela was inaugurated by Pradeep Kumar Dwivedi, district commissioner, Kokrajhar, in the presence of Pushpraj Singh, superintendent of police, Kokrajhar, Karunakar Das, business unit head, K C Muraleedharan, CGM, NTPC Bongaigaon, Vani Reddy, and Jhumita Biswas, senior member, Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club. The inauguration ceremony, graced by esteemed guests, marked the beginning of a celebration of culture, community, and creativity.

Over 25 stalls showcased the rich flavours of India through various food items, meticulously prepared by members of the ladies' club, captivating the entire gathering. Additionally, stalls featuring ethnic handicrafts, handlooms, organic food items, and innovative cane and bamboo furniture added to the di-



verse array of offerings. Participation from medical, IT, and safety departments, as well as automobile companies, enriched the Mela's offerings, reflecting the region's entrepreneurial spirit and in-

Speaking on the occasion, Dwivedi spoke about how NTPC Bongaigaon has been powering the region and the country and congratulated the team of professionals for lighting the nation 24x7.

He expressed his satisfaction with the arrangements of the Mela and the effort by the power station in bringing all vendors and family members under one

Earlier, Karunakar Das, business unit head of the station, expressed his gratitude to Dwivedi and senior management of ER-II headed by Sudip Nag, regional executive director, for showering their blessings on the celebrations

Cultural performances by troops from BTR and the region showcased the state's rich cultural heritage, while an army band infused the event with patriotic fervour through synchronised symphonies, captivating the audience at the annual mela.

Attendees also enjoyed activities such as game stalls by NTPC employees, stalls from Bal Bhawan, creating a vibrant atmosphere of joy and cama-

In a noble initiative, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts, NTPC Bongaigaon distributed solar lanterns to the 40 GEM Girls of 2023 on the occasion.

The GEM (Girl Empowerment Mission) initiative aims to empower young girls by providing them with access to education, skills training, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. NTPC Bongaigaon recognises the importance of sustainable energy solutions and distributed solar lanterns to the GEM Girls of 2023, enabling them to study and pursue their dreams. Dwivedi and Das personally handed over the solar lanterns to the GEM Girls, emphasising NTPC Bongaigaon's commitment to supporting the education and empowerment of girls in the community. The distribution of solar lanterns to the

GEM Girls represents NTPC Bongaigaon's dedication to leveraging its resources for the betterment of society, particularly in promoting education and gender equality. The Mela also showcased captivating

ethnic dance performances, dynamic fashion shows, and vibrant cultural programs by esteemed artists from both the state and the region, enriching the event's cultural fabric. The presence of IS Reddy, GM (Maintenance), A Biswas, GM (Operation), GM Thangzom, commandant, CISF, A Ngullie, general secretary of Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, Ashish Kumar, deputy commandant, CISF, Onkar Nath, AGM(HR), Paresh Mathur, AGM(TS), officials from district and state administration, HODs from various departments, and representatives of unions and associations added to the grandeur of the occasion.

The Anand Mela exemplified NTPC Bongaigaon's commitment to fostering community engagement, promoting local talent, and celebrating the vibrant cultural mosaic of Bodoland Territorial

# passes away

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 18: Suren

Kalita, a revered resident of Sesa Satra and former librarian of THB College, breathed his last on Sunday at his residence, succumbing to old age-related ailments.

He was 78 years old. Kalita, a well-known figure in the Jamugurihat area, had deeprooted associations with numerous socio-cultural organisations in the greater Jamugurihat region. He held the esteemed position of founder librarian at THB College and retired as head librarian in 2005.

The news of his demise has enveloped Ja-

mugurihat in sorrow. Kalita was admired and respected by many for his contributions to education and culture

in the community He is survived by his daughter, Uddipana Kalita, a scientist who was part of the Chandrayaan II mission, a son, and a large circle

Various organisations and individuals, including THB College, Bapuji Bhawan Natya Samaj, Baresohoriya Bhaona Committee. Naduar Press Club, Jamuguri branch of Sahitya Sanmilani, Natun Sahitya Parishad, and All Jamuguri Students' Union, among others, have come forward to pay heartfelt tributes to Suren Kalita, recognising his invaluable contributions to society.

#### THE HILLS TIMES

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

I didn't think; I experimented. -Anthony Burgess

### **Urgency of pension reform**

The recent surge in agitation among farm labourers and salaried workers underscores a profound discontentment over the denial of adequate pension coverage. The ongoing farmers' agitation, compounded by instances of police brutality, has ignited a fervent demand for pension rights, symbolizing a broader call for social justice and economic security. As the rural workforce unites in solidarity, their grievances reverberate across the nation, echoing the sentiments of millions grappling with the harsh realities of meagre pensions and uncertain futures. The participation of major Central Trade Unions in the recent strike action epitomises a collective outcry for comprehensive pension reforms, transcending sectoral boundaries to encompass all segments of the labour force. The Modi government's reluctance to address these pressing concerns is evident in its refusal to increase the monthly minimum pension under the Employees Pension Scheme (EPS) from a mere ₹ 1000 to ₹ 2000. Such indifference reflects a systemic failure to recognise the fundamental rights of workers, condemning many to a life of financial insecurity in their twilight years.

The inadequacy of the current pension system is starkly illustrated by the plight of pensioners under the EPS, with a significant proportion receiving pensions below the subsistence level. Despite incremental adjustments, the recent history of fluctuating EPFO fund interest rates further underscores the government's inconsistent approach to addressing the needs of retirees. The Standing Committee on Labour's condemnation of pensions below ₹ 1000 per month highlights the urgent need for substantive reforms. The Committee's directive to ensure adequate budgetary support underscores the gravity of the situation, emphasising the imperative for governmental intervention to safeguard the welfare of pensioners. The clamor for reverting to the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) resonates deeply among government employees; transcending partisan divides to emerge as a pivotal electoral issue. While some states have heeded this call, the Modi government's reluctance to implement OPS universally underscores its detachment from the concerns of the working class. As the spectre of the Lok Sabha election looms large, the demand for pension reform assumes heightened significance, with opposition parties championing the cause of comprehensive pension coverage. The convergence of diverse political forces under the banner of INDIA alliance underscores the widespread consensus on the urgency of pension reform as a cornerstone of social welfare pol-

In this charged political landscape, both agricultural and non-agricultural workers set the stage for a more aggressive agitation, as they mobilize to assert their rights to fair wages and dignified retirement. The resonance of these demands transcends mere electoral calculus, symbolising a broader struggle for economic justice and human dignity. The denial of adequate pension coverage represents a grave injustice that demands immediate redressal. As the voices of the marginalised grow louder, it is incumbent upon the government to heed their call for meaningful reform, lest it risk alienating the very constituents it purports to represent. The time for action is now, as we strive to build a society where every worker can retire with dignity and security. Moreover, the refusal of the Modi government to address the pension crisis reflects a broader pattern of neglect towards the working class. Despite repeated calls for reform, including demands for a return to the Old Pension Scheme and comprehensive coverage for all workers, substantive action remains elusive. As the election looms, the spectre of pension reform looms

# Unveiling the tragedy: Injustice and betrayal in Sandeshkhali



By: Shashanka Das

The serene landscape of Bengal's Sandeshkhali in the North 24 Parganas district has been marred by a harrowing saga of horror and despair, sending shockwayes across the nation. Hindu women, once the pillars of their community, now find themselves victims of unspeakable atrocities - rape, sexual exploitation, and threats allegedly orchestrated by members of the Trinamool Congress

In the face of mounting anguish and outcry, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's resounding silence reverberated, a stark contrast to her professed commitment to justice and equality. Instead of standing with the victims, she chose to shield her party leader, Shahjahan Sheikh, and his associates, deflecting blame onto political rivals while dismissing the cries of the oppressed as mere propaganda.

Banerjee's defense of Sheikh, amidst a litany of accusations, underscores a troubling pattern of political expediency trumping moral obligation. By absolving Sheikh of any wrongdoing and brazenly implicating the BJP and RSS, Baneriee not only betrayed her own principles but also abandoned the very women whose voices she claims to

The irony is glaring - Mamata Banerjee, hailed by many as a champion of democracy and secularism, stands accused of endorsing and empowering individuals with a history of anti-Hindu sentiments. Ahmed Hasan Imran, a Pakistani migrant with alleged ties to extremist groups, ascended to the Rajya Sabha, a testament to Banerjee's willingness to prioritize political alliances over principles.

Imran's shadow looms large over the Naliakhali massacre, where Hindu homes were razed to the ground in a frenzied display of communal violence. Reports suggest his orchestration of the atrocities, shedding light on the sinister nexus between politics and extremism that plagues West Bengal's corridors of power.

The Saradha Chit Fund Scam further implicates Imran in a web of corruption and deceit, raising questions about his ties to the TMC leadership and their complicity in shielding individuals with dubious backgrounds.

The tragedy unfolding in Sandeshkhali is not an isolated incident but a symptom of a larger malaise - the erosion of justice and accountability in the pursuit of political gain. As the victims' pleas for justice fall on deaf ears, the TMC's policy of appeasement towards certain communities at the expense of others threatens to deepen the fault lines of communal discord.

In the face of such blatant disregard for the rule of law, the nation stands at a crossroads, confronted with the stark reality of injustice and betraval. The time has come for a reckoning, for leaders to be held accountable for their actions and for justice to prevail, irrespective of

political affiliations. As the voices of the oppressed echo through the corridors of power, let us not forget the faces of those who have suffered, their stories a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. For in their struggle lies the hope for a brighter, more just future, where justice is not a privilege but a right for all.

## **Colombia's Right is trying to 'soft coup' President Gustavo Petro**

t was expected that Colombia's elites, who had enjoyed La monopoly over the state for two hundred consecutive years up until twenty months ago, would attempt to obstruct the left-wing President Gustavo Petro's administration. This effort to undermine the process of change mandated by the majority of Colombians has involved everything from misinformation campaigns to the blocking of policies in Congress - but there have also been more direct and sophisticated strategies to overthrow the progressive project.

After Brazil's legal apparatus was successfully wielded against LuizInácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, and Argentina's against Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Colombian elites are attempting to do the same to Petro, with his administration warning about a plot last summer. If successful, it would mean not only the defeat of Colombia's first left government, but also a major victory for the US and Latin American capitalist classes.

Disregarding the political nonpartisanship expected from his office, Colombia's most recent attorney general, Francisco Barbosa, has openly declared his contempt for Petro's government since the president was sworn in nineteen months ago. In a flagrant abuse of power, Barbosa and the general inspector's office recently intensified efforts to undermine the administration in manoeuvres that could only be interpreted as acts of lawfare. This is part of the Right's explicit goal of cutting short Petro's term in Colombia's highest office.

Under the guise of tackling corruption, the attorney general and general inspector have begun targeting Petro's team and allies more forcefully. First, they raided the offices of the country's teachers' union, Federacion Colombiana de Trabajadores de la Educacion (FECODE), citing farfetched accusations of irregularities in donations to Petro's presidential campaign, as well as suspending the foreign affairs minister, Alvaro Leyva, with similarly unfounded accusations of corruption. These follow an investigation into Petro's son, Nicolas, who is alleged to have illegally received money during the presidential campaign though there is no evidence of the

stalling the approval of three candidates proposed by Petro's administration to succeed Barbosa, whose tenure ended Sunday, at which time he was replaced by his equally problematic deputy in the interim. This latter move is designed to obstruct the appointment of a more qualified and aboveboard official who would be inclined to use their power to go after organized crime and more substantive cases of corruption, rather than engage in political manoeuvring or prosecute student protesters. Following the historic countrywide uprising in the spring of

**DEGREE OF THOUGHT** 2021, for instance, during far-right presi-By: Carlos Cruz Mosquera

Duque's administration, the country's highest judiciary offices focused much of their significant resources (which include US funding) on hounding young working-class protesters, with hundreds baselessly accused of terrorism and given lengthy sentences in dubious trials criticized by the United Nations.

In other words, Colombia's highest judicial seats are today, as they have been for decades, jealously commandeered by the country's ruling class - with strategic and material support from the United States - as a political weapon. Although the mainstream media has tended to reduce the president's ongoing conflict with the Supreme Court and attorney general to personal rivalries between public officials, the conflict can be more accurately characterized as the counpowerful minorities mobilizing the judicial branch to break the mass movement for

Petro's administration is far from the only left-wing government to be subjected to legal harassment. Dubious judicial proceedings against progressive leaders have become one of the principal weapons of Latin American elites against the Left since the 1980s. Their use coincides with the period of the United States' systematic strategy of pressuring the region's governments to "modernize" their judicial branches and policies.

A study into the use of what has been labelled "lawfare," published by the Strategic Centre for American Geopolitics

cano de Geopolítica, CELAG), traces how these modifications to legal apparatuses in Latin America were implemented with the advice and close involvement of US-backed NGOs and "developmental" organizations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Under the guise of tackling political corruption - formulated in this period as the explanation for the region's ills and backwardness - elites have subjected government officials inclined to utilize the power of the state to serve the public over the private interest to relentless legal persecution. Colom-

> especially has been on the receiving end of this "assistance" in reforming its

judicial system at the behest of US organizations.

Relatively recent examples of these judicial processes, in addition to those mentioned in Brazil and Argentina, have targeted Rafael Correa and Jorge Glas in Ecuador and Bernardo Arévalo in Guatemala, among others. The present attempt to sabotage President Petro in Colombia in what he has called a "soft coup" is a classic case of this tried-and-true method.

In Colombia, historically one of the United States' closest allies in the region, elites are hardly averse to the use of terror tactics, torture, disappearances, and assassinations to silence political opponents and dissidents. Their current utilization of more subtle methods against Petro and his administration, however, is prudent. They seek to avoid the almostcertain upheaval a more typically violent approach against the leader would unleash. More sanguinary methods are usually re-(with exceptions, served especially considering Colombia's long history of assassinations of leftist political leaders) for the nameless and faceless masses of ordinary citizens who, in the shell game of "anti-corruption," today stand to lose the possibility of a better collective future. Petro's government, in daring to implement the radical reforms promised by his coalition during its electoral campaign, has inspired the wrath of a small yet influential section of Colombian society that vehemently struggles against any threat to their stranglehold on power. This time, elites seek to use the judicial system to remove the democratically elected government and restore their monopoly on state power, realigning it once more with the particularly violent form of capitalist neoliberalism Colombia is known for.

As the leading representative of the country's popular left wing, President Petro has long been the target of legal aggressions. These efforts began at least a decade ago, when the Office of the Inspector General led a similar attempt to depose him as mayor of Bogotá, in an effort to disqualify him from politics altogether for fifteen years led by another notorious right-wing extremist, Alejandro Ordóñez. The plot in that period was centered around an accusation of irregularities in waste-collection contracts in the city, later dismissed by the courts.

Ordoñez oversaw the suspension of some of the country's most progressive senators through a series of baseless legal proceedings, which were all ultimately thrown out. Although his cases against Petro and various senators did not stick, they were nevertheless damaging. Then as now, the accusations alone no doubt helped shape and influence public opinion of leftist politicians - with the country's corporate-owned media outlets

enthusiastically doing their part. As highlighted by the Colombian analyst Javier Calderón Castillo, a contributor to CELAG's study on lawfare, these aggressions are not dished out at random but timed to achieve the utmost political impact. Ordoñez's attempt to remove Petro from his mayorship and disqualify him from holding political office was calculated to frustrate his potential candidacy for president. The present effort, in addition to helping generate a general distrust of the government, is preparing the ground for a stronger offensive that elites and the opposition hope will result in Petro's early removal from power. In a recent public meeting, Fernanda Cabal - a senator from a family of sugar barons - urged greater acts of destabilization against the government and stated that the opposition's task was to not let the progressive leader see out his term. Although outgoing attorney general Barbosa is just one player in a wider power struggle between classes, his represents the bian ruling class. His zeal to hamper the government's efforts to transform the country is not only due to his political loyalty to the far right; it is also rooted in selfpreservation. Reports, including one published by a coalition of human rights lawyers, suggest he is preventing investigations into organized crime cartels - known for their deep ties to the country's far right, which awarded him his

Colombia's mainstream media, rather than seriously reporting on Barbosa's inaction on numerous investigations that link narcotrafficking cartels to elected officials, focus instead on sensationalized stories like Barbosa's luxurious holidays paid for with public money and his promotion of officials willing to dog-sit for him, among others - scandalous, to be sure, but not as relevant as the more serious allegations against

The most famous case thrown out by Barbosa is that of the late José Guillermo "Ñeñe" Hernández, a businessman with known links to the drug cartels said to have contributed to former president Iván Duque's presidential campaign. There is also evidence that the attorney general used his position to protect former president Álvaro Uribe - known for his mix of neoliberalism and paramilitary violence - from being tried for more than two hundred crimes, including several massacres, such as those of El Aro, La Granja, and San Roque. Absurdly, considering the serious and compelling allegations levelled at him and his political allies, Barbosa has likened Petro to Pablo Escobar, the narcotics kingpin responsible for some of the country's most heinous crimes through the 1980s and

As broad "anti-corruption" programs are applied perfidiously using Washington's handbook. officials like Barbosa - themselves steeped in corruption and criminality - capitalize on that scheme to undermine redistributive political projects

If successful, the soft coup d'état pursued today in Colombia could potentially have adverse repercussions for generations to come. Right now, a popular, mass politics seems like the best defense against lawfare in Colombia and beyond - but recent history has shown it's not always

# with Hindus' stern rejection!

By: Er. Rajesh **Pathak** 

aking no attack on the enemy fleeing the battle from his back; granting pardon to the enemy fallen in the hand; raising not the arms on an unarmed adversary; backtracking not from the promise once given, come what may; unconcerned to victory or defeat in the battlefield. sacrificing the life in the battle-field being held as a matter of valour and glory - such was the exclusivist outlook to the human virtues which Indian kings could not part with, failing to discern the new kind of barbaric and cunning enemies of jihadist mindset beyond the border, leaving the country succumbed to have suffered the ig-

ries one by one in their hands But during this period for the first time one that in true sense discerned the deceptive tactics of invaders and left them behind in their own game and successfully founded the downfall of Mughals he was great Maratha Hindu king

Chhatrapati Shivaji.

nominy of slavery and

of secession of its territo-

It was the time when Hindu kings and vassals had the lone priority of somehow saving their respective territories by appeasing the foreign invaders. Initiating the attack on them was such a thing they couldn't even think of. But as Shivaji laid the foundation of Maratha power he opened the war-front against Mughals by

launching fierce attacks, tearing into their military capabilities and empire as a whole.

Utterly inferior since he had been before Muslim rulers in strength and resources both, the strategy he adopted earned the glory in the anal of history as 'Gurilla-war-

Using dexterously the mazes of terrains of Mountain, Sahvadri forming a force of its tribal inhabitants-Mavlays, he dealt one after other setback to the enemies. Gradually he gained upper hand; and as his strength increased he began to attack openly on Mughals.

And with the shattering defeats dealt upon Mughals led by Aurangzeb in the open battle of Salher in 1972, Maratha warriors even forced the opponents to adopt defensive stance! Away from the capital for 1 ½ years, Shivaji then successfully fulfilled the famous 'Karnataka-mission'

With his able administration and planned strategy he won one after other battles, and founded a separate sovereign Maratha state extending more than 700 miles down to southern part of the country, famous Jinji fort near Chennai being the tip of

Emulating the ways shown by Shivaji, later Maratha grew so formidable a force that Aurangzeb, frustrated, even had to propose a truce with them. But as of now it was too late; his proposal met with outright rejection by Maratha

shock of contempt, which could never been expected by him, he could gain redemption only when death embraced him.

And, particularly after 1740, when Mughals got weakened during the reign of Mohammad Shah the real power of the country had shrunk into the hands of Maratha. During 1755-1756 under Raghunath Rao and Malhar Rao Holkar they dealt decisive defeat to Rohillas and Afghans and succeeded in liberating Punjab after 800 years from foreigners.

And, replacing Muslim rulers, at one point of time the Hindu Maratha dynasts had rooted their rules firmly extending from Attock (Peshawar) of north down to south to Tanjavur (Tamil Nadu); and from entire Gujarat in the west to Hugli river (Bengal) in the east. Rising above the castecreed-regional pride, the community should keep in mind that their existence today is the result of complete decimation of Mughals

the past. In this Great War Aurangzeb had put in all the resources of his vast empire from Bharuch to Bengal and from Kabul to the threshold of south India.

under Aurangzeb by

their brave ancestors in

This was a fight between a small 'lamp' and 'storm'. But by the dint of their courage and prowess in battlefield Hindu Marathas successfully turned the result in their favour.

### Aurangzeb's peace overtures met India's farmer protests: Challenges, realities and potential solutions

ew Delhi finds itself encircled by the police as it confronts a protest led by Punjab farmers. This latest farmers march towards the capital signifies the resurgence of their agitation, labeled as Farmers' Stir 2.0. This comes in the aftermath of a year-long protest against three controversial farm laws, which ultimately led to their withdrawal by the Centre in November 2021. The ongoing demonstration has effectively brought movement in New Delhi to a stand-

In the initial two days of the latest farmers' protest, the authorities' reactions to the widespread discontent among the farming community have been notably excessive. Riot police, seemingly determined to prevent farmers and their ubiquitous tractors from entering New Delhi at all costs, have not only deployed stringent measures but have also resorted to firing tear gas shells. Some of these tear gas canisters have been launched from drones, targeting columns of demonstrators attempting to breach barricades, particularly at the Shambhu border between Punjab and

Despite the lack of success in advancing negotiations in the initial round, discussions have persisted. It appears that the government, possibly drawing insights from the significant "Delhi Chalo" agitation of 2020, has realized the importance of approaching the issue by fostering consensus with the protesting farmers. The emphasis is now on earnestly addressing the concerns of the farmers and actively exploring solutions to alleviate their challenges.

It may appear paradoxical that the farmers from Punjab are at the forefront of the current wave of protests, considering their relatively favorable agricultural conditions compared to counterparts in various other states.

Enjoying benefits such as free power, substantial allocations of subsidized fertilizers, and abundant water resources for irrigation, the Punjab farmers exhibit high productivity levels, particularly in wheat and rice cultivation. Furthermore, they benefit from reasonable access to government grain procurement facilitated by the Minimum Support Price

Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the situation is far from ideal for these farmers. Despite their dedication to sustaining the nation with their toil in agriculture, they grapple with genuine income challenges arising from the uncertainties of the free mar-

ket and Minimum Support Price (MSP) rates that fall short of being adequately remunerative. Additionally, the looming threats of climate change, leading to erratic rainfall patterns, add another layer of unpredictability to their livelihoods.

The approach should involve a comprehensive discussion of their issues, delving deeply into the challenges they face. Crafting viable solutions is crucial. However, yielding to the demand for a mandatory law enforcing Minimum Support Price (MSP) might have adverse consequences, proving to be disruptive and counterproductive. Such a move could potentially result in uncontrollable inflation in food prices.

This is a key rationale behind the reluctance of the UPA-2 government in 2010 and the subsequent NDA administrations since 2014 to consider endorsing the Swaminathan committee report. The report proposed a significant increase in Minimum Support Price (MSP), suggesting it should be at least 50 percent higher than the weighted average cost of production. However, both governments have refrained from adopting this recommenda-

Farmers in France and Germany have similarly expressed discontent with their circumstances, highlighting that the agitated state of mind among Indian farmers is not an isolated phenomenon.

However, in an economy where nearly half of the 1.4 billion population depends on agriculture, there is a pressing need to carefully consider how to enhance support for them. Finding effective solutions becomes paramount.

Securing the capital from protesting and camping farmers should not be the sole focus in addressing this second wave of protests. Given the ongoing election season, opportunistic opposition parties, none of whom endorsed such demands in their respective states or during their tenure at the Center, are now making grand promises regarding the implementation of an MSP law, should they come

The way forward appears intricately challenging for the ruling party. However, there is a potential solution: devising a strategy to increase the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for essential crops like wheat and rice, which form the foundation of the free ration scheme benefitting 80 crore people. This approach could provide some respite to the hardworking individuals who dedicate their efforts to cultivating the land. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

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#### THE HILLS TIMES 5

## Why people with severe psoriasis have a higher risk of heart disease

By: Tim Newman

**┪** lobally, psoriasis affects an estimated 125 million people around the world.

Despite its prevalence, this immune-mediated dermatological condition still holds many mysteries.

Aside from psoriatic lesions on the skin, this condition can also influence less visible parts of the body.

One important example is its links to an increased risk of cardiovascular events. This increase in risk is independent of traditional cardiovascular risk factors, such as smoking, age, diabetes, and hypertension.

Medical News Today spoke with Dr. Joel Gelfand, a professor of dermatology and epidemiology at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine about the dis-

"There are many lifestyle, genetic, and immunologic connections between psoriasis and cardiovascular disease," he explained.

He noted that scientists have known about this link for many years and it is an important area of research.

The more extensive psoriasis is on the skin, the greater risk the patient has of heart attack, stroke, and mortality," said Gelfand, who wasn't involved in the study.

"Underdiagnosed and undertreated, traditional cardiovascular risk factors in psoriasis patients are also critical to mediating this relationship."

A recent study, which appears in the Journal of Investigative Dermatology, uses a new approach to investigate the precise mechanisms behind psoriasis and cardiovascular disease.

#### Current theories on psoriasis and heart dis-

Experts say that the inflammation associated with psoriasis helps drive the development of cardiovascular disease

This inflammation encourages the growth of plaques in blood vessels and can lead to atherosclerosis, a factor in the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

This includes an increased risk of coronary artery disease, where the blood vessels supplying the heart become narrower.

However, there are still some gaps in our understanding. Studies have



Of these, they found that

31% had a coronary flow

reserve of 2.5 or lower, but

no sign of coronary artery

disease in a follow-up scan. So, roughly 1 in 3 had

Compared with partici-

pants without CMD, those

with CMD were more

• have a higher body

have psoriatic arthritis

They were also more

likely to have more severe

psoriasis and to have lived

with the condition for

longer. So, as disease dura-

tion and severity increased,

The importance of the

Researchers say the re-

sults show that disease du-

ration and severity are

linked to CMD. Because

CMD is prevalent in people

with other inflammatory

conditions, this supports the

theory that systemic inflam-

Also, their analysis found

no association between

CMD and conventional car-

diovascular risk factors,

such as smoking, blood fat

levels, or type 2 diabetes,

all of which are associated

with CMD in the general

population and people with

psoriasis demonstrate that

low coronary flow reserves

predict poorer cardiovascu-

The authors conclude that

the high levels of CMD are

"likely to contribute signif-

icantly to the increased risk

of adverse [cardiovascular]

outcomes in patients with

psoriasis [...] independ-

ently of traditional [cardio-

The authors also note that

some research suggests that

treating psoriasis is associ-

ated with reduced levels of

CMD. With this in mind,

that an early and effective

treatment of psoriasis

would restore a CMD and

eventually prevent the fu-

ture risk of myocardial in-

farction and heart failure

Other options for as-

associated with it."

"[W]e might hypothesize

vascular] risk factors."

Studies in the general

population.

lar outcomes.

they write:

mation drives CMD.

so did the risk of CMD.

psoriasis study

likely to:

• be older

mass index (BMI)

have hypertension

shown that people with psoriasis have elevated cardiovascular risk before the appearance of coronary artery disease.

Some scientists believe that this may be due to coronary microvascular dysfunction (CMD). The latest study digs into this theory.

#### Coronary microvascular dysfunction

CMD affects the tiny blood vessels that supply the cardiac muscle. Like coronary artery disease, inflammation seems to be a driving factor in CMD.

However, while coronary artery disease and CMD are related, according to the authors of the recent paper, they "may play different roles in the pathogenesis of vascular disease.

Some existing evidence suggests that the increased cardiovascular risk in people with psoriasis may be due to CMD, but previous investigations have been small in scale.

The latest study set out to replicate those findings in a larger group.

Because CMD affects the smallest blood vessels, most standard medical procedures cannot detect it. So, in this study, the researchers used a measure called coronary flow reserve, which can detect both coronary artery disease and CMD.

Coronary flow reserve Coronary flow reserve is a measure of how much blood flow to the coronary arteries can increase during exertion. In other words, it assess how much the coro-

nary circulation can dilate to increase its capacity. In healthy people, coronary flow reserve is between 3 and 6. If someone has a score of 3, this means they can triple the blood

flow when needed. A score of 2.5 or lower indicates either CMD or coronary artery disease. So, if a routine coronary angiography reveals no coronary artery disease, this

implicates CMD. The findings from the psoriasis and heart dis-

ease study The researchers included data from 448 people with cardiovascular

Gelfand explained how he and his colleagues are also investigating other ways of assessing cardiovascular risk in people with psoriasis

"The risk of future cardiovascular events can be further refined with cardiac imaging, such as a coronary artery calcium score," he said. "We are testing a novel, centralized, care coordination model to help psoriasis patients get better screening for, and management of, traditional cardiovascular risk factors. Our preliminary data is quite promising.

In the future, using a range of scanning and diagnostic technology might help assess and address cardiac risk earlier in this population.

**Beyond inflammation** Because inflammation plays an important role in increasing cardiovascular risk, psoriasis drugs that reduce inflammation may

also help reduce this risk. However, as Gelfand mentioned, the evidence is "quite mixed" at this point.

"To date, TNF [tumor necrosis factor] inhibitors seem to be the most promising for lowering cardiovascular risk in psoriasis, but a causal relationship has not been established," he

Successfully treating psoriasis symptoms can also reduce risk in other ways.

"Improved disease control may change how patients live their lives," Axel Svedbom, PhD, a researcher at the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden who was not involved in the latest research, told Medical News Today.

"Patients with well-controlled psoriasis may lead healthier lives due to reduced social stigma and their sleep may improve due to reduced itch — poor sleep is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease," he

"Furthermore," he noted, 'psoriasis is associated with lipid dysfunction and it is possible that disease activity modifies lipid composition of function. Another potential mechanism is tryptophan metabolism, which has been implicated in both psoriasis and cardiovascular disease."

We still have much to learn about psoriasis. This study adds another piece to the puzzle. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

#### By: Dr Pankaj Ranjan

ardiac ailments have swiftly risen to prominence as the leading cause of mortality in India and globally, claiming the lives of approximately 1 in 5 men and 1 in 8 women, according to reports from the World Health Organization (WHO). This surge is primarily attributed to the accumulation of fatty substances in the arteries, causing a blockade in the heart's blood supply—a condition exacerbated by lifestyle factors such as smoking, obesity, high cholesterol, elevated blood pressure, and diabetes.

In a noteworthy departure from the conventional association of heart attacks with old age, an alarming trend has surfaced, with an increasing number of individuals in their 20s, 30s, and 40s grappling with heart-related ailments. The escalating stress levels inherent in modern life have exposed even the younger demographic to the perils of heart diseases. While genetic predisposition and family history remain uncontrollable risk factors, the majority of heart diseases among the youth are linked to excessive stress, prolonged working hours, erratic sleep patterns, smoking, and a sedentary lifestyle, all of which contribute to inflammation and escalate the risk of heart-related

Startling statistics reveal that every day witnesses approximately 9,000 fatalities due to heart ailments, translating to one life lost every 10 seconds. Alarmingly, 900 of these casualties belong to the youth demographic, those below 40 years of age. Urgent and widespread education is crucial to stave off the impending epidemic of heart diseases in India, lest it becomes the leading cause of mortality by 2020.

While cardiac hospitals in India perform over 200,000 open-heart surnual increase, these interventions are merely palliative measures. The key to mitigating the prevalence of heart attacks lies in comprehensive public education about heart diseases and their risk factors

**Emerging trend: Surge in** 

progressive heart failure

among Indian youth

Recognizing the Symptoms:

Symptoms of coronary heart disease (CHD) can vary widely, with angina chest pain being a common feature. Ranging from mild discomfort to severe pain, individuals may experience sensations akin to indigestion or intense pain, heaviness, or tightness. Pain typically centers in the chest and may radiate to the arms, neck, jaw, or stomach, accompanied by palpitations and abnormal breathlessness. Prognosis and Diagnostic Meas-

Early assessment of a suspected CHD patient involves a comprehensive examination of medical and family history, lifestyle evaluation, and blood tests. Confirmatory diagnostic tests include non-invasive procedures such as electrocardiogram (ECG), X-ray, treadmill test (TMT), cardiovascular cartography, CT angiography, and invasive coronary angiography.

**Management of Heart Ailments:** Although coronary heart disease cannot be cured, effective management involves a multifaceted approach encompassing lifestyle changes, medications, and non-invasive treatments. Severe cases may necessitate invasive and surgical interventions. Lifestyle modifications, including a balanced diet, regular exercise, abstinence from smoking, and control of blood cholesterol and sugar levels, signifigeries annually, witnessing a 25% ancantly reduce the risk of CHD, Hospital, Greater Noida)

stroke, and dementia.

**Treatment Options:** 

Various medications are employed to treat CHD, targeting cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes. While these medications are generally effective, peri-

> potential side effects. Advancements in medical science have led to less invasive surgical methods, such as Coronary Artery Grafting (CABG), valve replacement surgeries, Minimally Invasive Direct

odic blood tests are rec-

ommended due to

Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting (MIDCAB), Thoracic surgeries with VATS, and management of heart and lung failure using Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO). Cardiac Resynchronization Ther-

apy (CRT) plays a crucial role in managing progressive heart failure by synchronizing the contractions of the heart's chambers. This innovative treatment involves implanting a device that coordinates the heart's rhythm, enhancing its efficiency and alleviating symptoms. CRT significantly improves the quality of life for individuals facing advanced heart failure.

#### **Demystifying Heart Failure:**

Contrary to its ominous name, heart failure can be managed effectively with improved care and diagnosis. Prevention revolves around avoiding lifestyle and dietary habits that contribute to obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure. A healthy lifestyle remains the simplest and most effective means of warding off heart failure and ensuring optimal heart function. (The auhtor is the HOD & Senior Consultant, Cardiac Sciences, Yatharth Super Specialty

### The crucial role of plastic surgeons in breast cancer treatment teams

By: Dr Ashwini Kumar Singh

reast cancer, a diagnosis that affects millions of women globally, demands a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach to ensure not only women globally, demands a comprehensive and the eradication of the disease but also the restoration of physical and emotional well-being.

In recent years, the integration of plastic surgeons into breast cancer treatment teams has become increasingly recognized as a pivotal component in achieving holistic care. The role of plastic surgeons, particularly in post-surgical reconstruction, plays a vital role in enhancing aesthetic outcomes and fostering the overall recovery of breast cancer survivors.

When facing a breast cancer diagnosis, the prospect of surgery is often daunting for patients. However, the inclusion of a plastic surgeon in the treatment team offers a ray of hope by addressing the cosmetic aspects of breast cancer surgery.

Post-mastectomy reconstruction is a reconstructive surgical procedure that aims to restore the natural appearance of the breast, helping patients regain a sense of normalcy and self-esteem after the challenging journey of cancer treatment.

One of the primary benefits of involving a plastic surgeon in breast cancer treatment is the opportunity for immediate reconstruction. This approach allows for the reconstruction to be performed during the same surgical session as the mastectomy, minimizing the emotional impact of seeing oneself without a breast and reducing the overall number of surgeries required.

Immediate reconstruction not only contributes to better aesthetic outcomes but also positively influences the psychological well-being of patients, fostering a more positive body image and self-confidence. More-

By: Dr B Niranjan

B most common cancer affecting

women globally. Accord-

ing to the National Can-

cer Registry, over 1.9

lakh women in India are

diagnosed with breast

Alarmingly, 55% of these cases are identified

at an advanced stage, with

less than a 15% chance of

survival. Early detection,

on the other hand, boosts

survival rates to over

Early Detection Mat-

ters: The cure rate for

breast cancer is an im-

pressive 97% when de-

Unfortunately, less than

10% of the 100,000 new

cases in India fall into this

Unlike the West, Indian

women are affected at a

younger age (30-40

early.

tected

cancer each year.

reast cancer is the

common

<u>Naik</u>

over, plastic surgeons bring a unique set of skills to the table, specializing in various reconstructive techniques such as autologous tissue reconstruction and implantbased reconstruction.

This diversity allows for a personalized approach tailored to the individual needs and preferences of each patient. The collaborative efforts between oncologic surgeons and plastic surgeons enable the creation of a customized treatment plan that aligns with the patient's medical condition, lifestyle, and desired cosmetic out-

Beyond the visible physical benefits, post-surgical reconstruction can significantly impact the emotional and psychological recovery of breast cancer survivors.

Research consistently demonstrates that women who undergo breast reconstruction experience improvements in self-esteem, body image, and overall quality of life. The integration of plastic surgeons into breast cancer treatment teams signifies a commitment to addressing not only the disease itself but also the emotional and psychological well-being of patients.

The role of plastic surgeons in breast cancer treatment teams is indispensable, contributing to a comprehensive and patient-centered approach. By incorporating plastic surgery into the continuum of care, medical professionals can empower women to overcome the physical and emotional challenges of breast cancer.

The aesthetic outcomes achieved through post-surgical reconstruction surgery go beyond the surface, playing a crucial role in restoring confidence, self-esteem, and a positive outlook on life for breast cancer survivors. (The author is the Senior Consultant & Head - Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, Yatharth Super Specialty Hospital, Greater Noida)

### **Inflammatory Bowel disease:** Symptoms and causes



By: Dr K. S. Somasekhar Rao

nflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Lcontinues to affect millions of people worldwide, causing chronic inflammation and damage to the gastrointestinal tract. As medical researchers delve deeper into the complexities of this debilitating condition, a clearer understanding of IBD's impact, symptoms, and treatment options is emerging.

IBD encompasses two major conditions: Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. While both conditions involve chronic inflammation, they differ in terms of their location and extent within the gastrointestinal tract.

Crohn's disease can affect any part of the digestive system, from the mouth to the anus, while ulcerative colitis typically affects the colon and rectum. The exact cause of IBD remains unknown, but experts believe that a combination of genetic, environmental, and immunological factors contribute to its develop-

Stress, certain medications, and a compromised immune system can trigger flare-ups in individuals predisposed to the disease. Recent studies have also highlighted the potential role of gut microbiota and the body's inflammatory response in IBD. Living with IBD can be incredibly challenging.

Symptoms vary from person to person, but common indicators include abdominal pain, diarrhea, rectal bleeding, fatigue, weight loss, and reduced appetite. These symptoms often lead to decreased quality of life, disrupted daily activities, and increased healthcare uti-

Early and accurate diagnosis is crucial for managing IBD effectively.

Gastroenterologists typically employ a combination of medical history review, physical examinations, blood tests, imaging techniques, and endoscopic procedures to diagnose the condition

Additionally, advancements in molecular testing and biomarker analysis are enabling more precise diagnoses and personalized treatment approaches.

Once diagnosed, treatment for IBD focuses on alleviating symptoms, inducing remission, and preventing flare-ups. Medications such a s anti- inflammatory drugs, immunosuppressants, and biologics are commonly prescribed. In severe cases, surgical interventions may be necessary, involving the removal of affected parts of the digestive tract. Moreover, adopting a well- balanced

diet, managing stress levels, and main-

taining a healthy lifestyle are crucial aspects of managing IBD effectively. While there is no known cure for IBD, ongoing research is providing hope for improved treatment options and ultimately, a better quality of life for those iving with the condition. Researchers are investigating novel therapies, including targeted im-

munomodulators and stem cell-based treatments, which hold promise for future advancements in IBD management. Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is highly prevalent in India. India now has the second largest number of IBD patients in the world after the US.

Early diagnosis and initiating the treatment in early stage of the disease may decrease the disease severity and complications. Adelay in making the diagnosis of crohn's disease (an average delay of atleast 5 years in countries like USA) may lead to complications of the disease like strictures, perianal fistulas, severe malnutrition which may require prolonged and complex treatments.

With the awareness about these diseases and with advanced diagnostics, early diagnosis and treatment initiation can limit the complications. (The author is a MD; DM Senior consultant, Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist, Yashoda hospitals, Hyderabad)

years), often leading to late-stage diagnoses due to low awareness regarding breast screening and self-examination.

Pink with a purpose:

Understanding breast cancer

Risks: Breast cancer doesn't have a single known cause, but various factors contribute. Urbanization brings

Understanding

its challenges, with pollution affecting water. air, and food Pesti-

cides in fruits and vegetables, genetic mutations, environmental toxins, lifestyle factors, and hormonal influences are all linked to breast cancer.

Recognizing Symptoms: Painless lumps in the breast or armpit, nipdischarge, skin mammography and breast ultrasound being reliable diagnostic tools. Treatment and Outcomes: Recent a d vances

changes, and nipple re-

traction are symptoms to

watch for. Early diagnosis

involves a clinical exam-

ination by a cancer spe-

in medi c a l fields have transformed breast cancer

management. Surgery, chemotherapy, targeted immunotherapy, radiotherapy, and hormonal therapy have improved overall survival. With awareness and early intervention, people now live longer than two decades post-diagnosis.

Prevention and Self-Care: Exercise, a positive attitude, adequate rest, and proper nutrition form the pillars of good health. A diet rich in antioxidants and regular exercise play preventive roles.

Monthly Breast Self-Examination (BSE) is a simple yet effective method for early detection. Women in high-risk groups should undergo regular breast screening tests after the age of 30.

Early detection is the best protection against breast cancer. Regular monthly self-examination is a key factor in identifying symptoms early.

It's a simple step, and the power lies in your hands. So, be breast sure, because in the battle against cancer, early detection is your best ally. (The author is a Consultant, Surgical Oncology, Fortis Hospital, Guru-

gram)

ruary 2022, the UK announced

three schemes - Homes for

Ukraine, the Ukraine Family

Scheme and the Ukraine Extension

Scheme – to grant visa holders

three years leave to remain in the

country, which would have meant

the first visas were set to expire in

The Home Office said the 18-

month extension delivers on the

government's long-term commit-

ment to Ukraine and comes as the

world approaches two years since

"Russia's reprehensible full-scale

traordinary generosity shown by

sponsors across the country. The

"I want to pay tribute to the ex-

invasion of Ukraine".

March 2025.

'This new visa extension scheme provides certainty and reassurance for Ukrainians in the UK on their

### future as this war continues, and we will continue to provide a safe haven for those fleeing the conflict' UK extends visas for Ukrainians amid war in Europe

LONDON, Feb 18: The UK government on Sunday extended its visa scheme for war-hit Ukrainians who sought refuge in the country in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, allowing an additional 18month stay on their current terms.

6 THE HILLS TIMES

The Home Office said that from early 2025, all those in the UK under one of the Ukraine visa schemes will be able to apply to stay here for an additional 18 months and continue to have the same rights to access work, benefits, healthcare, and education throughout their stay.

This will mean those who came on the first visas under one of the Ukraine visa schemes could now stay in the UK until September

"This new visa extension scheme provides certainty and reassurance for Ukrainians in the UK on their future as this war continues, and we will continue to provide a safe haven for those fleeing the conflict," said Tom Pursglove, UK Minister for Legal Migration



"Almost two years on from the start of this brutal war, over 200,000 Ukrainians and their familv members have arrived in Britain, Families across the country have opened their homes and their hearts to the people of Ukraine, showing extraordinary generosity, including offering shelter to those fleeing from the hor-

rors of war," he said He said the move shows that the UK and its allies stand in solidarity with Ukraine and "unequivocally condemns [Russian President] Putin's unprovoked, premeditated and illegal war against Ukraine". In the wake of the Russia-

Ukraine conflict escalation in Feb-

government continues to provide them with 'thank-you' payments in recognition of their support. As more families arrive, we will need more sponsors to come forward. I encourage anyone interested in hosting to check their eligibility and apply as soon as they can,' said UK Minister for Housing and Communities, Felicity Buchan.

schemes, the UK says it has offered or extended sanctuary to more than 283,000 Ukrainians.

"We appreciate all the help and assistance that our UK friends so generously provide for the temporarily displaced Ukrainians, added Eduard Fesko, Charge d'Affaires at the Embassy of Ukraine to

Under the extension, Ukrainians will be able to make their applications within the last three months of an existing visa. While the Ukraine Family Scheme allows applicants to join family members or extend their stay in the UK, the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme allows Ukrainian nationals and their family members to come to the UK if they have a named sponsor under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Meanwhile, the Ukraine Extension Scheme allows Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members to apply for permission to stay in the ÛK. (PTI)

### PML-N, PPP fail to reach consensus on power-sharing formula

between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan People's Party on a power-sharing formula for a coalition government remained inconclusive, though both sides claimed "significant progress" in the discussions, according to a media report on Sunday.

The third meeting between the Contact and Coordination Committees (CCCs) of the two parties, which took place on Saturday, remained inconclusive and both decided to meet again on Monday to finalise the power-sharing formula.

A brief announcement issued by the PML-N after the meeting said that there had been "significant progress" in talks with both sides, stressing the need for a "strong democratic government"

"The proposals put forth by both parties were thoroughly discussed, and while substantial progress was achieved, further deliberations are required to finalise the matters at hand," a joint statement read.

Nawaz Sharif led PML-N has nominated Shehbaz Sharif for the Prime Minister's post.

Independent candidates - a majority backed by former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party won 93 of the 265 National Assembly seats that were contested in the February 8 election.

The PML-N won 75 seats while the PPP came third with 54 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) has also agreed

to support them with their 17 seats. To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly.

During Saturday's meeting, the PML-N was represented by Ishaq Dar, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Azam Nazeer Tarar and Malik Muhammad Ahmed Khan, whereas those representing the PPP included former Sindh chief minister Murad Ali Shah, Saeed Ghani, Qamar Zaman

Kaira, Nadeem Afzal Chan and

Nawab Sanaullah Zehri. In the last meeting on Thursday, representatives of both parties sought more time to assess the pro-

posals discussed in the first meeting. Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari-led PPP has assured the PML-N of its support in the government formation and election of the next Prime Minister on the condition that, in return, it will get key constitutional offices, including that of the president. The PPP has also announced that

the Dawn newspaper that the party has decided to seek the posts of Na-

A PPP office-bearer, privy to the talk on government formation, told tional Assembly (NA) speaker and

despite supporting the PML-N at the

centre, the party will not take min-

Sources said the PML-N had been

vigorously trying to change PPP's

minds on the issue of ministries be-

fore discussing the constitutional of-

fices. The latter has so far refused to

istries in the federal Cabinet.

Senate chairman But the PML-N appears reluctant and wants to keep the NA speaker's office with it, the PPP leader added.

The PPP has sought top offices in both houses of Parliament as the party feared that under the PML-N, parliament "would not be able to gain its lost prestige".

Sources in the PPP claimed that so far, the party had not finalised the names for the top constitutional and parliamentary offices.

They said that besides the present NA speaker, Raja Pervez Ashraf, who is expected to retain the post, ex-prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who won the NA seat from Multan, also desires the post.

The PPP has also asked the PML-N for support in Senate elections for the seat that Gilani would vacate if he is nominated as NA speaker, according to party sources.

Gilani could also be considered for the Senate chairman, but it all depended on the outcome of the ongoing negotiations between the committees.

The other issue, the sources said, under discussion was the allocation of development funds for provinces.

They said the PPP wanted assurance from PML-N leadership that it would release development funds to provinces, particularly Sindh, without any hindrance.

According to reports, the PPP has asked PML-N to give it "some space" in Punjab as a precursor to any support in the government for-

In Punjab, PML-N emerged as the single largest party after the February 8 general elections with 137 general seats. The party has already nominated Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the daughter of Nawaz Sharif, as the new chief minister.

The PPP won 10 seats of the provincial assembly and emerged as the third major party behind PTIbacked independents, who bagged

### New Indian envoy visits Northern Province; calls for better connectivity between Sri Lanka & India

COLOMBO, Feb 18: Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha has made his first official visit to Sri Lanka's Northern Province and stressed the need for improved connectivity between the two countries. The newly-appointed Indian envoy completed his threeday maiden visit to the island nation's north on Saturday, the Indian High Commission said in a statement on Sunday.

He participated in diverse engagements during the visit, attesting to the "deep-rooted nature of the bilateral partnership as also India's firm commitment to deepening socio-economic and cultural ties with Northern Province," it said. Jha emphasised connectivity while visiting the Kankesanthurai (KKS) Port and the Talaimannar Pier and spoke of the need for expeditious resumption of ferry services between the two countries.

During his visit to the Palaly Airport, he explored means to strengthen air connectivity through infrastructure development at the airport, the statement said.

fundraising and emphasis on trans-

parency, with a candidate allowed

to accept up to USD 3,300 from any

individual while the limit for party

committees is USD 41.300, accord-

ing to a top US Federal Election

the US's Federal Election Commis-

sion, spoke to PTI in an interview

taken following the recent land-

mark ruling by India's Supreme

Court to scrap the central govern-

ment's electoral bonds scheme of

anonymous political funding, call-

ing it "unconstitutional" and order-

ing disclosure of the bond's donors.

amount and recipients by March 13.

on private fundraising, but public

transparency. Most of the money is

raised privately, but it does have to

be disclosed on a regular basis,"

Weintraub said. The Federal Elec-

tion Commission (FEC) is the inde-

pendent regulatory agency charged

with administering and enforcing

The FEC, which is led by six

Commissioners, has jurisdiction

the federal campaign finance law.

"We have a system that is based

Ellen L Weintraub, Vice Chair of

Commission official.

dian financial assistance to extend the runway at the Palaly airport after India's Alliance Air began

Chennai-Palaly flights. "Underscoring the rich and shared cultural heritage between India and Sri Lanka, the High Commissioner offered prayers at the historic Ram Sethu (Adam's Bridge). He also visited the ancient Thiruketheeswaram temple, which was renovated with grant assistance from the Government of

India," the statement said. In India's endeavour to contribute towards addressing the energy needs of islands off Jaffna, Jha assessed the readiness for early rollout of the Hybrid Renewable Energy Systems Project in Nainativu Island. The project is being implemented in the Delft, Nainativu and Analaitivu Islands of the island nation through grant assistance from India.

"With grant assistance of more than SLR 70 billion, Northern Province has been a region of focus in India's multi-dimensional development cooperation partnership with Sri Lanka, and the visit

Election Commission of India, the

FEC members are political ap-

pointees. The current FEC has three

members each from the Republican

Refraining from commenting on

the ruling of India's Supreme Court,

Weintraub, a Democrat, said that in

the US, an individual candidate is

allowed to accept up to USD 3.300

from a person for any election.But

this money should not be from for-

eign nationals, corporations or

labour unions but from individual

US citizens and Green Card hold-

ers. The money is raised in multiple

ways, including online, which is

quite significant. They raise money

in small increments of USD 3,300.

Many times, candidates can go

back to the same voters as long as

they don't get more than USD

3.300 from any one person from

"Then the party committees can

separately raise money and their

contribution limit is USD 41,300.

Again, from individuals not from

corporations, not organisations, and

certainly not from foreign nationals.

one election, she said.

and Democratic parties.

Feb 18: America's electoral financthe US House, Senate, Presidency

was an opportunity to reiterate India's unwavering commitment to the people of the region," it said.

According to the statement, Jha distributed deep freezers to fishermen communities in Mannar to enlivelihood their opportunities, reaffirming India's commitment to diverse sections of

society. He also distributed dry rations to hundreds of needy families in Jaffna and Kilinochchi, with a special focus on those headed by At the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) memorial in Jaffna, the High Commissioner paid homage to the brave sons of India who

made the supreme sacrifice in Sri The IPKF was formed under the mandate of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord signed in 1987 that aimed to end the civil war in the country between militant Sri Lankan Tamil nationalists such as the Liberation

the Sri Lankan military. Jha assumed charge as the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka in December 2023. (PTI)

ployer, their occupation, all of that

gets disclosed to the candidates on

the party committees and then the

committees report that to the Fed-

eral Election Commission, and we

post that information on our web-

According to the latest figures re-

leased by the FEC, so far, all the

2024 presidential candidates have

President Joe Biden, a Democrat,

leads the list with nearly USD 90

million, followed by his Republican

predecessor Donald Trump (about

USD 80 million). Indian-American

politician Nikki Haley, who is the

only other candidate in the race, so

that this kind of transparency is im-

portant to having an informed elec-

torate." Weintraub told PTI in

response to a question while re-

fraining from commenting on the

Indian election fundraising system.

others," she said.

"I don't want to give advice to

"I don't claim that our system is

perfect. I think that different coun-

"Our Supreme Court has held

far has raised USD 36 million.

in total raised USD 381 million.

site," Weintraub said.

**US** electoral financing system based on private

fundraising and transparency, says top official

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and

## situation with Palestinian counterpart al-Maliki

Jaishankar discusses Gaza

MUNICH, Feb 18: External affairs minister S Jaishankar on Sunday met his Palestinian counterpart Riyad al-Maliki during which they exchanged views on the current situation in war-

Jaishankar is in Germany to attend the prestigious Munich Security Conference, the world's leading forum for debate on international security. "Nice to see Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki. Exchanged views on the current situation in Gaza," the minister posted on X, sharing a photograph of the

India has been pushing for a twostate solution to the Palestine issue for many decades.

During an interactive session at a security conference here on Saturday, Jaishankar underlined that an increasing number of countries are now not only supporting the twostate solution to the Palestine issue but seeing it as "more urgent" than

The minister described the Octo-

the strengths of our system. I'm

proud of that aspect of it," Wein-

traub said. However, several inde-

pendent think tanks and experts

believe that dark money including

that coming from lobbying groups

and foreign companies is also playing

ing in the US. The non-partisan, inde-

pendent and non-profit Open Secrets

released a report on foreign-influ-

enced corporations' money in State

elections, according to which the top

33 foreign-influenced companies

gave at least USD 1 million each

across six US states, collectively ac-

counting for about USD 134 million

in giving between the 2018 and 2022

under the weight of a deluge of

spending, its once robust disclosure

requirements have greatly atrophied.

Today, dark money permeates the

system," Milan Vaishnav, director

and senior fellow of the South Asia

Programme at the prestigious

Carnegie Endowment for Interna-

tional Peace told PTI in an inter-

"While America has long struggled

election cycles.

view. (PTI)

a significant role in electoral financ-

Hamas as "terrorism". At the same time, he said Israel has an international obligation to observe humanitarian law. It is important that Israel should have been very mindful of civilian casualties, he said at the session, also attended by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock.

Israel has been pushing ahead with its military offensive in Gaza as part of its retaliation to the unprecedented attack on Israeli cities by Hamas on October 7.

Hamas militants killed around 1,200 people in Israel and kidnapped more than 220 others some of whom were released during a brief ceasefire. Over 25,000 people have been killed in Gaza in the Israeli offensive, according to Hamas-run authorities in Gaza. India has been calling for de-escalation of the situation and creating conditions for an early resumption of direct peace negotiations towards a two-state solution to the Palestine issue. India strongly condemned the terror attack

### Supporters of Imran Khan's party clash with police over Pak election rigging allegations

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK, over the financing of campaigns for And all this money is disclosed. tries have evolved different sys-"Anyone who gives more than tems. That's fine. I do think that the party have clashed with police in various cities across the country as they staged protests against alleged rigging in the general elections held

on February 8. In Lahore, supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) gathered outside the Lahore Press Club and the party's Jail Road office on Saturday to register their protest, the Dawn newspaper reported on Sunday. The protesters chanted slogans, demanding the restoration of their "stolen mandate". They called for rectified results based on the vote count as per Form 45, prepared at polling stations under the watch of political parties' polling agents. PTI-backed candidate for NA-128, Salman Akram Raja, was arrested and taken to Racecourse Police Station. He was later released, the re-

Video clips circulating on social media showed policemen dragging the lawyer as he participated in the protest outside PTI's office on Jail Road. Ali Ijaz Buttar, another PTI candidate, was also arrested, along with elderly men, women and a astrous repercussions", like damag- gramme. (PTI)

In many cities of Punjab, police parliamentary system. arrived at the protest site even be fore the demonstrators had gathered and arrested several party leaders, candidates, workers and supporters. They dragged elderly men and women. PTI workers and supporters, who had gathered on the call of party founder Imran Khan, chanted

slogans and demanded the restoration of their "stolen" mandate, the Dawn report said. "If police stop protesters, stay

peaceful and stage a sit-in there," he wrote in a post on X.

In Karachi, hundreds of PTI workers and supporters gathered outside the Election Commission of Pakistan's Sindh office in the city's Saddar area.

The protesters chanted slogans against the alleged rigging and demanded the judiciary and state institutions to intervene and fix the 'flaws" in the results

The charged crowd, including women and children, carried party flags and danced to the tunes of party songs. They claimed that the mandate of Karachi was "stolen" on Feb 8 and that it could lead to "dis-

dent, Haleem Adil Sheikh, and other senior leaders addressed the demonstration and vowed to keep raising their voices against the 'rigged" elections".

In Peshawar and other areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PTI workers, including the newly elected lawmakers, staged rallies.

The rally in the provincial capital was addressed by PTI provincial president and chief minister-designate Ali Amin Gandapur and other leaders

In his speech, Gandapur said his party would not seek revenge but would reform institutions responsible for the "political witch-hunt" of his party workers and leaders.

"Reforms are necessary for the bright future of our children." Gandapur said, without specifying which institutions he aims to reform. Holding a portrait of the PTI founder Imran Khan, he said the party's next government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would ensure rights for women and vowed to revive the Sehat Card health insurance pro-

'It's like you were wearing little in a warm room, then you go outside, and you feel very cold

### Chinese pray God of Wealth for a turnaround of their fortune in Dragon Year to beat economic slowdown

BEIJING, Feb 18: Chinese people in large numbers flocked to Buddhist temples, especially the God of Wealth, as they welcomed the Lunar Year of the Dragon this week, praying for a turnaround in their fortune amid the slowdown of the world's second-largest economy.

Huge crowds are being seen in temples across China during this year's eight-day Spring Festival holidays ending on Friday, as Chinese people are embracing the Year of the Dragon. People are flocking to temple fairs to pray for blessings, luck. and good fortune for the coming year, the state-run Global Times reported.

Videos and posts on Chinese social media platforms showcased the busy scenes at the temple fairs in Beijing. More than 130,000 visitors visited the temple fair at Ditan Park last Sunday - the opening day of the fair.

Similar scenes were witnessed in many Chinese cities, including Shanghai, Hangzhou, Chengdu, and Fuzhou, where people gathered in temples to pray and take part in local fairs.

Large crowds were seen from 3:00 am at the Lingshun Temple in Hangzhou in East China's Zhejiang province last Wednesday to greet the God of Wealth, the report said.

A significant feature of this year's visits to the temples was the large number of young people, who were hit by the economic slowdown and increasing unemployment, which in recent months climbed to over 21 per cent, according to the widely-publicised reports.

Besides those who flocked to the temples, there is still a large group of young people on the internet who say that they are more interested in welcoming the God of Wealth than finding a partner, the re-

Many netizens have posted pictures showing that they have changed their phone and computer wallpapers to the 'God of Wealth".



On Wednesday, numerous citizens commented on a video posted by China's Ministry of Finance on social media, expressing their hope to receive good fortune and jokingly requesting the ministry

to support their dreams, the report said. Some tourist attractions have also arranged celebrations centred around the 'God of Wealth'.

Last week, some people dressed as the 'God of Wealth' at the entrance of the Shanghai Tower greeted visitors and wished them good fortune.

The Shanghai Tower Observation Deck also invited a group of window cleaners dressed as "Airborne Gods of Wealth" to descend from the top of the skyscraper safely, offering New Year blessings and good luck to the visitors on-site.

port said

Official data showed that China's economy grew by 5.2 per cent in 2023 which was well within the range of the government's target. However, business confidence remained low. As the property crisis drags on, coupled

with the flare-up of geopolitical tensions with the US and other Western countries, private and foreign investments have contracted, falling to their lowest levels in more than a decade.

Private investment shrank 0.4 per cent year-on-year, while foreign investment dropped by 8 per cent from 2022, according to a report in the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

With safe avenues of savings on the decline, the Chinese are increasingly turning

to investments in gold, like their Indian counterparts, placing their faith more in the yellow metal to save their money. As a result, China overtook India's gold

consumption last year, according to the latest figures released by the World Gold Council (WGC) early this month.

China's gold consumption in 2023 rose to 630 tonnes surpassing India's 562.3

China's investment in gold bars and coins grew 28 per cent to 280 tonnes in 2023 and the country saw an increase of 10 per cent in demand for the year.

"Gold has remained popular in the past year and been bought mainly as a safehaven asset. Prices have surged, but we expect they will hit new highs in 2024," Evelyn Xu, a wealth manager at a branch of the Bank of Jiangsu in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, told the Post.

The gold rush followed China's benchmark CSI 300 index, which tracks 300 of the biggest companies on the Shanghai

and Shenzhen bourses, has slumped by 38 per cent since January 2021, hitting a five-vear low last week.

In the property sector, home prices in 70 large and medium-sized cities fell in December at the fastest pace in almost nine years, the Post reported, quoting the most recent data from China's National Bureau of Statistics.

Summing up China's economic situation, Wu Fei, a professor at the Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance under Shanghai Jiao Tong University, said investors got used to big rewards amid China's rapid economic growth in the past decades, but that is no longer the case.

and they're becoming more conservative, having a better sense of risk, especially when it comes to the property market and stock market," Wu said.

"Everyone realises winter has come,

"It's like you were wearing little in a warm room, then you go outside, and you feel very cold," he told the Post. (PTI)

## Pak increases telecom towers in PoK to help terror groups: Officials

JAMMU, Feb 18: The number of telecom towers along the Line of Control in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) has been increased in recent times with an aim to aid terrorists and their associates in infiltration activities, officials said

Terror groups have been using highly encrypted YSMS services, a technology that merges smartphones and radio sets for covert communication purposes, the officials said after a study of the pattern of infiltration bids and recent terror attacks, particularly in the south of the Pir Panjal range in the Jammu region.

With this technology, a handler of a terror outfit in PoK is connected with the infiltrating group and its reception party in the Jammu region on a telecom network used across the LoC. This is done to avoid detection by the army or the BSF, which guard the borders with Pakistan.

The project for boosting telecom signals has been completely handed over to the Special Communication Organization (SCO) led by Pakistani army officer Maj Gen Umar Ahmad Shah, believed to be formerly working with Pakistan's spy agency ISI.

The strategic placement of telecom towers near the LoC and the international border, generally used for aiding terrorists and their



associates in infiltration activities, stands in violation of Article 45 of the constitution of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a body under the United Nations.

Article 45 of the ITU's constitution requires all 193-member countries to take the steps required to prevent the transmission or circulation of identification signals, "and to collaborate in locating and identifying stations under their jurisdiction transmitting such sig-

The officials said, the Radiocommunication Bureau (BR) under the ITU has reiterated that all stations are "forbidden to carry out unnecessary transmissions, or the transmission of superfluous signals, or the transmission of false or misleading signals, or the transmission of signals without identification".

The matter is being discussed at the ministerial level for taking it up at the international forum con-

The new telecom towers are operating on the Code-Division Multiple Access (CDMA) technology and the encryption has been done by a Chinese firm mainly for caterwithin defined areas. ing to YSMS operations, the offi-

cials said. This rouge telecom infrastructure supports infiltrating terrorists and their contacts in the Jammu rity threats effectively. and the Kashmir regions.

The deployment of CDMA technology along the LoC has been done with the aim to complicate monitoring efforts as the technology allows multiple signals on a single transmission channel, posing challenges in controlling ille-

gal communications. Past instances of use of such technology in 2019 and 2020 were thwarted by security agencies by breaking the encryption. The officials said the present attempt of terror groups aided by state actors of Pakistan would meet a similar

Despite the towering presence of the SCO in PoK, including in Gilgit and Baltistan, telecom towers offer minimal advantages in the Kashmir Valley due to its elevated terrain. But, their signals extend into the Jammu plains, with traces even reaching sensitive places like the Kot Balwal jail area.

Conventional measures such as jammers and managed access systems have fallen short in deterring mobile-phone usage, prompting the development of advanced detection capabilities aimed at locating and neutralising active phones

The officials said new technology is likely to be tested nationwide, particularly in prisons, by security agencies to combat secu-

The smuggling of cell phones in prisons presents a significant public safety hazard, empowering criminals to orchestrate terror activities from within the confines of a prison, the officials said.

This comes after several security agencies indicated that telecom signals from PoK have been penetrating into Indian territories, affecting regions from Baramulla and Kupwara in Kashmir to Jammu, Kathua, Rajouri, and Poonch Districts in the Jammu di-

Of particular concern is the communication between terrorists on Indian soil and their handlers in Pakistan, facilitated by various technologies like LoRa, YSMS, Baidu and Thuraya Satellite Communication

The utilisation of LoRa technology, known for its long-range capabilities, is being used by terror groups and their handlers so that the communication remains undetected between terrorists and overground workers (OGW). (PTI)

### Ram temple construction heralds establishment of 'Ram Rajya' for next 1,000 years: BJP resolution

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: The BJP's national convention on Sunday passed a resolution on the Ram temple in Ayodhya, asserting that this heralds the establishment of "Ram Rajya" in India for the next 1,000 years.

The resolution noted that the temple where a grand consecration ceremony took place last month, has become a temple of "national consciousness" and will play a decisive role in fulfilling the resolutions adopted in building a "Viksit Bharat".

"The construction of a grand and divine temple of Lord Shri Ram at his birthplace in the ancient holy city of Ayodhya is a historic and glorious achievement for the country. This heralds the establishment of 'Ram Rajya' in India for the next 1,000 years with the beginning of a new 'Kalachakra'," the resolu-

tion said. "This convention of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) heartily congratulates the leadership of the prime minister (Narendra Modi) for successfully conducting the consecration of

Lord Ram," it added. The resolution noted that the Ram temple is a symbol of India's vision, philosophy and path. "Shri Ram temple has truly become a temple of national consciousness," it said and added that every Indian was happy to see the divine consecration of

Lord Shri Ram.

On January 22, a new idol of Lord Ram was consecrated at the temple in a consecration ceremony led by Prime Minister Modi. Lakhs of people watched the "pran pratishtha (consecration)" ceremony on television in their homes and neighbourhood temples, becoming part of the historic event.

The resolution said that Lord Ram, Sita and the Ramayana are present in every aspect of Indian civilisation and culture.

"Even in the original copy of the Constitution of India, on the section of fundamental rights, the picture of Lord Shri Ram, Mother Sita and Lakshman ji after returning to Ayodhya after the victory is a proof of the fact that Lord Shri Ram is the source of inspiration for the fundamental rights," it said.

The resolution said that "the idea of 'Ram Rajya' was also in the heart of Bapu Mahatma Gandhi"

"He used to say that the idea of 'Ram Rajya' is the idea of true democracy. Following the ideals of Lord Shri Ram, the prime minister has implemented the spirit of 'Ram Rajya' in the true sense by establishing good governance in the country," it added.

The values that Lord Ram instilled in his words and thoughts are the inspiration for 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas,' and the basis of 'Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas', the resolution said.

"Under the leadership of the prime minister, India's unity and solidarity have received the power of public participation. He has raised the morale of the nation with his policies and leadership. Indian cultural, spiritual and historical pride has been restored in the last 10 years," it said.

"This convention congratulates Prime Minister Modi for making the shared power of heritage and development the identity of new India through his determined efforts and thanks the prime minister for making the whole of India experience the magic of Ram," it added. (PTI)

### caste-based survey: Official

RANCHI, Feb 18: Jharkhand chief minister Champai Soren has given the go-ahead for a castebased survey in the state on the lines of neighbouring Bihar, a senior official said on Sunday.

The CM has directed the personnel department to prepare a draft (SoP for conducting the survey) and place it before the cabinet for

If everything goes according to the plan, the exercise will begin after the Lok Sabha elections, the official said. Indicating the survey, the CM posted on X, "Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Utni Hissedari (Bigger the population, bigger the share). Jharkhand is ready.

Vinay Kumar Choubey, principal secretary to the CM, told PTI, "The personnel department will prepare a standard operating procedure (SOP) to conduct the survey in Jharkhand. It will be placed before the cabinet for approval."

The caste survey will be con-

# **CM Soren nods**

approval, he said.

ducted on the pattern of neighouring Bihar, where data collection was conducted between January 7 and October 2 last year, he added. (PTI)

### Govt to turn spotlight on promoting Lakshadweep, domestic islands & lesser known destinations

'Lakshadweep has many islands and we have selected a few right now like Minicoy, Suheli Par, Agatti and also Bangaram'

Union Ministry of Tourism will adopt a sustainable tourism development model to showcase Lakshadweep but is keen on not "overcrowding" the islands to preserve its ecology and ensure that the local environment is not spoiled, a senior government official said.

Besides promoting domestic islands, less popular spots in India are being identified to develop tourism and smaller promotional programmes put in place, Director of Ministry of Tourism, Bengaluru office, Mohamed Farouk, said.

He emphasised that the Ministry doesn't want to encourage mass tourism in these lesser known destinations at least for sometime so that the beauty and ecological sensitivity of the places are maintained.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's early January visit to Lakshadweep has drawn global attention to the archipelago and its immense tourism potential.

He also posted pictures of his undersea exploration on X and shared his "exhilarating experience" after snorkelling in the islands located in the Arabian Sea. Pictures also showcased moments from his early morning strolls along the pristine beaches of the islands.

"Of late, our Honourable Prime Minister visited Lakshadweep. It is one of the most sought after islands and the beaches are beautiful there. These (Lakshadweep) are one of the best beaches that we will find in India. So we are promoting Lakshadweep. There are lot of inquires about Lakshadweep as a tourist destination. We are coming up with good star classified hotels in Lakshadweep very soon," Farouk

told PTI in an interview. 'Taj hotel group is coming up with hotels there. They have already started the work and I am sure within one or two years time, they



would be catering to the tourists. The high-end tourists will find Lakshadweep, a beautiful beach destination compared to any other world class destinations," he said.

Incidentally, three deputy ministers of Maldives used disparaging comments against Modi for his post on 'X' following his visit to Lakshadweep, inferring it was an attempt to project the Union Territory as an alternative tourist destination to the Maldives. The controversy also led several Indian celebrities appealing to people to explore domestic islands instead of going to the Maldives.

Several initiatives are being taken to promote tourism in Lakshadweep, including construction of additional rooms and plans afoot for a big airport, with the archipelago being discussed across the world after the visit of Modi, its administrator Praful Patel had recently said. The Ministry has also identified the islands which would be developed as a tourist destination spots in Lakshadweep but Farouk said the focus would be to adopt sustainable tourism development model since it a "very eco-sensitive destination.

"Lakshadweep has many islands and we have selected a few right now like Minicoy, Suheli Par, Agatti and also Bangaram.

Lakshadweep is a very eco senstive destination, it is ecologically fragile and we have to ensure that when we do tourism, it should be sustainable. So, we are looking at a sustainable tourism development model where Lakshadweep's unique features, the fragile eco senstive eco system will be maintained," he said.

As of now, the Ministry is cautious about not bringing in too many players in Lakshadweep as it does not want the island to be "overcrowded" at this point in time.

"....so that the future generations get to see the same beauty as this generation get when they visit Lakshadweep. So we are very very careful about not bringing in too many players. Depending on the potential in future, we might come up with new hotel groups and we don't want to crowd it too much and ensure that Lakshadweep as a destination is not overcrowded and the local environment is not spoiled. So we are looking at sustainable tourism development in both Lakshadweep as well as Andaman and Nicobar Islands," Farouk said. He noted that India is a country not short of tourism products and that it will take a lifetime for any traveller to visit India as a whole. There are less popular, lesser known sites. For example in Karnataka, the Ministry has identified a few places like Sakleshpura which is a coffee and eco tourism destination.

"Chikkamagaluru...Coorg (Kodagu) is a very famous destination. You know people go to Coorg more often but there are places like Sakleshpura which are picking up. It is equally good to Coorg and now we are making efforts to promote these lesser known destinations.", Farouk said.

"There are jungle lodges and resorts of the Government of Karnataka. Some beautiful properties throughout Karnataka. For examples, the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary is a beautiful place but most people do not know Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary as well as they know Kabini.

The need of the hour is.... all Government of India tourist offices along with the state governments...we are identifying lesser known state destinations and we are making smaller promotional programmes so that the locals and nearby tourist go and visits these destinations.

"Again..we don't want to encourage mass tourism. These are lesser known destinations and we want it to be lesser known for some time so that the ecological sensitivity, the beauty of the place is maintained for some time.

We are ensuring that these destinations are maintained well and that their eco sensitivity is taken care of and when the tourist travel, they should feel that the destination is same even when they visit after 20 years," he added. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

#### Conrad bats for ILP to

The Meghalaya Assembly in December 2019 had adopted a resolution for implementing the ILP regime in the state. The ILP is a special permit required by "outsiders" from other regions of India to enter the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

"Our concerns are that anybody from outside the country is a non-Indian, and illegal immigration is illegal immigration. Citizens coming from other countries would be in a way foreigners coming into our country," he added. Passed in December 2019 by the Parliament, the CAA grants Indian nationality to Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians? from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, who arrived in India till December 31, 2014. Home Minister Amit Shah has said rules for implementing the CAA will be issued before the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. The provisions of the Act will not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. The Sixth Schedule protects tribal populations, providing autonomy to communities through the creation of Autonomous Development Councils, which can frame laws on land, public health and agriculture.

Asked about Manipur chief minister Biren Singh's statement on deporting those who have come in the state after 1961, Sangma said it is for the state and the Union governments to decide, but added, "The situation in Manipur is complicated and those decisions will have to be taken keeping ground factors in mind. It is for the Government of India and the Government of Manipur to decide," he said.

"From a practical point of view, it is very complicated. How will they implement that decision has to be equally looked into," he added. (PTI)

#### 10 coal miners abducted

including ULFA (I) members, seek refuge in Myanmar camps. After committing crimes, they easily flee to their camps through jungle routes," explained a police source. "This is not the first abduction incident. Numerous abduction cases have previously occurred in Changlang," the source added.

#### UNLF(P) cadres involved

The unrest escalated when reports claimed that a shooting incident in Maphou village, predominantly inhabited by the people of the Kuki ethnicity, was carried out by individuals allegedly associated with the Arambai Tenggol and UNLF (P) cadres. These cadres of UNLF (P) were reportedly providing live updates on social media while claiming to target the Kuki community. Despite the ceasefire agreement aimed at ending hostilities between UNLF(P) and security forces, the recent incidents show that UNLF (P) cadres have been moving

freely with their automatic weapons, seemingly immune to arrest by security forces. Quoting an instance, the officials said armed UNLF (P) cadres were stopped by the central security forces and handed over to the local authorities but within no time they were out on the pretext that their organisation had entered into a ceasefire agreement. Ahead of recent unrest in Churachandpur in the hills of the Manipur states, the officials said that UNLF (P) cadres in uniform were sighted near Terakhongsangbi in their vehicles marked with UNLF insignia. Ethnic clashes between the Meitei and tribal Kuki communities in Manipur since

May last year have resulted in the loss of over 180 lives. The ceasefire agreement was expected to bring an end to hostilities between UNLF and security forces which have claimed precious lives on both sides over the last more than half a century and also provide an opportunity to address the longstanding concerns of the community. The UNLF, established in 1964, has been active both within and outside Indian territory. Since 2014, the Centre has signed agreements with several armed groups in the Northeast to quell militancy and foster development. Additionally, a Suspension of Operations (SoO) with 21 Kuki-dominated groups has been ongoing since 2008 to ensure peace in Manipur's hilly regions. The Manipur government's unilateral withdrawal from the SoO in March due to allegations of encroachment on forest land by two Kuki-dominated insurgent groups, has not been endorsed by the Centre. (PTI)

### Tension grips Karbi Anglong

In a show of solidarity, numerous indigenous social organisations have voiced their support for the Karbi Students Association (KSA). The All Tiwa Students Union (ATSU) urged immediate action from the administration against the attackers of KSA and emphasised the necessity to prevent any further escalation. They also called for the arrest of all perpetrators and the enforcement of legal measures.

In a press release, ATSU underscored the hospitality extended by the indigenous populace of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong to migrants from other regions, urging gratitude towards the host community. Similarly, the CPI (ML) Liberation, Hills Party Committee, and allied organisations echoed the sentiment,

demanding a resolution to the PGR and VGR land issues.

They advocated for stringent action against those responsible for the assault on KSA members. In a press conference held in Diphu, organisations representing the Dimasa Tribe—the Dimasa Students Union, Dimasa Sahitya Sabha, and Dimasa Cultural Society—condemned the attack on KSA members. They reiterated their stance against violence, emphasising the imperative of peace and harmony within society.

### Opposition lacks road

House, he said. "We have to connect with everyone, not for forming government but to build the country," he said. Taking an aim at critics who wondered if he would be able to handle foreign policy, he said India's ties with West Asia is at its strongest and noted that he was the first prime minister in a few decades to visit the UAE. The Congress government used to look at West Asia through the prism of Pakistan, he said. Five Arab countries have bestowed their highest honours on him. Modi said the nation no longer thinks and dreams small.

It now has big dreams and has taken big resolutions to make India a developed country by 2047, he added. 'The next five years are going to be crucial. We have to take a big leap towards 'Viksit Bharat'. The first condition for realising the big goals for the country is to ensure the return of the BJP to power with a strong mandate," he said. He said the Congress is riven by internal divisions not due to ideological differences but over its stand on him as one section believes in tarnishing his image by all means, including personal attacks, while another wants to avoid this approach. How confused the Congress is, he said. "Abusing Modi and levelling false allegations against me have become the single-point agenda of its leaders," he said, claiming that the party is the mother of politics of nepotism, appeasement and corruption. He also accused the Congress of seeking to divide the nation along regional and language lines.

Addressing the delegates who repeatedly raised slogans cheering him, Modi asserted that the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya has ended the centuries-long wait and mentioned the matter among some of the achievements of his government, including the opening of Kartarpur Sahib corridor, repeal of Article 370 and women's reservation. He spoke at length about his government's numerous initiatives to empower women and asserted that he is the only prime minister who raised from the Red Fort the issues of toilets and use of derogatory words for women.

The Prime Minister said that even opposition leaders are now raising slogans in favour of more than 400 Lok Sabha seats for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), in an apparent reference to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge. Congress leaders have, however, described Kharge's remarks as a swipe at the BJP's claim. "But, for NDA to cross 400, the BJP will have to cross the milestone of 370," Modi said. The prime minister said fulfilling the dreams of crores of women, poor and youth is his mission.

"We rid the country of mega scams and terror attacks, and made efforts to improve the living standards of the poor and the middle class," he said. He said 10 years of unblemished governance and pulling 25 crore people out of poverty were no ordinary feats. "If I had thought of my home, it would not have been possible to build homes for crores of people," he said. "A senior leader once told me 'I have done enough as PM and CM, should take it easy now'. But I am working for 'rashtraniti', not 'rajneeti'," he said. The prime minister said he lives by the ideals of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and takes inspiration from him.

"My efforts are dedicated to the people of India. The dreams of Indians are my commitments," Modi said. In the times to come, there will be plenty of opportunities for "our mothers, sisters and daughters", the prime minister said. The Northeast was completely ignored by earlier governments, he said, "but we do not work for votes and seats." He said his Council of Ministers had a record representation of leaders from the Northeast and Other Backward Classes as well. "For the first time, a woman has become a member of the Rajya Sabha from Nagaland. We are proud that for the first time we have given a place to a person from Tripura in the Council of Ministers," he said. "For the first time in our government, Arunachal Pradesh has got a cabinet minister," Modi said. (PTI)

### Tribal body urges govt

and replace Churachandpur SP and DC but so far, no cancellation or replacement has been done," the outfit said in a statement. "State government employees should refrain from going to office... it will be their sole responsibility if any untoward incident happens," it added.

Head constable Siamlalpaul was kept "under suspension with immediate effect until further orders" after a video of him with "armed men" and "sitting together with village volunteers" went viral on social media. "This tantamount to very grave misconduct being a member of the disciplined police force," a police order said.

"A departmental inquiry is being contemplated against Siamlalpaul of Churachandpur district police, as a clip has gone viral on social media showing him making a video with armed men on February 14," the order stated. Siamlalpaul has been asked not to "leave the station without prior permission" and "his pay and allowances have been restricted to subsistence allowance admissible as per the rules", it said.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh has condemned the violence and said that an FIR has been lodged against one person for threatening to kill the SP and that the damaged DC bungalow was being repaired. He questioned the motive behind the violence, suggesting a hidden agenda, while asserting that all government records were safe. (PTI)

### International meet moots

Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Thailand, proposed a hybrid training model to accommodate large-

scale skill development efforts, leveraging online platforms and smart classrooms. He underscored the importance of collaboration in the context of India's Act East Policy, positioning AIT as a valuable partner in training initiatives for the North East region. Tripathi pledged to support these efforts, leveraging AIT's international resources and expertise to enhance skill development programmes effectively. The discussions also focused on potential collaborations between the government of Assam, international bodies

and industry partners, with NIELIT serving as a liaison to facilitate such partnerships, the release said. The general chairs of the conference were Yumnam Jayanta Singh, executive director, NIELIT Guwahati, and N Debachandra Singh, director, NIELIT Imphal. The conference received over 200 full-length articles, with approximately 80 papers slated for publication in the Springer Book Series 'Lecture Notes in Networks

### Centre 'deactivating' Aadhaar

cooperative banks can be an alternative. "If the banks think they will not work without the Aadhaar cards, then we will work without them... we have so many cooperative banks and other financial organisations,' Banerjee said. Referring to the farmers' agitation over the demand for government guarantee on minimum support price of their produce, she asserted that cultivators in Bengal do not face any problem. (PTI)

### **INDIA REGISTER BIGGEST-EVER**

# India annihilate England by 434 runs in 3<sup>rd</sup> Test, take 2-1 lead

Jaiswal's sensational double hundred found harmonious co-existence with the stunning craftiness of five-wicket man Ravindra Jadeja as ruthless India demolished wasteful England by a record 434 runs on the fourth day of the third Test here on Sunday.

England resisted their desire to play 'Bazball' but the Indian bowlers led by Jadeja (5/41) were an irresistible force, as they hustled out the tourists for 122 in their second innings while chasing an improbable 557-run target. India, now, lead the five-match

series 2-1. This was also India's biggest win in Test cricket in terms of runs, bettering the previous 372run win over New Zealand at the

Wankhede Stadium in 2021. Jaiswal's unbeaten 214 off 236 balls, in which he equalled the highest number of sixes (12) in a Test innings, was the cornerstone of India's second innings total of 430 for four declared, which gave them a massive lead of 556 runs earlier in the day.

It was also a perfect platform for Jadeja to weave his magic as England's claims of fancying themselves in big chases through an aggressive approach came to

Legendary

South African

Procter dies

He was 77.

cricket history

all-rounder Mike

**JOHANNESBURG, Feb 18:** 

Cricket South Africa (CSA) on

Sunday mourned the death of

one of country's finest all-rounders Mike Procter.

Procter's career as a fast

bowler, capable off-spinner,

hard-hitting middle-order bat-

ter, and astute captain is etched

in the annals of South African

Beyond his playing days, he

served the game in every con-

ceivable role - as a national

captain and coach, administra-

tor, selector, commentator, elite

ICC match referee, and then

dedicated his final years to

coaching underprivileged chil-

dren. Procter was South Africa's coach in the post apartheid era. He played as

many as 401 first class games but could only feature in seven

Tests due to South Africa's isolation in 1970s and 1980s.

"Mike was not just a giant on

the field but a beacon of hope

and inspiration off it. His com-

mitment to transforming the

game, ensuring its growth

among all sectors of our popu-

lation, and mentoring hundreds

of underprivileged youngsters

in the Durban area, stands as a

testament to his character and

passion for cricket," said CSA

president Rihan Richards in a

statement. Procter's achieve-

ments, including his remark-

able record of twice taking a

hat-trick and scoring a century

in the same match, and his

world-record six consecutive

Currie Cup centuries for Rhode-

sia as it was then in 1970-71,

highlight his extraordinary talent

and impact on the game. (PTI)

India's plan of attacking the wickets took the wind away from the sails of England, whose top order crumbled without any significant contribution.

With Jadeja finding ample support from Kuldeep Yadav (2/19), Jasprit Bumrah (1/18) and Ravichandran Ashwin (1/19), who rejoined the match on this day after attending a medical emergency at home, England found no way out.

Ben Duckett (4) ran himself out, Zak Crawley (11) was trapped leg-before by Bumrah and Jadeja struck twice in quick succession to see the back of Ollie Pope (3) and extended Jonny Bairstow's (4) misery on

Struggling desperately for runs on this tour, Bairstow was trapped leg-before while trying to sweep

England's hero of the win in the first Test, Pope cut one straight to Rohit Sharma at first slip as Jadeja shook their top-order.

After a brief period of resistance, Joe Root (7) missed a sweep with the umpire declaring him out leg-before off Jadeja, and the replays confirmed that the ball would have flicked the top of off-

Captain Ben Stokes (15) had a similar fate, missing a sweep off Kuldeep Yadav as England slumped to 50 for six.

Ashwin took the field in the post tea session and contributed his bit with the scalp of Tom

For a while, it seemed England would fold for one of their lowest-ever totals against India, but a late burst from Mark Wood (33, 15 balls, 6x4s, 1x6s) took them to 122 from 82 for eight.

But before Jadeja and his horsemen of apocalypse ran through England, Jaiswal and debutant Sarfaraz Khan showcased their brilliance in no little

Shubman Gill too displayed his class with a 91 after India resumed the fourth day from 196 for two. The knock combined with his hundred in the previous Test might have brought him considerable time and confidence.

But none shone as bright as Jaiswal. Having notched up his overall third century and second of the series, Jaiswal continued with his red-hot form to become the first player to hit 20 sixes in a series with two more matches



SPORTS

### Dhoni picked as skipper of IPL's all-time greatest team

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: Iconic Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Sunday selected as the leader of IPL's all-time greatest team which was picked to celebrate the success of world's mostpopular T20 league which was launched in 2008.

The selection panel consisted of former cricketers Wasim Akram, Matthew Hayden, Tom Moody and Dale Steyn. About 70 journalists were also part of the selection process. Australia's fiery David Warner and India's batting main stay Virat Kohli were chosen as openers while 'Universe Boss' Chris Gayle was given the number three spot in batting order.

The middle-order consisted of Suresh Raina, AB de Villiers, Suryakumar Yadav and Dhoni, while Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja and Kieron Pollard were the three all-rounders in the 15-member squad.



and Yuzvendra Chahal formed the spin attack while Lasith Malinga and Jasprit Bumrah were the unanimous choice for the fast bowlers' slots. The marquee tournament will complete 16 years of the first-ever IPL auction on February 20, 2024.

In the realm of IPL cricket, few names shine as brightly as that of

the most successful captains in cricket history, his leadership prowess has garnered praise from peers and pundits alike.

Speaking exclusively on the 'Star Sports Incredible 16 of IPL' show, former South Africa fast bowler Dale Steyn echoed sentiments shared by many when he hailed Dhoni as

leadership excellence.

"It has to be MS Dhoni. He has won everything -- World Cup, IPL, ICC Champions Trophy," said Steyn. "He's a leader of men, and you've got a bunch of men here that are all at the highest level of their game, and they need someone who has been there and done that and can manage them extremely well on and off the field, so I will have to go with MS Dhoni," he said. Former Australia cricketer and coach Tom Moody emphasised on Dhoni's remarkable feat.

"It has to be MS Dhoni for me, the reason being MS Dhoni has won the title with very good squads and average squads, and that tells me a lot about the captain and how he can lead a variety of talent in a squad to success. "Rohit Sharma has been a brilliant captain for MI but MI have always had the best squads or up there with the best squads in the IPL since its in-

## Indian women clinch historic Gold in Badminton Asia Team Championships

SHAH ALAM (MALAYSIA), Rawinda Pra Jongjai 21-16, 18-Feb 18: Anmol Kharb yet again performed when it mattered, winning the decisive fifth rubber to lead the Indian women to a historic Badminton Asia Team Championships title with a tight 3-2 victory over a depleted Thailand, here Sunday.

The young sprightly group of Indian women's team, led by seasoned PV Sindhu, defied all expectations to come up trumps against two-time bronze medallists Thailand.

"I'm very happy that we bagged the gold medal because this is the first time India are winning the gold at the Badminton Asia Team Championships," Anmol said after the match.

"It is a big thing because history has been scripted here. Yesterday (after the semifinal win) it went crazy in India because beating powerhouses like Japan and China was such a big thing. Today, it will be full-on celebration in India and in the team as

"I wanted to play my 100 per cent but there was no pressure on me at all. We were confident of winning the fifth match."

It is the first-ever major title for Indian women in team championships and provides a big boost to the side ahead of the Uber Cup, which is set to be held in Chengdu, China from April 28 to

India had won two medals in the past with the men's team claiming bronze medals in the 2016 and 2020 editions.

Though like most of the teams in the competition, Thailand were not at full strength, they still had higher-ranked players in their

Thailand were without their top two singles players -- world No. 13 Ratchanok Intanon and Pornpawee Chochuwong, who is ranked 16th in the world.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu provided India a confident start, riding on her power and placement to outclass world number 17 Supanida Katethong 21-12, 21-12 in the first singles and hand India a 1-0 lead.

World No. 23 Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand then dished out another gritty performance to shock the world number 10 pair of

21, 21-16 to put India in the driver's seat.

Playing the second singles against world ranked 18 Busanan Ongbamrungphan, expectations were high from Ashmita Chaliha after her stunning win against former world champion Nozomi Okuhara on Saturday.

The Indian, who had defeated Busanan during the Singapore Open in 2022, stayed in the match till 14-14 in the second game but a string of unforced errors thereafter cost Ashmita dearly as she went down 11-21, 14-21 against her experienced rival.

Young Shruti Mishra and Priya Konjengbam, the senior national champions, then lost 11-21, 9-21 to the world number 13 combination of Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard to leave the tie evenly poised at 2-2.

Anmol then shouldered the responsibility of taking India through once again, producing a dominating 21-14, 21-9 victory over world number 45 Pornpicha Choeikeewong in the deciding third singles.

"It's a big achievement at 17 years old. Now I have to train harder to beat tougher opponents,"

Soon after the win, the entire squad got into a huddle to lift Anmol, celebrating the magnificent win at the Setia City Conven-

"It is a great moment for Indian badminton. I give a lot of credit to these youngsters. They displayed great spirit, they were supporting each other and the atmosphere was just like it was when India won the Thomas Cup. So this is a special moment for India," former India coach Vimal Kumar told

Sindhu opened a 5-1 lead after Supanida struggled with her control in drifty conditions, committing too many unforced errors. A powerful smash on Su-

panida's forehand gave Sindhu an 8-2 lead as she kept dictating the terms, moving to a massive 11-4 advantage at the break.

Sindhu played at a good pace and was also far more polished at the net. Soon she was 18-9 up with another lethal jump smash and pocketed the game after her opponent sprayed into the net a

**Pro League** 

matches are

## Ranji Trophy: Saurashtra secure quarters berth after innings win against Manipur

RAJKOT, Feb 18: Saurashtra's mammoth 529/6. veteran left-arm spinner Dharmendrasinh Jadeja bagged his 22nd five-wicket haul as the defending champions scored an innings and 243-run victory against Manipur to move into the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals from Group A here on Sunday.

Saurashtra's victory was a foregone conclusion on day two itself when they had reduced Manipur to 55/3 in their second innings on Saturday, and the task was completed by the 33-yearold Jadeja, who bagged a fivefor on day three as the visitors slumped to a big defeat at the Sanosara Cricket Ground

Manipur had made 142 in the first innings batting first, and following that Saurashtra had declared their lone innings at a

Manipur then folded up at 144 in 51.5 overs in their second essay to hand over the hosts the victory with a bonus point.

Besides Jadeja (5/55), Yuvrajsinh Dodiya (3/51) and India white-ball pacer Chetan Sakariya (2/28) too contributed the the big win.

The difference in class between Saurashtra and Manipur was all too visible from the opening day of the seventh and concluding round of the Ranji league matches.

After dismissing Manipur for a paltry 142, with Jadeja taking four wickets, Saurashtra piled up tons of runs with stand-in skipper Arpit Vasavada (148), Prerak Mankad (173) and Cheteshwar Pujara (103) scoring centuries as

the home team batters declared

Then, Saurashtra bowlers Sakariya, Jadeja and Dodiya picked up a wicket each in the final session on Saturday to put the hosts in a commanding position. The home team bowlers continued the good work on Sunday bagging the remaining seven wickets.

Saurashtra, with 29 points from seven games, are the only team from the Group A so far to have secured a place in the quarterfinals, while Vidarbha (27 points, six games) and Haryana (24, six games) too are in with a chance to make the grade.

A clear picture will emerge at the conclusion of the seventh round of matches on Monday.



## Test cricket is tough, but I'm determined to make it count: Jaiswal

RAJKOT, Feb 18: Playing an aggressive brand of cricket, Yashasvi Jaiswal has already hit two double hundreds in his nascent career and the young India opener says though Test cricket is "tough" he believes in making it big after getting a

The left-handed attacking opener scored unbeaten 214 off 236 balls to steer India to a commanding 430 for 4 declared in their second innings, setting England a mammoth target of 557 runs.

It was his second double hundred in just six matches, having made his debut against the West Indies in July 2023. Jaiswal also entered the

record books by hitting the highest number of sixes (12) by an Indian in a Test innings in the Rajkot Test that India won by a massive 434-run margin.

"Test cricket is hard, but I thought that when I'm in there, I need to give my 100 per cent," Jaiswal said after India took a 2-1 lead in the fivematch series.

"I'm just trying. Whenever I'm set, I try to make it big. Because in Test cricket you never know, when you're playing well you have to make it

Analysing his double century, Jaiswal said he just tried to play session by session and



also had to overcome a back problem en route the knock.

"It was pretty difficult for me because initially I wasn't getting runs. So had to play the session, and get set. That's when I felt I could score runs. "After a while my back was not good. I didn't want to go out (of the field) but since it was too much, I went out. Today when I came, I wanted to make sure that I take the game forward and bat till the end," he said.

The left-hander said as an opener his job is to give the team a good start. "I felt there was something

in the wicket and the ball was hard. For me, it is important for me to give teams a good start so it was important for me to play long," Jaiswal said.

"I tell myself whenever I get set, I need to score well because you can get out anytime. My seniors have said to make it count.'

He was also motivated by the knocks of skipper Rohit Sharma and Ravindra Jadeja in the first innings.

"The way Rohit (Sharma) bhai and (Ravindra Jadeja) Jaddu bhai played, that motivated me a lot. Their passion determined me to play session by session. I thought inside the dugout that when I go out there I should also make it count," Jaiswal said. (PTI)

### vital for Paris **Olympics** preparations, says Fulton ROURKELA, Feb 18: Indian men's hockey team chief coach

Craig Fulton on Sunday said the ongoing FIH Pro League matches are vital to his team's preparation for the Paris Olympics scheduled for July-August. The Indians have so far played four matches in the Pro League out, winning three and losing one against the mighty Australia. "It (Pro League) gives us 18 games that you are looking in the build up to Paris. So it is important. Whether some teams are putting their strongest teams or not is out of our control," Fulton said during a virtual press confer-

"Everything we are looking forward to is to have more perspective about our game, develop our game with the squad we have.

"We know we can compete in all the games, in different phases we have to different things and do them better. So the Pro League is really important for now because this is the only competition we have". India captain Harmanpreet Singh too agreed with his coach.

'These are the major matches we are getting before the Olympics and they are very important for us. We started on a good note but as the coach said from the Australia game we have learnt a lot," he said. "We will definitely get a lot of advantage by playing these matches. Before the Olympics these are the games we are getting and we had made a good start as well and these matches will definitely help us in Olympics." (PTI)

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