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- 'US revitalised partnership with allies and nations like India amidst China's rise'

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Government of Assam

HONOURING  
**LACHIT  
BARPHUKAN:**  
THE PRIDE OF INDIA



“  
Lachit Barphukan is India's pride. He epitomised unparalleled courage. He placed the well-being of people above everything else and was a just as well as visionary leader.

**Shri Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister



A monumental tribute to Lachit Barphukan, the valiant General who saved Assam from Mughal invaders

## Unveiling of The Statue of Valour

by  
**Shri Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister



Lachit Barphukan Maidam Development Project

### Features

- 🏰 **125-foot tall** statue
- 📏 Height of the statue: **84 feet**
- 📏 Height of pedestal: **41 feet**
- 🏛️ Lachit Barphukan and Tai-Ahom **Museum**
- 🎫 **500-seat** auditorium
- 🏠 **Hostel** Housing (G+2)

### Highlights

- 👤 **Tourism** opportunities
- 👤 **Inspiring** new generation with the **patriotism** and **courage** of Lachit Barphukan

📍 Hollongapar, Jorhat 📅 9 March 2024 🕒 12:00 Noon



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# 'There are over 33 crore domestic cooking gas users in the country'

## Weeks before polls, LPG price cut by ₹ 100

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** Weeks before general elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday announced a ₹ 100 per cylinder cut in cooking gas LPG price to ease financial burden on households.

Non-subsidised cooking gas price will be cut to ₹ 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder in the national capital with effect from midnight of Friday/Saturday, official sources said.

Prices vary from state to state depending on the incidence on local taxes.

The reduction has been made possible because of easing of international oil and gas prices, against which domestic fuel rates are benchmarked.

However, no change in petrol and diesel prices was announced. Petrol and diesel prices continue to be on freeze for a record 23 months now.

All LPG consumers in the country buy cooking gas at non-subsidised prices. Some like the poor women who got free connections under the Ujjwala Yojana, and consumers in remote and far-flung areas are paid a fixed amount of subsidy per refill in their bank accounts.

"Today, on Women's Day, our Government has decided to reduce LPG cylinder prices by ₹ 100. This will significantly ease the financial burden on millions of households across the country, especially benefiting our Nari Shakti," Modi said



in a post on X.

This is the second reduction in cooking gas prices in six months.

Rates were cut by ₹ 200 per cylinder in late August ahead of assembly elections in five states, including Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

That revision brought down the prices from a nine-year high of ₹ 1,103 per 14.2-kg cylinder to ₹ 903 and now the rate has been cut to ₹ 803.

"By making cooking gas more affordable, we also aim to support the well-being of families and ensure a healthier environment. This is in line with our commitment to empowering women and ensuring 'Ease of Living' for them," the Prime Minister said.

For the beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), who get ₹ 300 per cylinder subsidy, a 14.2-kg LPG cylinder will now cost ₹ 503 in the national capital.

"Ujjwala beneficiaries will now get LPG cylinders for only ₹ 503 and (other) consumers will get it only for ₹ 803," Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said in a post on X.

The Union Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister had on Thursday approved extension of ₹ 300 per LPG cylinder subsidy to Ujjwala Yojana for another one year to March 2025.

The government had in October last year hiked the subsidy from ₹ 200 per 14.2-kg cylinder for up to 12 refills per year to ₹ 300 per bottle. The ₹ 300 per cylinder subsidy

was for the current fiscal, which ends on March 31. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on Thursday decided to extend this subsidy to 2024-25.

That move, which is likely to benefit nearly 10 crore families, will cost the government ₹ 12,000 crore.

General elections are due in April-May.

Cooking gas prices had shot up in the last couple of years and had become a major election issue. Rates went up by ₹ 294 per 14.2-kg cylinder between July 2021 and August 2023.

The opposition Congress party used the high LPG prices, which had burnt a hole in the budgets of households already reeling under high inflation, effectively in the 2023 assembly elections in Karnataka.

It has promised to give LPG at ₹ 500 per cylinder if voted to power in Madhya Pradesh in November/December assembly elections, forcing Modi's BJP to also promise cooking gas at the same rate.

While Ujjwala beneficiaries are about 10 crore, there are over 33 crore domestic cooking gas users in the country.

The government in June 2020 stopped giving LPG subsidies. Cooking gas across the country was priced at market rate, which rose to ₹ 1,103 in the national capital in August 2023. (PTI)

### Forex kitty jumps USD 6.55 bn to USD 625.63 bn

**MUMBAI, March 8:** India's forex reserves jumped USD 6.55 billion to USD 625.626 billion for the week ended March 1, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had risen by USD 2.975 billion to USD 619,072 billion. It can be noted that in October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year. For the week ended March 1, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by USD 6,043 billion to USD 554,231 billion, the data said.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased by USD 569 million to USD 48,417 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 17 million to USD 18.18 billion, the apex bank said. (PTI)

## Sudha Murty holds about ₹ 5,600 cr worth of stocks in Infosys



**NEW DELHI, March 8:** Sudha Murty, who was on Friday nominated to the Rajya Sabha by the President, holds a 0.83 per cent stake in IT bellwether Infosys which at current prices is worth close to ₹ 5,600 crore. The 73-year-old philanthropist is the wife of Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy.

She is the chairperson of the Murty Trust and has authored several books.

According to the latest shareholding filed by Infosys with the BSE, she holds 3.45 crore shares of the

company. At the last closing price of ₹ 1,616.95 on the BSE, Murty's holding in Infosys is currently worth ₹ 5,586.66 crore. Her husband Narayana Murthy owns 1.66 crore equity shares that are worth ₹ 2,691 crore.

Sudha Murty, who was awarded the Padma Shri in 2006 and Padma Bhushan in January this year, is also the mother-in-law of UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

While Padma Shri is the country's fourth-highest civilian award, Padma Bhushan is the second-highest civilian honour.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday morning took to the X to announce her nomination. "I am delighted that the President of India has nominated @SmtSudhaMurty Ji to the Rajya Sabha. Sudha Ji's contributions to diverse fields including social work, philanthropy and education have been immense and inspiring. Her presence in the Rajya Sabha is a powerful testament to our 'Nari Shakti', exemplifying the strength and potential of women in shaping our nation's destiny. Wishing her a fruitful Parliamentary tenure."

Murty thanked the Prime Minister for the opportunity to serve the nation.

"Thank you, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi Ji. It is my privilege and honour to be nominated to the Rajya Sabha by our Hon'ble President of India Smt. Droupadi Murmu Ji @rashtrapatibhvn. I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve our nation." (PTI)

## Interest rates on small savings schemes remain unchanged for Q1 FY25

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** The government on Friday left the interest rates unchanged on various small savings schemes for the first quarter of the next fiscal, beginning April 1, 2024. A notification in this regard has been issued by the finance ministry.

"The rates of interest on various small savings schemes for the first quarter of FY 2024-25, starting from April 1, 2024, and ending on June 30, 2024, shall remain unchanged from those notified for the fourth quarter (January 1, 2024, to March 31, 2024) of FY 2023-24," the notification said.

The deposit under the Sukanya Samriddhi scheme will attract an interest rate of 8.2 per cent, while the rate on a three-year term deposit remains at 7.1 per

cent. The interest rates for popular PPF and savings deposits too have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the Kisan Vikas Patra will be 7.5 per cent, and the investments will mature in 115 months. The interest rate on the National Savings Certificate (NSC) will remain at 7.7 per cent for the April 1-June 30, 2024, period.

Like the current quarter, the interest rate for the Monthly Income Scheme will earn 7.4 per cent for investors.

The government notifies the interest rates on small savings schemes, majorly operated by post offices, every quarter. (PTI)

## LG Electronics Launches 'Break The Label' Campaign



**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 8:** In celebration of International Women's Day, LG Electronics, a leading consumer durable brand in India, has launched its month-long #BreakTheLabel campaign.

This initiative aims to spotlight and celebrate the exceptional achievements of women who have shattered stereotypes and excelled in unconventional fields.

The campaign commenced with a groundbreaking panel discussion held at the LG Innovation Gallery on March 5th, featuring inspiring women from diverse backgrounds who have made significant impacts in their respective domains.

The panel discussion showcased a stellar lineup of speakers, including Priyanka Mangesh Mohite, Sneha Rathor Khandelwal, Capt Dr Sneha Sharma,

Barkha Kaul, Shikha Khushu, and Shweta Mehta. These remarkable women represent a wide range of backgrounds and expertise, each making a significant impact in their field.

Through this platform, LG recognised their resilience, determination, and unwavering spirit.

The #BreakTheLabel campaign underscores LG's commitment to gender equality and empowerment, aiming to inspire others to challenge societal norms and embrace their full potential.

Hong Ju Jeon, managing director of LG Electronics India, expressed his delight in launching the month-long campaign, stating, "We are thrilled to introduce our #BreakTheLabel campaign for International Women's Day, driven by inspiring stories filled with optimism and dedication. Life's

Good when we empower women to defy stereotypes and pursue their aspirations, fostering a world of equality and opportunity. Let's celebrate the resilience and accomplishments of women worldwide as we unite for a brighter, more inclusive future."

During the discussion, Priyanka Mangesh Mohite, Fearless Mountaineer & Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awardee, shared her insights, emphasizing the importance of passion and resilience in achieving goals. She advised aspiring climbers to stay mentally strong and cherish life's moments.

The event also included a meet & greet of Influential Entrepreneurs, setting the tone for a month-long campaign dedicated to paying tribute to women achievers such as Malvica Saxena, owner of Funky Footwear brand The Quirky Naari, Smriti & Kriti Singhal, Co-founders of Youth Marketing Agency The Education Tree, and Aditi Gupta, founder of ed-tech company Techtip24, among others. These women's stories serve as an inspiration and testament to the power of diversity and women's contributions across all spheres of society. The month-long campaign aims to shine a spotlight on these unsung heroes, amplifying their voices and celebrating their achievements.

Contd. from Page 3...

## Modi gets glimpse Assam's diverse

Traditional performances of Bihu and other folk songs and dances were presented along the route, with Modi praising it with a post on X. "Landed to a very special welcome in Golaghat district, Assam. Got a glimpse of Assam's diverse and beautiful culture," the PM wrote, sharing photos of the performances.

As Modi reached the guest house, where he will spend the night, Sarma said it was a privilege for the people of Assam to have the PM in their midst as part of their own family.

"As Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji reaches Kaziranga National Park, #ModiParivarAssam comes out in large numbers to welcome their very own family member to the World Heritage Site," Sarma wrote on X.

In another post, the CM added, "The most popular leader of the world, elder of our family, respected Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji is heartily welcomed to Kaziranga."

Modi is scheduled to undertake a jungle safari early on Saturday morning, official had said earlier, with Park authorities making arrangements for both jeep and elephant safaris.

He will be there for around two hours, they said.

After undertaking the safari, Modi will leave for Arunachal Pradesh, where he is scheduled to attend two programmes. He will return to Jorhat in the afternoon and inaugurate the 125-ft high 'Statue of Valour' of legendary Ahom general Lachit Barphukan.

The prime minister will then proceed to Meleng Meteli Pothar, where he will inaugurate and lay the foundation for central and state projects worth a total of around ₹ 18,000 crore, the officials said.

He is also scheduled to address a public meeting at the venue.

After the meeting, he will leave for West Bengal. The prime minister had visited Assam on February 4 and launched infrastructure projects worth ₹ 11,600 crore. (PTI)

## Indian Army's JCO abducted

The senior police officials to address their grievances. Manipur Police also published a statement blaming the notorious group AT for the attack and warned all miscreants to refrain from such acts and indicating that prevalence of such conditions will result in reimposition of AFSPA in the valley.

The security forces toiling day and night for early restoration of peace and normalcy are being targeted for performing their duty, the officials said, adding the attacks by the inimical elements on security forces and their families need to be strongly condemned and perpetrators caught and punished as per the law.

At least 219 people have been killed in the ethnic strife in the state that started on May 3 last year after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts. (PTI)

## Jail official arrested over

Ten members of the pro-Khalistani outfit, including its top leader Amritpal Singh and one of his uncles, have been kept in the Dibrugarh jail after they were arrested under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) from different parts of Punjab following a crackdown on the outfit early last year.

Multi-tier security arrangements were put in place at the jail after the members of the radical outfit were brought here from Punjab, officials said. The Dibrugarh jail is one of the oldest and high-security jails in the Northeast. It was constructed in 1859-60, they said. (PTI)

## PM to inaugurate Barauni

While acknowledging delays in the project's completion, initially targeted for December 2021, the official claimed that there was no significant cost escalation associated with the delays.

The 24-inch diameter pipeline has the capacity to transport around 2.5 MMSCMD of natural gas and is expected to cater to domestic households, industries, commercial units, and automobile sectors in the northeastern region. Through the CGDs, approximately 29 lakh households will receive piped natural gas in the nine geographical areas, with over 614 CNG stations planned in these areas.

Tripathi highlighted the environmental benefits of the project, stating that the transportation of natural gas through the pipeline will contribute to reducing around 7.67 lakh tons per annum of carbon dioxide emissions when operated at full capacity.

Furthermore, during the implementation of BGPL, the project generated direct and indirect employment opportunities, with about 15.8 lakh man-days created during the construction phase and around 70,000 man-days expected during the operation and maintenance phase, he added. (PTI)

## All-woman team keeps

and are a big support, especially in dealing with tourists and community interaction," Ghosh said. They are engaged in the same patrolling and jungle duties as their male counterparts, the director said.

Forest guard Rashmi Bora, a member of the all-woman camp, said everyday is a new learning experience inside the park. "It involves a lot of hard work, no doubt, but I am gaining crucial information about various wild animals and how they need to be conserved for a balanced environment," Bora said.

Bora said though she misses home at times, the "environment at the camp is good and I like being here".

A forest guard officer Bidyut Bora said of the six-members in the camp, five are forest guards and one is a forester.

"These women are a part of the park's conservation efforts, and are engaged in regular foot-patrolling duties along with drone patrolling," he said.

Besides at the entry points, they are involved in ticket checking of tourists, the official said.

Forest guard Priyanka Bharali said their daily duty begins at 7 am, and they again go for foot or elephant-back patrolling from 6 pm along the embankment areas.

"We visit particular areas in the range, which are vulnerable to various threats. We try to ensure that the animals do not move out of the protected areas to neighbouring villages to reduce human-animal conflict," she said. Another guard Deepamoni Mili said that sometimes, they have to face unforeseen circumstances and take quick decisions to resolve issues. "On several occasions, when the forest guards accompany the tourists during the safari, some animals emerge, and we have to open blank fire to chase them away and take the tourists back to safety," she said. According to forest guard Deepanjali Bora, at times, the animals come too close, while on some occasions, tourists create problems by talking loudly. "We have to be strict with the tourists so that animals do not get disturbed and no untoward incident takes place," she said. "The tourists should follow all the rules and regulations so that neither the animals nor the people are disturbed," her colleague Rashmi said.

Ghosh pointed out that the women are trained on how to deal with wildlife as well as external forces affecting the conservation process. "Once they are recruited, they undergo rigorous training in the police training centres of the state for three months," she said. There is also a forestry and wildlife training module for them, Ghosh added. (PTI)

## SC to hear on March 11

of the bond was kept recorded in two different silos. No central database was maintained. This was done to ensure that donors' anonymity would be protected," it said.

"It is submitted that donor details were kept in a sealed cover at the designated branches and all such sealed covers were deposited in the main branch of the applicant bank, which is located in Mumbai," it said.

Later, a separate petition was filed in the apex court seeking initiation of contempt proceedings against the SBI for alleged disobedience of the apex court's directives.

The contempt plea, filed by NGOs Association for Democratic Reforms and Common Cause, claimed SBI's application seeking extension of time has been deliberately filed at the last moment to ensure that details of donor and the amount of donations are not disclosed to the public before the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"It is submitted that the said application is mala fide and demonstrates a willful and deliberate disobedience & defiance of the judgement passed by the constitution bench of this court. It is further a clear attempt to undermine the authority of this court," it said.

"The petitioner herein is filing the instant petition seeking initiation of contempt proceedings against State Bank of India for willfully and deliberately disobeying the order dated February 15 passed by this court... wherein this court directed SBI to submit details of contribution made to the political parties through electoral bonds to the Election Commission of India by March 6," the contempt plea said.

It said as per clause 7 of the electoral bond scheme, information furnished by the buyer can be disclosed when demanded by a competent court.

"As per clause 12 (4) of the scheme, electoral bonds have to be encashed within fifteen days failing which the amount of bonds not encashed are to be deposited by the bank to the PM relief Fund. Thus, it is inconceivable that SBI does not have the recorded information readily available within its data base," it said.

The plea said electoral bonds are "completely traceable" which is evident from the fact that SBI maintains a secret number-based record of donors who buy bonds and the political parties they donate to.

The contempt plea said any form of anonymity in the finances of political parties goes against the essence of participatory democracy and people's right to know enshrined under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

It said availability of information about electoral bonds will give voters a chance to truly inspect, express and decide their choices. (PTI)

## Police assistance required to

two or three thousand personnel is not enough. KAAC need the help of a large security force. The state home department is not under KAAC and for that we need the help of the state government. The eviction will be done, but it cannot be carried out overnight and more time is needed.

The CEM said that many have died from movements demanding autonomous state. Many died due to militancy, 41 people died at Charchim massacre and clashes between militants, 56 crores of Karbi Anglong properties were destroyed during the agitation of Joint Action Committee for Autonomous State (JACAS), but nothing was achieved. Everything would be achieved and done with discussion and mutual sharing of views.

Ronghang also said that although he had promised to act on the eviction, some people have posted objectionable remarks on social media. Cases will be filed against them as per the IT Act. Legal remedies are also being explored as per Article 244 (A) on granting autonomous state.

He made it clear that no communal hatred will be tolerated. Citing the example of the state of Manipur, he said there should be no violence, which cause a lot of destruction.

It may be mentioned that different social organisations including Karbi Students Association have demanded that eviction should be carried out by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) from professional grazing land and village grazing land. Sarthe Phangcho had filed a complaint before the appropriate authority that several non-tribal families have settled in his land measuring about 31 bighas. Several organisations including KSA, came to his aid in his fight to free the land from encroachers.

On February 16, when KAAC executive member, Amar Sing Tisso and other executive members had come to Kheroni to talk with the agitating demonstrators on the attack on KSA members, Tisso assured them that notice would be served for eviction by March 7. However, several social organisations alleged that the notice to evict encroachers was not served as per the deadline.

### Name correction

I, Alkas Ali do hereby by solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of the below mentioned address and citizen of India by birth. That my actual name is Alkas Ali which appeared in my elector photo identity, PAN Card. But my name appeared in my Passport bearing No. L8545787 as Mohammad Alkas Ali in place of Alkas Ali. That my spouse name is Halima Khatun. That this affidavit is required to be produced before the authority concerned as a piece of document.

Sd/-  
Alkas Ali  
SO- Amir Hussain  
RO- Takimari  
PO- Chakarabasti  
PS- Dalgao (Darrang)

### LOST

I, Miss Birtika Engtipi daughter of Longbiram Engti and Debika Hansepi have lost my HSLC Admit Card bearing Roll-B22-0439 No. 0343 in Bakalia market. If anyone finds the lost document kindly contact the given address or phone number.

Miss Birtika Engtipi  
D/O- Longbiram Engti  
Add- Langtuk Terang Gaon  
P.O.- Disobai  
P.S.- Bakalia  
Phone no.-  
8812985011

**6 WORLD**

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**8 NATION**

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## Indian Army's JCO abducted from home in Manipur's Thoubal district

**IMPHAL, March 8:** A serving junior commissioned officer of the Indian Army was abducted from his home in Manipur's Thoubal district by anti-social elements on Friday, officials said.

They said the junior commissioned officer (JCO), identified as Komsam Kheda Singh, a resident of Charangpat Mamang Leikai, had been on leave when some people barged into his home at 9 am and bundled him in a vehicle and fled.

Though the cause of the abduction is not known, initial reports suggest that it was an ex-

tortion case as his family had received such threats in the past, the officials said.

On receiving information, a coordinated search operation has been launched by all security agencies to rescue the JCO.

Checking of all vehicles plying on National Highway 102 is currently in progress. The cause of the abduction is not known and further details are awaited.

This is the fourth incident since the commencement of the conflict in Manipur wherein soldiers

while on leave, on duty or their relatives have been targeted for nefarious interests by inimical elements.

In September 2023, a former Assam Regiment soldier Serto Thangthang Kom was kidnapped and killed by an unidentified armed group from the valley.

He was posted in Manipur's Leimakhong with the Defence Service Corps (DSC).

Two months later, an unidentified armed group kidnapped four people while they were travelling

in an SUV from the hill district Churachandpur to Leimakhong, and killed them.

The four were family members of an Indian Army soldier serving in Jammu and Kashmir.

A fifth passenger, the father of the soldier, who was injured, managed to escape and was later airlifted by the army to Dimapur for treatment. He was eventually shifted to the base hospital in Guwahati, Assam.

An Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) from Manipur Police was attacked in his house in

Imphal city on February 27. The attackers in this case were identified as Arambai Tenggol (AT), a radical Meitei group.

Following the incident, police commandos of Manipur laid down their arms in Imphal and other areas. The open defiance of discipline in the police ranks on the morning of the commencement of the state assembly (February 28, 2024) prompted Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh to visit the police officer in the hospital and also hold discussions with (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Modi enjoys Assam's diverse, beautiful culture

PM reaches Kaziranga on 2-day state visit  
● Himanta, Sarbananda accompany Modi



**TEZPUR/ GUWAHATI, March 8:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Assam on Friday on a two-day visit, during which he will inaugurate and lay the foundation of projects worth ₹ 18,000 crore.

Modi landed at Salonibari airport in Tezpur in the afternoon, where he was welcomed by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and others.

He then flew to Panbari in Kaziranga in a helicopter, with Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and state Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, along with Sarma and others, once again extended their welcome to the PM as he landed there.

The PM undertook the last leg of his journey of about 15 kms from the Panbari helipad to the Police Guest House near Central Kohora Range in Kaziranga National Park by road. People lined up the route to the guest house as Modi stood on the footrest of his vehicle and waved to them. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Jail official arrested over seizure of electronic gadgets from 'Waris Punjab De' inmates

**DIBRUGARH, March 8:** Dibrugarh Central Jail's superintendent Nripen Das was arrested on Friday after electronic gadgets, including a smartphone, were found with members of radical outfit 'Waris Punjab De' who are lodged here, police said.

Superintendent of police VV Rakesh Reddy said that during an investigation into the recovery of gadgets from the jail last month, it was found that there was 'collusion of the jail superintendent and staff with the NSA detainees'.

Based on mobile data, digital proofs and other such evidence, a new case was registered and the jail superintendent was arrested, he

said. Among the gadgets seized from the possession of the inmates were a smartphone along with a SIM card, a keypad phone, a TV remote with keyboard, a spy-camera pen, pen drives, a bluetooth headphone and speakers, police said.

In a post on X, director general of police, GP Singh said, "Reference NSA Detenues at Dibrugarh Jail, Assam-On receipt of information about unauthorised activities taking place in NSA cell, additional CCTV cameras were installed in the public area of NSA block." "Further, lawful action and steps are being taken to prevent recurrence of such incidents," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Women focal point of all governance initiatives: CM

**GUWAHATI, March 8:** Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said the focal point of all initiatives of his government is women.

"On #InternationalWomensDay, celebrating the women of Assam; courageous, enterprising, resilient and changemakers. We are committed to ensure that each woman in the State gets a fair opportunity to grow as the focal point of all our governance initiatives are women!" the CM said on X.

In another post, Sarma thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for reducing cooking gas cylinder prices by ₹100.

"With the earlier cut of ₹200 & latest cut of ₹100 on LPG cylinders, our mothers and sisters can now significantly save and put this money to better use. On behalf of entire #ModiParivarAssam, I sincerely thank Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji, for this bold decision," he added.

Announcing the price cut on the occasion of International Women's Day on Friday, the PM said it will significantly ease the financial burden on millions of households across the country, especially benefiting 'Nari Shakti' (women power). (PTI)

## PM to inaugurate Barauni-Guwahati national gas pipeline today

**GUWAHATI, March 8:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate the Barauni-Guwahati Natural Gas Pipeline (BGPL), a milestone project linking the Northeast to the National Gas Grid, during his visit to Assam on Saturday, a top official of the executing company, GAIL (India) Ltd said.

This pipeline will provide a dependable

source of clean energy, foster economic growth and enhance the overall well-being of the people of the region, GAIL's executive director (Projects) AK Tripathi told reporters here on Friday.

The 718km pipeline which traverses through Bihar, West Bengal and Assam has been built at a cost of ₹ 3,992 crore by GAIL, a Maharatna PSU under the Union

ministry of petroleum and natural gas, he added.

The pipeline is designed to supply natural gas to nine geographical areas covering 31 districts across these three states through authorised city gas distribution (CGD) entities along its route, Tripathi said.

Tripathi highlighted the unique chal-

lenges encountered during the project's execution, such as uneven terrains, hilly landscapes, and deep water bodies.

"The BGPL is a unique project in terms of application of technology. The topographical challenges encountered were diverse, such as uneven land, hilly terrains, muddy turf and even deep water," he said.

GAIL employed innovative techniques

including micro tunneling and horizontal directional drilling to overcome these challenges, he added.

Tripathi emphasised that comprehensive measures were taken to minimise environmental impact during the project, including mitigation strategies to preserve water quality and vegetative cover along the pipeline route. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

directional drilling to overcome these challenges, he added.

Tripathi emphasised that comprehensive measures were taken to minimise environmental impact during the project, including mitigation strategies to preserve water quality and vegetative cover along the pipeline route. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## All-woman team keeps poachers at bay in Assam's Kaziranga

**KAZIRANGA, March 8:** Dressed in olive greens with a rifle slung on their shoulders, the members of an all-woman anti-poaching team are at the frontline of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve to protect and conserve its wildlife and bio-diversity.

The 'King Cobra Camp' in the park's Eastern Range of Agorotoli has six members, and it began functioning in 2023, a senior official said. The UNESCO World Heritage Site has 54 female frontliners at present, comprising forest guards, foresters and some in the Rhino Protection Force, she said.

"Kaziranga is proud to have women frontliners, which has been made possible years after it was declared a National Park and a Tiger Reserve," the park's director, Sonali Ghosh, told PTI.

In 2023, the state forest department recruited more than 2,500 frontliners, comprising foresters and forest guards, and out of them, there were 300 young women from the northeastern state, she said.

"These women are performing extremely well," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Electoral bonds

### SC to hear on March 11 SBI's plea seeking extension of time

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** A five-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court will hear on March 11 an application filed by the State Bank of India (SBI) seeking extension of time till June 30 to disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties before the scheme was scrapped last month.

The bench, headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, will also hear a separate plea which has sought initiation of contempt action against the SBI alleging it "wilfully and deliberately" disobeyed the apex court's direction to submit details of the contributions made to political parties through electoral bonds to the Election Commission by March 6.

According to the apex court's cause list for Monday, the bench, also compris-

ing justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra will assemble at 10:30 a.m. to hear the two petitions.

In a landmark verdict delivered on February 15, a five-judge constitution bench had scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional" and ordering disclosure by the Election Commission of the donors, the amount donated by them and the recipients by March 13. Ordering closure of the scheme forthwith, the top court had directed the SBI, the authorised financial institution under the scheme, to submit by March 6 the details of the electoral bonds purchased since April 12, 2019 till date to the Election Commission which was asked to publish the informa-

tion on its official website by March 13.

On March 4, the SBI had moved the apex court seeking extension of time till June 30 to disclose the details of the electoral bonds encashed by political parties.

In its application, the SBI has contended that retrieval of information from "each silo" and the procedure of matching the information of one silo to that of the other would be a time-consuming exercise. The application said due to stringent measures undertaken to ensure that the identity of the donors was kept anonymous, "decoding" the electoral bonds and matching the donors to the donations made would be a complex process. "It submitted that the data related to the issuance of the bond and the data related to the redemption (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## KAAC to evict illegal encroachers from professional grazing land, village grazing land

### Police assistance required to conduct eviction in Karbi Anglong: CEM Ronghang

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, March 8:** Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang clarified on the position of the autonomous council on carrying out the eviction from professional grazing land and village grazing land.

In a press conference held at Karbi Youth Festival Silver Jubilee Auditorium in Taralango, the CEM said, "Some people held a dharna before KAAC demanding eviction from professional grazing land and village grazing land from the land of Sarthe Phangcho. These people got mixed them up."

"KAAC executive member for land and revenue, Amar





Sing Tisso has promised that the eviction would be done on March 7 from the land of Sarthe Phangcho. We have already initiated the process for eviction, but we need the support of the police, which is not in our hand. We have already written to the appropriate au-

thority. However, they have said that as the Lok Sabha election is fast approaching they cannot afford to spare any police force for the eviction," Ronghang said.

He further said, "We have taken the views of intellectuals, the Karbi Students Associ-

ation and all concerned. I have clearly said that there is a standing Supreme Court order according to which the eviction will be carried out. KAAC authority has already given the order. It is not like the previous evictions that were carried out at Langkaijan and Dudu Colony. There were fewer households there."

The CEM said that at the time of eviction in Dudu Colony the then secretary Mukul Kathar was pelted with stones and the officer-in-charge of Khatkhati Police Station was also injured on the head, which required stitches. All these happened when there were 300 houses in the vicinity. The present case involves more than 10,000 houses. A force of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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(NHM/D/2023-24/2016)

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Tomorrow is only found in the calendar of fools.  
- Og Mandino

## Protecting Farmers' Livelihoods

India's agricultural sector stands at a crossroads, grappling with the repercussions of its membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) for nearly three decades. The promises of increased market access and enhanced income for farmers have remained largely unfulfilled, leaving millions in distress. The recent protests by farmers, demanding India's withdrawal from the WTO, underscore the urgent need for reform. The prevailing situation is dire, as exemplified by the plight of small farmers in Punjab receiving inadequate compensation for their produce while facing stiff competition from imported fruits like oranges and apples flooding the market from distant shores. The failure of WTO mechanisms, particularly in addressing quantitative restrictions, has exacerbated India's agricultural woes. The flood of heavily subsidized agricultural products from Western nations has decimated local markets and pushed small farmers to the brink of bankruptcy. Despite assurances of fair trade, the reality is starkly different, with multinational corporations reaping the benefits at the expense of vulnerable farmers. The influx of foreign produce, coupled with the entry of retail giants like Amazon and Walmart, has further marginalized local producers and traders.

Central to the issue is the WTO's flawed approach to agricultural subsidies, which disproportionately favors wealthy nations. While developed countries enjoy lenient subsidy regulations hidden behind obscure clauses, developing nations like India face stringent caps and constant pressure to roll back support for farmers. The arbitrary 10 percent cap on procurement for the Public Distribution System (PDS) undermines India's ability to ensure food security for its population. Moreover, the dominance of corporate agribusiness cartels, both global and domestic, threatens to erode food sovereignty and exacerbate food insecurity. The concentration of power in the hands of a few corporations, such as Cargill and ADM, raises concerns about market manipulation and artificial shortages, further jeopardizing the livelihoods of farmers. It is imperative for India to reassess its approach to agricultural trade policies and prioritize the welfare of its farmers. Legal guarantees for Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) and the expansion of the PDS are indispensable measures to safeguard the interests of small farmers and ensure food security for all citizens. Additionally, India must advocate for reforms within the WTO to address the imbalance in subsidy regulations and protect the autonomy of developing nations in managing their agricultural economies.

Delinking Quantitative Restrictions (QRs) from the purview of the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) is a crucial step towards securing domestic subsidy support and preserving MSPs. By mobilizing developing nations to collectively challenge the status quo within the WTO, India can assert its sovereignty and protect its farmers from unfair trade practices. The time for action is now. The government must heed the voices of the agitating farmers and take decisive steps to reform agricultural trade policies in alignment with the interests of the farming community. Failure to do so risks further exacerbating the already precarious situation faced by millions of farmers across the country. India's agricultural sector is in urgent need of comprehensive reform to address the systemic challenges posed by its membership in the WTO. By prioritizing the welfare of farmers and advocating for equitable trade policies, India can secure a sustainable future for its agricultural sector and ensure food security for generations to come.

## Knowing the causes behind Sandeshkhali outrage



By: Er. Rajesh Pathak

If somebody asks you what 'Nabi-Diwas' is, perhaps very few of you could answer it. And the people of West Bengal too were no exception to this once. They didn't know that till few years back. And they knew it only when TMC came to power. And Muslim community began to celebrate a festival, "Eid-Milad Un Nabi" as 'Nabi-Diwas' in memory of Prophet Mohammad born that day. And this only is now celebrated at the level of government administration in the libraries of school-colleges all across state.

Just opposite to it, such elements have now begun to swell in numbers who nurse grudge against 'Saraswati-pooja' so far organised in educational institutions across the state. In the schools of Hawrah district the festival of Saraswati-pooja had been performed for the last 65 years. But to appease communal sentiments of a section of people the Mamta-government has put ban on it.

Moreover when the students descended on the street against the action of the administration, police pounded upon them with their batons and all that. Obviously the thing like Sandeshkhalee incident sparked not into such a heart rending one without cause.

Take a look at the series of the incidents to understand more about why the situation has come to this pass. Kanglapahadi is such a village of Virbhoomi district where the number of houses of Hindus are 300; and that of Muslims only 25. Ban is imposed in this village on observing Durga-pooja, because Muslims want so!

Few years back Muslim families lodged a written complaint to the local administration that Durga-pooja comes under idol-worshipping, which hurts their religious sentiments hence ban should be imposed on it. Under the pressure of TMC leaders the administration soon swung into the action and fulfilled the wishes of fanatics.

This also needs to be remembered that in previous Vidhansabha election Mamat Benarji for invited Bangladesh actors and actresses, most prominent among them being Firdosh- the superstar of the country. This was done to win the votes of those having the sympathy with the infiltrators from Bangladesh. Notably the same Bangladesh where once there were 25% Hindus; and now they have got to be reduced as low as 8%. Incidents of vandalizing during Hindu festivals have now got to be so common there that the newspapers have almost stopped giving them the space.

More so few months back a news flashed from Bangladesh that the principal of a college named Swapna Vishwas had been garlanded with shoes and made to stroll in the city! His crime was that a student named Rahul Roy of his college dared to post the photograph of Nupur Sharma in social media.

Latest of all being the incident occurred in wake of last Cricket world cup when Taslima Nasreen had to tweet: 'The youths of Bangladesh are joyously celebrating the defeat of India in the hands of Australia. Whereas it is India that brought freedom to them. And upon whom they are much depended for their foods, entertainment and health.'

Besides it also aimed at preventing the shift of the Niti's Mahadalit support base to BJP. It is perceived in the political circle that in the existing scenario, the Mahadalits may rally behind Modi. Though Lalu and Tejashwi are sure of Mahadalits not going over to BJP, they do not intend to take any chance. The development which has conjured them to reach out to the Dalits and Mahadalits, is absence of both prominent Dalit faces, Chirag Paswan, the self-proclaimed Hanuman of Modi and Jitan Ram Manjhi, at both the public meetings of Modi, one held in Begusarai and another at Aurangabad. Both are known to be opponents of Niti's. It is believed that both of the leaders would prefer to join INDIA bloc. Tejashwi taking vow from his partymen at the first ever public rally of the INDIA bloc at Patna Gandhi Maidan on Sunday stirred the Dalits and proletariat to assert their rights and sent an indestructible message across the country that the 2024 Lok Sabha election symbolises the battle between the poor and the rich with the poor struggling for equal opportunity and share of power.

It was a coincidence that while the celebs and glitterati of the country were busy enjoying the marriage of the son of Mukesh Ambani in Gujarat, Rahul Gandhi was telling the Dalits and poor of Bihar at the rally that Narendra Modi government has been "working for only two-three super-rich people and neglecting Dalits and backward classes who comprise 73 per cent of the population".

Apparently the leaders of INDIA bloc sounded the bugle for the ensuing Lok Sabha election, but in reality it asked the poor, dalit and proletariat to use the election as an device for extracting their share which Modi government has denied them. Though the left leaders, Sitaram Yechury (CPM), D Raja (CPI) and Dipankar Bhattacharya (CPIM-ML) called upon the poor and dalit to put their might in the epic battle, RJD chief Lalu Yadav and his son, Tejashwi Yadav moved a step forward and asked other people, especially the Yadavs, the major constituent of the OBC to reach out to the Dalits and proletariat and protect them and their interest. Tejashwi even sought a vow from the participants by raising their both hands.

Ostensibly it has a wider implication. Only a day earlier Narendra Modi addressing a rally at Aurangabad in Bihar had alleged that the Congress-RJD combine in Bihar had used the deprived sections as a "shield, to justify" corruption and dynastic politics. Yet another factor which prompted Lalu and Tejashwi has been the BJP's and RSS's accusations that Yadavs, a prominent constituent of the OBC have been perpetrating torture on the dalits and also exploiting them.

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# Trump's November vulnerabilities come to the fore after his Tuesday sweep

Third day after Super Tuesday and Donald Trump is on everybody's mind. His Republican Party rival Nikki Haley, after the drubbing she got, is full of unsolicited advice for the man who beat her in every state but two in the ongoing Republican Party primaries. And Trump's detractors are talking of how Trump "will have to make a choice" on what to do with Nikki Haley's supporters, court them or leave them to their defeated devices?

Nikki isn't going to help any. Nikki made that clear. Nikki wants the good of the conservative movement and Nikki will not be the reason for the Republican Party's defeat in November, but Trump is not her problem. If Trump has to do well, he'll have to figure out how? Nikki Haley will not endorse Trump even if the whole Republican shengang does it with enthusiasm.

This, after Super Tuesday established Trump's dominance in the party. Strange thing is, Donald Trump isn't sweating, but other people are. Nikki Haley and President Joe Biden are worried sick Nikki's voters will not vote for Trump in the general election. The "Republicans in name

only", the ones they call 'RINO', are also not sure Trump stands a chance and prominent media dashboards, like the Washington Post and NYT, believe "Trump can't win".

There are other media like 'The Hill' and New York Times. There is also the CNN, and the MSNBC, dripping concern for Trump's general election showing. These concerned quarters are picking up exit polls results to highlight Trump campaign weaknesses. The general beef is Haley supporters are waiting to dump Trump. This despite Haley voters in states such as New Hampshire, Virginia and North Carolina saying they find the idea of voting Trump in November 'appealing'.

The 'RINO' and Haley haven't changed outlook. Instead, they assert that Trump will 'struggle to unify Republicans' and that Trump will not be able to 'defeat Biden in the Electoral College'. Important thing is, Nikki Haley is now a weapon in the hands of 'No Trumpers', which includes Democrats and so-called "moderate Republicans" who had no intention to endorse Donald

Trump, ever.

Haley suspended her run for presidency but said Donald Trump will have to 'earn the votes' of those who did not support him. Haley's hubris says she isn't fading into the sunset. Haley's 'voice' will continue to resonate with those who plan to be at the Republican convention where Donald Trump will be declared the Republican Party's official presidential candidate.

So there's no Trump olive branch and the Trump accusation is Haley didn't have groundswell Republican support; that loads of Democrats switched parties "for

the duration of the primaries" to vote for Haley. Also that Nikki Haley is "establishment

candidate" for whom her dollar donors made sure she remained rolling in cash. The entire Haley-Biden-Dollar Donors cabal is now warning Trump that it'll be uphill from here and that, at the end of the road, the Biden campaign will rip Trump's to tatters. Fact is, so long it lasted, Haley's support looked uncannily Democrat-driven. It is entirely possible that Trump will not ex-

tend an outreach to Nikki Haley supporters till it is too late, by when the majority of Haley voters would have become "Trump voters" as at the end of the day, no Republican would want a second Joe Biden term.

Chances are the former President will get "swaths of moderate Republicans" to vote for him. The only doubters will be the RINO, who are everywhere, ever willing to doling out advice and making unnecessary interventions on behalf of the Republican Party. "The primaries told us that both Biden and Trump have serious vulnerabilities within their respective parties that weaken them in November," said one RINO, a former Republican Party spokesperson, who believes "Trump will have the steeper climb".

Trump allegedly told moderate Republicans to "pound the sand" and Haley was never a serious threat. The media spread the heat that Haley was a "surer bet" to beat Biden in November and this canard was given respectability by a dozen "closely fought" opinion polls with Haley's best showings in New Hampshire and South Carolina, two states which found Haley wanting. The belief

is independents who voted for Haley will vote Biden in November. Another thing bothering Trump's newfound concerned friends are the exit polls full of warning signs for Trump.

Different media outlets have singled out the warning signs. One pointed out that 31 percent of Virginia voters and 34 percent North Carolina voters will not vote for Trump come November. Another said that exit polls showed that Haley had widespread support among self-identified moderate voters who will not vote for Trump in November. The message being dog-whistled is Haley was the option and now there is only a flawed Trump.

Trump won a majority of women votes but Haley voters haven't departed from the viewpoint that Trump will not be fit for "President" once he is convicted on any of the 91 felony charges he is facing. There is a sneaking belief that Haley wouldn't endorse Trump not because she hates Trump's guts but because she hates Trump might become a convicted felon any day before November 5 and then, who for the Republican presidential candidacy, if not Nikki Haley? (IPA Service)

## Massive rally of INDIA bloc in Patna sent ominous signals to NDA

By: Arun Srivastava

It was a rally with a difference. More than being an electoral rally where the leaders usually seek votes, the first ever public rally of the INDIA bloc at Patna Gandhi Maidan on Sunday stirred the Dalits and proletariat to assert their rights and sent an indestructible message across the country that the 2024 Lok Sabha election symbolises the battle between the poor and the rich with the poor struggling for equal opportunity and share of power.

It was a coincidence that while the celebs and glitterati of the country were busy enjoying the marriage of the son of Mukesh Ambani in Gujarat, Rahul Gandhi was telling the Dalits and poor of Bihar at the rally that Narendra Modi government has been "working for only two-three super-rich people and neglecting Dalits and backward classes who comprise 73 per cent of the population".

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Reminiscing his days of early nineties, Lalu reminded the audience, especially made aware the younger generation of the deep caste inequities that prevailed from the village well to the roads during those years. He said; "We gave everyone izzat". We invoked the Mandal commission and how backward castes captured power. He said it is thanks to the commission that all poor, backward castes and Dalits are standing at the doors of power."

It is worth mentioning that the CPI(ML) had launched class struggle in late sixties and seventies in rural Bihar, widely called as "Bhojpur Kisan movement", with the thrust on preserving and protecting the "izzat" (prestige) of the dalits and proletariat. A number of massacres had taken place during seventies and eighties in which hundreds of dalits were killed.

On this occasion the general secretary of the CPI(ML) Dipankar Bhattacharya recited the famous poem of Ram Dhari Dinkar, which was the key inspirational song of JP movement. He said that the rally would rewrite the history after 50 years. It was quite revealing to listen Dipankar mentioning the names of prominent Naxalite leaders who were killed by the mercenaries of the feudal lords.

One important feature of the rally which deserves mention is the massive participation of the youths. Carrying red flags, they responded enthusiastically to the calls of the leaders to bring about a change in the politics and remove Modi.

It was expected that the INDIA bloc would announce the seats allocated to the constituents coinciding with the rally. But it has been delayed for a couple of days. Leaders of Bihar INDIA bloc are hopeful of some new parties and leaders joining the bloc. In that situation they would have to adjust them. The earnestness is visible in the leaders of constituents not in haste to force for an early decision. (IPA Service)

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## The Raisina Dialogue: India's global influence through Think Tanks and cultural diplomacy

By: Dipak Kurmi

In the realm of policymaking and its implementation, think tanks play a crucial role in India. While policies are articulated by the Prime Minister and government officials, the intellectual prowess of these institutions significantly shapes India's cultural diplomacy landscape. Their influence on foreign policy is gaining recognition, as the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in India actively utilizes their expertise to advance the country's interests on the global stage. An exemplary instance of this collaborative synergy is the annual Raisina Dialogue, a prestigious forum jointly organized by the MEA and the Observer Research Foundation (ORF). This event serves as a prominent platform where global leaders converge to address pressing issues in the international arena. The recent edition of the Raisina Dialogue, with the participation of around 2500 individuals from 115 countries, focused on the theme 'Chaturanga: Conflict, Contest, Cooperate, Create.' It provided a vital space for discussions on the ever-evolving dynamics of the global landscape.

A notable highlight of the dialogue was External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's advocacy for reforms in the United Nations and Security Council. His call underscored India's stance on advocating for a global governance system that aligns with the contemporary world order, emphasizing inclusivity to accommodate the emergence of new global powers.

The deliberations during the Raisina Dialogue extensively explored the intricate geopolitical dynamics related to Russia. India put forth a perspective advocating for a nuanced approach, emphasizing the importance of providing Russia with diverse options beyond a close alignment with China. In the midst of contrasting views from Western nations, this stance reflects India's strategic positioning as a 'middle power,' showcasing its ability to navigate amidst competing global interests. Furthermore, the discussions also touched upon topics such as cultural rebalancing and the challenge to biased narratives, highlighting India's commitment to fostering fair representation in global diplomacy and challenging established norms.

The importance of the Raisina Dialogue extends beyond its distinguished participants, finding significance in its capacity to spark discussions that go beyond conventional diplomatic avenues. By orchestrating multilateral conferences and guided dialogues, entities like the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) fulfill a vital role in uniting stakeholders from similarly aligned states to craft solutions for shared challenges. The Raisina Dialogue serves as a platform that not only highlights India's influential role in shaping the future global order but also underscores its assertiveness on the global stage.

The Raisina Dialogue, often likened to Singapore's Shangri-La Dialogue, draws in prominent participants spanning diverse fields such as politics, defense, diplomacy, academia, and journalism. Over the years, it has hosted distinguished figures, including former Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Held in New Delhi this year, the event featured panels delving into crucial topics, notably discussions on the Indo-Pacific security framework, exemplifying India's dedication to regional stability and collaboration. At the Raisina Dialogue, think tanks contribute insights into how India's cultural diplomacy can nurture mutual understanding and respect among nations. Their recommendations encompass leveraging cultural heritage, soft power assets, and digital platforms to bolster India's global influence.

Fundamentally, the Raisina Dialogue stands as proof of the escalating significance of think tanks in influencing international relations and cultural diplomacy. Acting as an informal arena for the exchange of ideas among states, these dialogues actively promote discussions and collaboration on a broad spectrum of issues, spanning security and defense to trade and climate change.

Additionally, think tanks boast a rich history of shaping foreign policy and diplomacy, tracing their influence back to the Cold War era. Noteworthy initiatives such as the Dartmouth Conference and the Neerama Dialogue played pivotal roles in fostering intellectual dialogues between adversarial parties, ultimately contributing to confidence-building measures and cooperation on pressing issues. In a parallel vein, the Raisina Dialogue has evolved into a crucial platform for India, allowing the nation to assert its role in the Indo-Pacific region and actively engage with stakeholders in shaping a novel security framework.

Leading think tanks such as the Observer Research Foundation, India Foundation, and Vivekananda International Foundation play a pivotal role in crafting policies that showcase India's cultural heritage and values on the global platform. Through extensive research, analysis, and strategic recommendations, these institutions actively foster dialogue and collaboration between India and other nations. The prominence of Indian think tanks in the realm of cultural diplomacy has witnessed a significant upswing in recent years. Institutions like India Foundation and Vivekananda International Foundation have taken proactive strides, offering innovative solutions and policy frameworks for cultural exchange programs, educational initiatives, and fostering people-to-people connections.

In addition, think tanks forge partnerships with universities and academic institutions to enhance cultural bonds through educational exchanges, collaborative research ventures, and language programs. Their engagement spans a broad spectrum, involving diverse stakeholders such as civil society, diaspora communities, and international organizations. Through these collaborations, think tanks contribute to amplifying India's cultural narrative and fostering meaningful intercultural dialogues. Their research and advocacy endeavors actively contribute to molding a dynamic and inclusive cultural diplomacy agenda for India.

Beyond promoting cross-cultural understanding, these efforts are instrumental in debunking cultural stereotypes associated with India in Western perceptions. By accentuating India's abundant diversity and embracing a pluralistic ethos, they work to dispel misconceptions and cultivate a more nuanced appreciation of Indian culture and society. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewsive@gmail.com)

## Assam: As cracks emerge in INDIA Bloc, can it overcome the lack of cohesion?



By: Sagarnel Sinha

To fight against the juggernaut Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Opposition parties in the Northeastern state of Assam decided to form a common platform, the United Opposition Forum (UOF) – even before the formation of the Opposition-led Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) at the Centre. As Congress remains the largest Opposition party in the state, it is the natural big partner in the bloc with its State unit President Bhupen Borah functioning as the chairman of the bloc.

Despite initial challenges, UOF was strengthened after the two regional parties – Assam Jatiya Parishad by Lurinjyoti Gogoi and Rajiv Dal by Akhil Gogoi, who is also a legislator from the Shivsagar constituency – joined the bloc. Their joining was significant because the two parties didn't join the Congress-led Grand Alliance in the last State Assembly polls held in 2021 and divided the anti-BJP votes in some seats of Upper Assam.

### Factionalism hurting Congress's prospects

However, everything isn't well within the Opposition bloc. This is mainly due to the ongoing internal factionalism within the grand old party and an exodus of party leaders. The party is divided into many factions.

Recently, two Congress MLAs announced support for the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led BJP government. Of them, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha who has also resigned from the post of party working president, is a senior Congress leader from the Barak Valley. He has been unhappy with the state leadership, particularly with Borah, and had even earlier threatened to leave the party after his close aide was removed from the party's Cachar district president last year.

In addition to this factionalism, the ambition of former chief minister Tarun Gogoi's son Gaurav Gogoi, current Lok Sabha MP from the Kaliabor seat, is adding fuel to the fire.

### Who will compensate GN Saibaba and Pandu Narote? And how?

He wants to contest from the "safe" Nagaon seat, currently held by the party's Pradyot Bordoloi. Gogoi's Kaliabor seat has been changed to Kaziranga with a reduced number of Muslim voters. As a result, he is unwilling to contest this seat. The party may witness another big exit if Bordoloi is denied a ticket from his constituency. Senior party leaders searching for "safe seats" show that defeating the BJP, for now, seems to be the least priority for them. They are more eager to ensure their political survival. This attitude doesn't send a good message to the voters.

### AAP announces to contest from 3 seats

Taking advantage of the crisis within the Congress, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in February announced the candidates for three Lok Sabha constituencies – Guwahati, Sonitpur, and Dibrugarh.

In Guwahati, the party nominated its State President Bhoben Choudhury as the candidate. Earlier there were reports that Congress was willing to cede a seat for the party, most probably the one in Guwahati. The party's announcement came at a time when the Opposition bloc was yet to reach a consensus to field a single candidate against the BJP-led NDA.

In the Northeastern state, AAP doesn't have a presence in all the regions. Its presence is limited to some pockets of urban areas but despite this, the party believes that it can give a good fight against the BJP. The party's confidence is rooted in its electoral victories in some urban pockets of the state. In the Tinsukia Municipal Board election of 2022, AAP emerged as an Opposition party by winning a seat while the Congress drew a blank. It also secured a seat in the North Lakhimpur Municipal Board elections. Later, in the same year, AAP won a seat in the much prestigious Guwahati Municipal Corporation and polled 10.69%. The Congress failed to win a seat and registered 13.71% votes – just 3% more than the AAP.

### AAP trying to gain from a weakened Congress

After many difficulties, AAP and Congress sealed alliance deals in Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana and Goa officially. One can understand why the AAP-Congress didn't agree to the alliance in Punjab where the former is the ruling party and the latter is the main Opposition party – and the BJP remains a negligible force. But this deal isn't yet extended to Assam, despite the fact that the AAP isn't a stronger force. It doesn't have its own strength to win a single Lok Sabha seat. But it is still adamant and has even refuted those reports that claimed that it would withdraw candidates from two seats.

It, however, still believes that the INDIA bloc would support it in the three seats and also stated that it would support the bloc in other seats.

But why is the AAP so adamant to contest in 3 seats? Is this a part of pressure politics from AAP on Congress? Yes. The party's strategy doesn't seem to be the upcoming Lok Sabha polls – its eyes seem to be set on the 2026 state elections. The party believes that Congress has been weakening in the state and this is likely to continue even after the Lok Sabha polls. This is the reason that AAP has been eager to contest more than one Lok Sabha seat in the state in order to create a space for itself in the near future.

### Lack of cohesion likely to hurt INDIA Bloc

AAP's stand to contest the three seats is likely to create problems for the unity of the INDIA bloc. The Dibrugarh seat is eyed by the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP), a regional party formed ahead of the last Assembly Polls and led by Lurinjyoti Gogoi.

In comparison to AAP, the party has some presence in Upper Assam and other areas dominated by the Assamese Hindus. According to reports, the Congress too is ready to cede the Dibrugarh seat to the AJP but now with AAP's refusal to withdraw, the situation remains complicated for the INDIA bloc.

On the other hand, CPI(M) too is bargaining hard for the Barpeta Lok Sabha constituency, having an incumbent Congress MP. The Left party, which still has a few pockets of influence, has even threatened to contest separately in this constituency if the grand old party doesn't allot it this seat. Apart from this, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress, which is also a part of the Opposition bloc in the state, is also pushing to contest at least two seats. TMC wants to contest at least a seat from the Bengali Barak Valley – either Silchar seat, now a Scheduled Castes seat, or Karimganj seat, a Muslim-dominated seat which till 2019 was a reserved seat for the Scheduled Castes.

If reports are to be believed, TMC's Rajya Sabha MP Sushmita Dev, a former Congress Lok Sabha MP from Silchar, is even arguing in favour of the party – despite having minimal presence in some pockets of the state – to contest all the seats in the state. But the alliance in the state depends upon how much TMC agrees to the demand of the Congress in West Bengal. Although the Opposition bloc claims that its major task is to defeat the BJP-led NDA, the political actions of some of the constituents of the bloc and leaders within the Congress don't seem to be completely supporting the cause. Voters prefer cohesion among the constituents and leaders within the alliance.

In the case of the INDIA bloc in the state, it seems that the priority of many Congress leaders as well as some constituents of the bloc is less about putting a strong fight against BJP – which already has declared its candidates for 11 seats and has also smoothly shared the rest 3 seats with its allies Assam Gana Parishad and United Peoples Party Liberal – in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls but more about ensuring their political survival amid BJP's dominance keeping in mind the 2026 State elections. (Courtesy: The Quint)

## What a Taiwan minister's racial comments about Indian workers say about challenges in both nations

By: Abhik Deb

On Monday, the Taiwan foreign ministry issued an apology for their labour minister's claim on February 29 that as a consequence of an agreement signed by New Delhi and Taipei to facilitate employment for Indians in the island-nation, jobs would go to residents of India's northeastern states. This, Labour Minister Hsu Ming-chun said on February 29, was due to the Christian faith of people from this Indian region and their similarities with the Taiwanese in skin colour and dietary habits.

Even as the apology from the Taiwan government stated that Indians will be recruited "regardless of their ethnic background", the minister's views reveal anxieties along racial lines that have been expressed previously too. Experts in Taiwan also voiced concern about the conditions Indian labourers would have to work in, pointing out that migrant workers from other countries are often treated unfairly.

### Anti-Indian racism

The possibility of Indians being recruited in Taiwan surfaced in November when Bloomberg reported that one lakh job seekers could be sent to the East Asian country. The report sparked outrage, with many Taiwanese social media users arguing that allowing Indians in Taiwan would result in an increase in crime rates and women's safety would be compromised. The Taiwan government intervened, characterising the remarks as racist. It said this was part of China's "cognitive warfare" aimed at hampering Taipei's relations with New Delhi.

In December, the Taiwanese labour ministry said that the reports about one lakh Indians being recruited was "false information" and that the labour mobility agreement with India was in the "evaluation and consultation stage".

Brian Hioe, editor of the Taipei-based online magazine New Bloom told Scroll that the matter was an issue even during the presidential elections in January, as the Opposition party, the Kuomintang, opposed the entry of Indian workers.

After the elections, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's candidate Lai Chiang-te became president of Taiwan, but his party did not win a clear majority.

Sana Hashmi, a research fellow at the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation in Taipei City, said that this could have been one reason behind the labour minister's recent comments, as the agreement with India needs to be ratified by the legislature.

"The minister probably said it to pacify Opposition parties to win their support and ease the concerns of people in Taiwan about allowing Indians in the country," Hashmi said. Hashmi said Taiwanese people are anxious about Indian blue-collar workers. "There is no animosity towards Indian scientists and engineers who work in the semiconductor industry in Taiwan but when it comes to blue-collar workers, people in Taiwan think that they are uneducated and do not belong to good backgrounds," she said.

The agreement signed between India and Taiwan on February 16 has not been made public, but a statement by Taipei's labour ministry mentions the "region of origin" of Indian workers as one of the "implementation details" that will be worked out in meetings with New Delhi.

When asked if "region of origin" was what the labour minister alluded to in her statement about recruiting workers from the North East, a spokesperson at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center, the representative office of Taiwan in India, told Scroll that the text of the statement was "figurative" in nature.

"All the details like how many workers will be recruited, in what industries and other requirements will be finalised after discussion with the Indian side," he said.

### Migrant workers in Taiwan

In the labour ministry's statement on the agreement with India, Taiwan said that its demand for migrant workers was rising due to its ageing population and low birth rates. In January, Taiwan had 7,56,419 migrant workers, an increase of more than 37% since 2014. In June, for several sectors, the Taiwanese government increased the quota of migrant workers that firms are allowed to hire. Currently, workers are hired from four countries – Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Activist Jing Ru Wu, who works with Taipei-based non-government organisation Taiwan International Workers' Association, told Scroll that most migrant workers entering the country have to pay a placement fee to private brokers who conduct hiring on behalf of companies. "The fee depends on the industry and the hiring agency but it could go up to \$6,000 [Rs 5 lakh]," she said.

Wu added that the workers are typically hired on three-year contracts and are not allowed to change their employer during that period. Besides, the workers pay a monthly service fee of at least 1,500 New Taiwanese dollars (nearly ₹ 4,000) to brokers who facilitate their hiring. The average monthly salary of migrant workers in Taiwan is about 32,000 New Taiwanese dollars (nearly ₹ 84,000).

Hioe of the New Bloom agreed that the broker system of hiring workers is exploitative. It has existed for several years even though Taiwan has government-to-government agreements with Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and

Vietnam. "The Indonesian government has been pushing to do away with the broker system but it has not happened yet," he said.

Hioe also highlighted the fact that the migrant workers take up "3D jobs" that are dirty, dangerous, and demeaning.

In Taiwan, so-called 3D jobs is not just a colloquial term but an official category of work for migrant workers. "In this category, there is factory work which is quite dangerous in some cases, or the work on distant sea fishing vessels where you do not return to Taiwan for years at a stretch," Hioe said.

On being asked if Indians will have to pay to work in Taiwan, the spokesperson at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center said that the government does not charge a brokerage fee. However, companies to which firms might outsource the process of hiring could charge money, he added.

The prospect of Indians having to pay brokerage fees to go to Taiwan cannot be ruled out as the spokesperson said that the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed with India is "pretty much the same" as those with the other four nations supplying migrant workers to the country.

Gautam Mody, the general secretary of Delhi-based labour rights body New Trade Union Initiative said that fears about worker rights in Taiwan are not an exception as there have been instances of Indian workers facing hardships in Israel and Jordan too.

"This shows that the Indian government is sending away workers as it is not able to provide quality employment" at home, Mody said. "If even government-to-government agreements are not able to ensure safeguards for Indian workers, it shows that the government simply doesn't care." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

## Why Imran Khan's resurrection does not promise political maturity in Pakistan

By: Pervez Hoodbhoy

Liberal commentators, once maligned by Imran Khan as "liberal scum" and "bloody liberals", have nevertheless been fair-minded and have rightly criticised the Feb 8 elections as heavily managed.

They are part of a growing chorus alleging unfair exclusion of Khan and his PTI. True enough, but so what? Wasn't that heavy management equally evident in the 2018 elections when Khan rode to power on the coattails of those who later dumped him?

Of course, two wrongs cannot make a right. However, thoughtful people should be troubled by much else, not just the travails of some politician or his party. Most particularly, they should be appalled that, instead of strengthening democracy, Feb 8 was simply a power grab and a horse race followed by horse trade.

When candidates appeared on TV their language was crude, aggressive, and ad hominem. None spoke of plans for improving their community or country – and means of implementation. Past experience shows that many who become parliamentarians seek only to exponentially increase their wealth and power.

In the election run-up, the PML-N, PTI, PPP and other rivals behaved as wolf packs, not political parties. Lacking defined agendas, they reluctantly trotted out half-baked election

manifestos hurriedly slapped together just days earlier. Without details or implementation schemes, these manifestos are worthless.

Personality contests, sectarian and tribal affiliations, and bribes were all that mattered. No party offered insight into preventing the impending apocalypse of an imploding economy, exploding population, and resentments in Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan.

How is one to deal with desperate youth with university degrees but no skills? Seething religious fanaticism intertwined with misogyny? Disappearing trust in key institutions including the judiciary, bureaucracy, police and army?

Inadvertently Feb 8 transformed PTI's jailed leader into Pakistan's most popular politician. The iddāt case: what a joke! Such clumsy persecution tactics earned Khan widespread sympathy. In 2018, the establishment worked hard to make him a hero; this time it did that by vilifying him.

The future: we have recently seen convicted felons and politicians whitewashed and cleared. Given this precedent one knows Khan's release will come within months or years. He will be declared innocent of crimes that he did not commit but also of those that he did. When he claws his way back to the top, a dark age will descend on Pakistan. Several signs point to this dismal outcome.

Let us recall the reign of Emperor Khan from August 2018 to April 2022. Surrounded by bootlickers – many of whom deserted him after May 9, 2023 – Khan filled key positions with sycophants. This included appointing a nincompoop as Punjab's chief minister, making a rank opportunist his closest confidante, choosing a crony general to head the ISI, and dismissing the HEC chairman on flimsy grounds.

While Khan ruled, religiously inspired terrorists felt strongly emboldened. Accommodating TTP fighters who had fled to Afghanistan, he invited them back to resettle in North Waziristan. A decade earlier, directly after the 2013 suicide attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar, he had requested TTP to open offices inside Pakistan for holding peace talks.

A year later TTP massacred 141 children and teachers inside the Army Public School in Peshawar. Khan was booed by grieving parents as he tried to visit. "U-turn Khan" earned his unflattering nickname after breaking approximately 130 promises in less than four years. As just one example, weeks after publicly declaring Pakistan would never seek an IMF loan, Khan sent his financial managers to Washington to ask for one. When reminded he blustered that reneging on earlier promises is a "hallmark of great leadership". For those who follow a Pied Piper through narrow twisted streets this may not matter but people who value

consistency and truth were unconvinced. Khan's tenure saw an attempt at further tightening of the draconian Peca law (now being used to suppress PTI itself), a decrease in Pakistan's ranking on the World Press Freedom Index, and a worsening of Pakistan's ranking on Transparency International's corruption perception index. As the Tashkhana and Al Qadir cases show, Clean was no cleaner than the chor politicians he viciously attacked for having pocketed public monies.

The negative impact of the SNC (Single National Curriculum) is possibly Khan's greatest disservice to Pakistan. For the first time public and private schools – all except those for the super-elite – were yoked to the madrasah curriculum. The classless education he promised remains a mirage but education standards plummeted. The upcoming generation is being stuffed with religious materials but knows no skills.

In the minds of his blinded followers, as well as those who see the United States as the incarnation of evil, Khan's ouster was an American conspiracy. At a public rally in March 2022, he waved a 'secret' document that supposedly was iron-clad proof of America calling for his eviction. But weeks later, he absolved America of blame while broadening the net of conspirators to include 'Super-King' Bajwa (whose tenure had been extended), Nawaz Sharif, Asif Zardari, and Maulana Fazlur

Rehman.

Referring to the PTI's electoral victory Mani Shankar Aiyar, a well-known political commentator from India known for Pakistan-friendly views, excitedly declared: "February 8, 2024, will be chalked up as the historic day on which the people of Pakistan defeated their army." Given that the establishment indeed sought to vanquish Khan, is this really true?

At a superficial level, yes. Many PTI supporters did vote against the generals. Their anti-army sentiment surfaced on May 9 when they attacked and burned military facilities. On the other hand, Khan has never expressed dismay at the army's business, commercial, and real-estate interests nor opposed appointments of retired army officers to top administrative positions.

He and the army are, to quote him, "on the same page". His differences remain personal – some generals are for him, others against. Only animals, he famously declared, can be neutral.

An election fulfils its purpose when it helps establish a representative government; enhances ability to deal with issues such as employment and allocation of resources; and brings forth individuals committed to the rule of law, decency and public service.

Imran Khan's re-emergence stands in stark contrast to these ideals, suggesting political maturity remains a distant goal for Pakistan. (Courtesy: The Wire)

## Is turbulent the new normal in Sino-Indian relations?

By: Harsh V. Pant & Kalpit A Mankikar

At the 2024 iteration of Raisina Dialogue, Asia's premier conference on geopolitics, China featured prominently in the discussions, given that there has been a tense standoff at the border between the Indian and Chinese armies for nearly four years. The clashes between the two armies in Galwan in 2020, which resulted in fatalities of on both sides, is an important turning point in the relations between the two Asian powers. Foreign minister S Jaishankar deconstructed China's approach in dealing with India. He said that while China tried to change the status quo at the border in the process violating the agreements to which it is a signatory, it was trying to stymie India's bid to get a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. The minister alluded to China deploying mind games to resolve border issues with India, but that the breakthrough would come about only if other powers were kept at bay. Underlining India's response to these developments, Jaishankar stated that India would not let a competitor curtail its policy choices, and that his government would look to make use of the international system for the best outcome.

The Indian government has termed relations between the two nations as "abnormal" and also pinned the breakdown of trust between the two nations on China's aggressive action at the border. The reason for such a pessimistic assessment of the ties between the two nations is that the clashes in Galwan have been followed by China trying to change the status quo on the ground at different points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

In addition to the military coercion, China has resorted to mind games, which Jaishankar alluded to, China unilaterally renamed towns in Arunachal Pradesh, to which it lays claims. It also publicised a map recently showing large parts of Indian territory as part of China. The cartographic onslaught is also backed by

a massive build-up of People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers along the border, and China creating enormous infrastructure—both civilian and military—to improve the staying power of its military. Twenty-one rounds of talks between the two militaries that have been conducted has led to resolution at some friction points, but overall troop deployment remains a cause for concern.

On India's part, it has stood up to the China challenge on several fronts. First, it has matched China's troop deployment at the border, there has also been a fillip to the development of infrastructure facilities at the border. Second, India has taken the lead in banning cellphone apps on national security grounds, and there has been curbs on infusion on Chinese capital and investment into India.

The government's approach has received public approval. ORF's Foreign Policy survey 2023 found out that an overwhelming 83% of the respondents interviewed in urban India gave a thumbs-up to India's foreign policy. There is little constituency for peace with China since nearly 80% of those surveyed cite China's aggression at the border being responsible for the trust deficit. More so, because many of these respondents see India's seat at the UN Security Council (that China has sought to block) as a key priority. On the bright side, more than three-fourths of the respondents see India's G20 Presidency and the Quad as appropriate fora to pursue India's interests, with the same number putting great store in Australia, Japan, and the US (Quad members) as leading partners in the near future.

### Leveraging the international system

Thus, faced with the China challenge, India has crafted a foreign policy that seeks greater engagement with the world. A case in point is India's G20 presidency under which more than 100 countries were invited to a 'Voice of Global South' summit, taking up issues of food and energy security, fast-tracking reforms of global financial to seek better representation to developing nations. The other central piece of this proac-

tive foreign policy was India's increasing engagement with the Quad, which Jaishankar described as India's riposte to those who seek to veto her policy choices. Speaking at the Quad Think Tank Forum on Feb 24, the minister highlighted nascent capacity-building initiatives that were helping policy-makers in the Indo-Pacific region better evaluate infrastructure projects on viability and sustainability criterion. Such efforts underscore Quad's commitment to the region reeling from the impact of China's debt-trap diplomacy in the wake of the Belt and Road Initiative.

At the same time, China's belligerence through different means continues unabated. An important aspect of China's aggression and expansionism has been the deployment of grey-zone warfare, in which a nation uses strategies to pursue its aims, but that may not invoke a strong military response from the other side. For example, China has built 'xiaokang' villages near the Indian border in a bid to bolster its territorial claims, and now there are reports that these are being populated with settlers.

During the Raisina conclave, India's Chief of Defence Staff Anil Chauhan drew attention to China's use of such strategies to hobble rivals. If the 2010s put strains on India-China ties due to land-based incursions, then the coming decades may see increased strife in the maritime and cyberspace spheres as well.

While China considers the South China Sea as its lake, it has stated that the Indian Ocean is not India's ocean. There have been reports of Chinese research vessels trawling the Indian ocean to collate and build a repository of data, which may give its submarines an edge in navigating in this region.

The Indian establishment will also have to be alert to increased efforts by Chinese state and non-state actors who will try to infiltrate the cybersecurity domain to steal data that may have national security ramifications. It's a turbulent road ahead for Sino-Indian ties. (Courtesy: ORF)

The annual speech was a test for Biden, 81, to demonstrate his acuity as more voters than ever are concerned about his age

# Biden slams Trump; says democracy and freedom under threat in US and world

WASHINGTON, March 8: Seeking a second term, US President Joe Biden has launched a vitriolic attack against his rival and predecessor Donald Trump and accused him of threatening democracy within the country and globally, kneeling before Russia and supporting "resentment, revenge and retribution".

Without taking the name of Trump, Biden in his final State of the Union Address to the joint session of the US Congress, identified him as his predecessor, which he mentioned as many as 13 times in his speech that lasted for over an hour.

Following Super Tuesday, decks have become clear for a rematch of 2022 in the November presidential elections.

Biden, 81, who is the oldest president of the US slammed Trump, 77, Trump on several issues ranging from his recent comment on Russian President Vladimir Putin, immigration, January 6 insurrection, abortion, and gun control.

"A president, my predecessor, who failed the most basic duty. Any President owes the American people the duty to care. That is unforgivable," Biden, a Democrat, said amidst multiple standing ovations from the lawmakers.

"Now, my predecessor, a former Republican President, tells Putin, 'Do whatever the hell you want'. A former American President actually

said that, bowing down to a Russian leader. It's outrageous. It's dangerous. It's unacceptable," Biden said.

Trump recently said he would encourage Russia to do "whatever the hell they want" to any NATO member country that doesn't meet spending guidelines on defence in a stunning admission he would not abide by the collective defence clause at the heart of the alliance if reelected.

Biden said he came to the office determined to get America through one of the toughest periods in the nation's history.

"Not since President Lincoln and the Civil War have freedom and democracy been under assault here at home as they are today. What makes our moment rare is that freedom and democracy are under attack, both at home and overseas, at the very same time. Overseas, Putin of Russia is on the march, invading Ukraine and sowing chaos throughout Europe and beyond," he said.

He also sought the support of the US Congress for providing weapons to Ukraine to stop Russia.

"If anybody in this room thinks Putin will stop at Ukraine, I assure you, he will not. But Ukraine can stop Putin if we stand with Ukraine and provide the weapons it needs to defend itself. That is all Ukraine is asking," Biden said.

They are not asking for American soldiers. In fact, there are no



American soldiers at war in Ukraine, he said. "And I am determined to keep it that way," he said.

"But now assistance for Ukraine is being blocked by those who want us to walk away from our leadership in the world," he said.

A former American President actually said that, bowing down to a Russian leader. It's outrageous. It's dangerous. It's unacceptable," Biden said amidst multiple standing ovations from the lawmakers.

Biden said history is watching, just like history watched three years ago on January 6, referring to the mob attack on the United States Capitol Building in Washington, DC, by supporters of then-US president Trump, two months after his defeat in the 2020 presidential election.

"We all saw with our own eyes these insurrectionists were not pa-

triot. They had come to stop the peaceful transfer of power and to overturn the will of the people. January 6th and the lies about the 2020 election, and the plots to steal the election, posed the gravest threat to our democracy since the Civil War. But they failed. America stood strong and democracy prevailed," Biden said.

"But we must be honest, the threat remains and democracy must be defended. My predecessor and some of you here seek to bury the truth of January 6th. I will not do that. This is a moment to speak the truth and bury the lies. I will do that," Biden said.

"Between those who want to pull America back to the past and those who want to move America into the future. My lifetime has taught me to embrace freedom and democracy," Biden said. A future based on

the core values that have defined America.

"Now some other people my age see a different story. An American story of resentment, revenge, and retribution," he said.

"Past administrations, including my predecessor, failed to Buy American," he said.

"Over one hundred million of you can no longer be denied health insurance because of pre-existing conditions. But my predecessor and many in this chamber want to take that protection away by repealing the Affordable Care Act. I won't let that happen! We stopped you 50 times before and we will stop you again!" he said.

Biden also slammed Trump on his border policies and said that his predecessor has opposed his move on immigration and border security.

He forcefully called on Republican lawmakers in Congress to pass a bipartisan immigration compromise that stalled last month, accusing them of derailing the proposal for political reasons.

"He feels it would be a political win for me and a political loser for him. It's not about him or me. It'd be a winner for America!" he said.

"My Republican friends you owe it to the American people to get this bill done. We need to act. And if my predecessor is watching instead of playing politics and pressuring members of Congress to block this bill, join me in telling Congress to

## US revitalised partnership with allies and nations like India amidst China's rise: Biden

WASHINGTON, March 8: The US has revitalised its partnership with its allies and nations like India, Australia and Japan, US President Joe Biden said on Thursday, amidst the rise of China, which he said is indulging in "unfair economic practices" and endangering peace across the Taiwan Strait.

Biden, 81, in his final State of the Union Address before a joint session of the US Congress, said the US wants competition with China, but not conflict.

Biden, seeking re-election in November, said America is in a stronger position to win the competition for the 21st Century against China.

"We are standing up against China's unfair economic practice, standing up for peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. We revitalised our partnership with allies and the Pacific, India, Australia, Japan, South and South Korea," Biden, a Democrat, said.

China considers Taiwan as its breakaway province and insists it should be unified with the mainland, by force if necessary. Taiwan, however, sees itself as completely distinct from China.

China has been ramping up its military offensive against the self-ruled island of more than 23 million people, triggering global concerns including from the US.

He said he several times found his Republican fellow members saying that China is on the rise and America is falling behind.

"They've got it backwards. America is rising," Biden said.

The US has the best economy in the world, Biden said in his address watched by millions of Americans.

"Since I've come to office, our GDP is up. And our trade deficit with China is down to the lowest point in over a decade," he said. "I've made sure that the most advanced American technologies can't be used in China's weapons. Frankly, for all his tough talk on China, it never occurred to my predecessor to do that," Biden said.

"And we're in a stronger position to win the competition for the 21st Century against China or anyone else for that matter," said the president in his speech.

Following Super Tuesday, decks have become clear for a rematch between Biden and Trump in the November 5 presidential elections.

Biden, who is the oldest president of the US, also slammed his Republican rival and predecessor Donald Trump, 77, on several issues ranging from his recent comment on Russian President Vladimir Putin, immigration, the January 6 insurrection, abortion, and gun control. (PTI)

## UK ex-PM Theresa May to stand down as MP after 27 years

LONDON, March 8: Theresa May, who was the prime minister of Britain between 2016 and 2019, on Friday announced her exit from frontline politics after 27 years as a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons.

The 67-year-old, whose travails with getting a Brexit deal through Parliament in the wake of the June 2016 referendum ended in a forced exit from 10 Downing Street over four years ago, said she had taken the "difficult decision" to not contest in the next general election from her Maidenhead constituency in south-east England.

She has been the Conservative MP for the Berkshire seat since 1997, having been elected seven times.

"Since stepping down as prime minister I have enjoyed being a backbencher again and having more time to work for my constituents and champion causes close to my heart including most recently launching a Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking," said May in a statement to her local 'Maidenhead Advertiser'.



"These causes have been taking an increasing amount of my time. Because of this, after much careful thought and consideration, I have realised that looking ahead, I would no longer be able to do my job as an MP in the way I believe is right and that my constituents deserve. I have therefore taken the difficult decision to stand down at the next general election," she said.

The senior parliamentarian, often referred to as the "new Iron Lady" as the second female prime minister of the UK after Margaret Thatcher, pledged her continued support to the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak-led government and said she believed the Conservatives could win the next election, which is expected later this

year. "As I pass the baton on I will be working with my successor to secure a Conservative victory in Maidenhead. I remain committed to supporting Rishi Sunak and the government and believe that the Conservatives can win the election," said May, whose term as home secretary before her inns at Downing Street is associated with stringent migration policies including abolishing the post-study work visa for international students.

"I have always said there is no greater privilege than being an MP; I have served as home secretary and prime minister but none of that would have been possible without the people of Maidenhead and the constituency which I have been proud to call my home," she added.

May's decision to leave the Commons adds to a string of Tories, over 60 MPs, announcing they will not fight their seats at the next election. High-profile parliamentarians who have said they will quit include former cabinet ministers Ben Wallace, Sajid Javid, Dominic Raab and Kwasi Kwarteng. (PTI)

## Zelensky says dismissed military commander Zaluzhnyi will be new ambassador to the UK

KYIV, March 8: Ukraine's former military chief has been appointed the country's new ambassador to the United Kingdom, a month after he was sacked as head of the armed forces by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Zelenskyy announced that he has approved the appointment of Valerii Zaluzhnyi to one of Ukraine's most important diplomatic positions. Britain is a key supporter of Ukraine in its war with Russia. Zelenskyy fired Zaluzhnyi as military commander-in-chief in February, part of a shake-up aimed at reigniting momentum in the deadlocked war. The president said at the time that Ukraine must be led by individuals who are "convinced of victory" against Russia.

Zaluzhnyi is widely respected among Ukrainian troops and considered a national hero. He is credited with stalling Russia's full-scale invasion in the early days of the war and expertly pushing back Moscow's troops.

Reported tensions between Zaluzhnyi and the president grew after Ukraine's

much-touted 2023 counteroffensive failed to make major territorial gains. Zelenskyy said on Thursday on Telegram that Zaluzhnyi "told me this is the direction he would like to take — diplomacy".

"Our alliance with Britain should only strengthen," Zelenskyy added.

The position of ambassador to Britain has been vacant since the previous envoy, Vadym Prystaiko, was removed by Zelenskyy in July. No reason was given, but Prystaiko had publicly criticised the president. Britain has been a strong ally of Ukraine in the war, now in its third year, and has given Kyiv more than 7 billion pounds (USD 9 billion) in military support since Russia's February 2022 invasion. The British government said on Thursday it would provide 10,000 attack drones to Ukraine.

The announcement by Defense Secretary Grant Shapps during a visit to Kyiv includes an investment of 125 million pounds (USD 160 million) on top of 200 million pounds (USD 256 million) previously committed for drones. (AP)

## Gunmen abduct 287 students in the latest school attack in Nigeria's northwest

ABUJA, March 8: Gunmen attacked a school in Nigeria's northwest region on Thursday and abducted at least 287 students, the headteacher told authorities, marking the second mass abduction in the West African nation in less than a week.

Abductions of students from schools in northern Nigeria are common and have become a source of concern since 2014 when Islamic extremists kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls in Borno state's Chibok village. In recent years, the abductions have been concentrated in northwestern and central regions, where dozens of armed groups often target villagers and travelers for huge ransoms.

Locals told The Associated Press the assailants on Thursday surrounded the government-owned school in Kaduna State's Kuriga town just as the pupils and students were about to start the school day at around 8 a.m. Authorities had said earlier that more than 100 students were taken hostage in the attack. Sani Abdullahi, the headteacher, however, told Kaduna Gov. Uba Sani when he visited the town that the total number of those missing after a headcount was 287.

"We will ensure that every child will come back. We are working with the security agencies," the governor told villagers in the area located 55 miles (89 kilometers) from the capital.

No group claimed responsibility for Thursday's attack though blame fell on armed groups that mostly constitute herders who have been accused of carrying out violent attacks and kidnappings for ransom following decades-long pastoral conflict with host communities.

Security forces arrived with the governor several hours later as a search operation widened, while community members and parents gathered to wait for news.

The attack occurred days after more than 200 people, mostly women and children, were abducted by extremists in northeastern Nigeria. Women, children and students are often targeted in the mass abductions in the conflict-hit northern region and many victims are released only after paying huge ransoms.

Observers say both attacks are a reminder of Nigeria's worsening security crisis which resulted in the deaths of several hundred people in 2023, according to an AP analysis. (AP)

## Hong Kong's new national security bill includes stiff penalties and more power to suppress dissent

HONG KONG, March 8: Hong Kong unveiled a proposed law that threatens life imprisonment for residents who "endanger national security" on Friday, deepening worries about erosion of the city's freedoms four years after Beijing imposed a similar law that all but wiped out public dissent.

It's widely seen as the latest step in a crackdown on political opposition that began after the semi-autonomous Chinese city was rocked by violent pro-democracy protests in 2019. Since then, the authorities have crushed the city's once-vibrant political culture. Many of the city's leading pro-democracy activists have been arrested and others fled abroad. Dozens of civil society groups have been disbanded, and outspoken media outlets like Apple Daily and Stand News have been shut down.

Hong Kong leader John Lee has urged legislators to push the Safeguarding National Security Bill through "at full speed," and lawmakers are set to begin debate on it Friday afternoon. It's expected to pass easily, possibly in weeks, in a legislature packed with Beijing loyalists following an electoral overhaul.

The proposed law will expand the government's power to stamp challenges to its rule, targeting espionage, disclosing state secrets, and "colluding with external forces" to commit illegal acts among others. It includes tougher penalties for people convicted of working with foreign governments or organizations to break some of its provisions.

The law would jail people who damage public infrastructure with the intent to endanger national security for 20 years — or life, if they collude with an external force to do so. In 2019, protesters occupied the airport and vandalized railway stations.

Similarly, those who commit seditious face a jail term of seven years but colluding with an external force to carry out such acts increase that penalty to 10 years. On Thursday, an appeals court upheld a conviction for seditious against a pro-democracy activist for chanting slogans and criticizing the Beijing-imposed 2020 National Security Law during a political campaign.

Its expansive definition of external forces includes foreign governments and political parties, international organizations, and "any other organization in an external place that pursues political ends" — as well as companies that are influenced by such forces.

Critics say that the proposed law would make Hong Kong even more like mainland China. However, the government said it was necessary to prevent a

recurrence of the massive anti-government protests that rocked the city in 2019 to justify, insisting it would only affect "an extremely small minority" of disloyal residents.

The legislature's president, Andrew Leung, told reporters that the process was accelerated because the bill was necessary to safeguard national security.

"If you look at other countries, they enacted it within a day, two weeks, three weeks... So why can't Hong Kong do it in a speedy manner? You tell me," the pro-Beijing politician said.

Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, requires the city to enact a national security law, but a previous attempt sparked a massive street protest that drew half a million people, and the legislation was shelved.

Such against the current bill are unlikely, due to the chilling effect of the 2020 law. After it was enacted to quell the 2019 protests, (AP)

## North Korea conducts artillery firing drills in likely response to South Korea-US military training

SEOUL, March 8: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised artillery firing drills aimed at boosting combat readiness, state media reported on Friday, days after his country vowed to take corresponding military steps against the ongoing South Korean-US military training that it regards as an invasion rehearsal.

Thursday's drills involved frontline artillery units, whose weapons place Seoul, the South Korean capital, in their striking range, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said.

Kim said artillery units must "take the initiative with merciless and rapid strikes at the moment of their entry into an actual war," KCNA said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said later Friday that it had detected North Korea firing artillery into the waters off its west coast the previous day. It said South Korea will make a stern and overwhelming response in the event of provocations by North Korea.



North Korea's forward-deployed long-range artillery guns pose a serious security threat to Seoul, a city with 10 million people which is about 40 to 50 kilometres (25 to 30 miles) from the border with North Korea. North Korea's Defence Ministry said Tuesday it would conduct unspecified "responsible military activities" in response to the annual South Korea-US military drills that began on Monday. Kim visited a western operational training ground on Wednesday and called for stronger war fighting capabilities.

The 11-day South Korea-US drills in-

volve a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the number conducted last year.

North Korea views South Korea-US military exercises as a major security threat, calling them a preparation to launch attacks on the North. Seoul and Washington officials have said their drills are defensive in nature.

North Korea has sharply accelerated its missile testing activities since 2022 in part of efforts to develop more powerful nuclear-capable weapons targeting the US mainland and South Korea. The South Korean and US militaries have expanded their drills in response.

Experts say North Korea likely aims to use a modernised arsenal to win sanctions relief from the United States when diplomacy restarts. They say North Korea could increase its weapons tests and dial up warlike rhetoric this year as the United States and South Korea hold major elections. (AP)

The practice, incorrectly believed to control women's sexuality, can cause serious bleeding and even death

## UNICEF: 230 million females are circumcised globally, 30 million more than in 2016

CAIRO, March 8: Over 230 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation, most of whom live in Africa, according to a report issued on Friday by the United Nations children's agency.

In the last eight years, some 30 million people have undergone the procedure, in which external genitalia are partially or fully removed, UNICEF estimated in the report, which was released on International Women's Day.

The percentage of women and girls who experience female genital mutilation is declining, UNICEF said, but it warned that efforts to eradicate the practice are too slow to keep up with fast-growing populations.

"The practice of female genital

mutilation is declining, but not fast enough," the report said.

The practice, incorrectly believed to control women's sexuality, can cause serious bleeding and even death.

Girls are subjected to the procedure at ages ranging from infancy to adolescence. Long term, it can lead to urinary tract infections, menstrual problems, pain, decreased sexual satisfaction and childbirth complications, as well as depression, low self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"We're also seeing a worrying trend that more girls are subjected to the practice at younger ages, many before their fifth birthday. That further reduces the window to intervene," said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell.



Some 144 million women and girls have been through female genital mutilation in Africa alone, followed by Asia and the Middle East with 80 million and 6 million respectively, the report said.

Somalia tops the list of countries where the practice, also known as female circumcision, is prevalent, with 99% of the female population

between the ages of 15 and 49 having been circumcised.

Burkina Faso made the most significant progress, reducing the proportion of women between 15 and 49 who were circumcised from 80% to 30% over three decades.

The report also showed that 4 in every 10 survivors live in conflict-

torn countries with high population growth rates, adding that political instability disrupts efforts to prevent the practice and provide support to victims.

"Ethiopia, Nigeria and Sudan account for the largest numbers of girls and women who have undergone female genital mutilation in conflict-affected countries," the report said.

Although the report hailed the progress made in some countries, it warned that the world is falling short of what would be needed to meet the UN's goal of eradicating the practice globally by 2030.

"In some countries, progress would need to be 10 times faster than the best progress observed in history in order to reach the target by 2030," said the report. (AP)

## Will always oppose CAA, say opposition leaders Opposition alliance stage anti-CAA protest ahead of PM's visit to Kaziranga



**GUWAHATI, March 8:** Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's arrival in Assam on Friday on a two-day visit, opposition parties staged a protest in Kaliabor in Nagaon district against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA).

The sit-in by the 16-member United Opposition Forum, Assam (UOFA) was held near Kaziranga, where the PM is scheduled to spend the night after reaching the state in the afternoon.

UOFA spokesperson and Rajior Dal chief Akhil Gogoi said the protest was initially slated for Saturday, but was held a day before at the request of Ahom community organisations.

"The Prime Minister will un-

veiling a statue of Ahom general Lachit Borphukan. As such, the community requested us to change the date of the protest. Hence, we organised it a day earlier," Gogoi told the media at the demonstration site.

He maintained that the CAA is a threat to the identity of the Assamese people, and they will continue protesting it.

State Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah participating in the protest said, "The government cannot stifle our voices. We had sought an appointment with the PM to apprise him of the opposition to the CAA in the state. But we are yet to hear from his office."

Another senior Congress leader, Debabrata Saikia, also maintained

that the protests against the CAA will continue.

"The government can use all tactics and power to suppress us. But the people are firm in their opposition to the CAA and we will continue with our protests," the leader of the opposition in the state assembly added.

The UOFA, All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and 30 other organisations had earlier announced holding protests against the CAA, which seeks to provide Indian citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis entering India on or before December 31, 2014 from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan after five years of residence here.

Union home minister Amit Shah

had earlier said that CAA rules would be notified and implemented before the Lok Sabha polls.

The UOFA had said that a state-wide bandh will be called the very next day the contentious act comes into force, followed by 'gherao' of the Janata Bhawan (the secretariat).

It had also submitted a memorandum to President Droupadi Murmu, saying they would undertake a 'democratic mass movement' across the state if CAA is not repealed.

The AASU and 30 other groups took out motorcycle rallies across the state on Thursday against the contentious Act.

The organisations will light lamps before the portraits of five slain youths, who were killed in police firing during anti-CAA protests in 2019, on Friday, they said.

The state had witnessed massive protests after the Rajya Sabha passed the CAA on December 11, 2019, with agitators engaging in pitched battles with security forces, forcing the administration to impose curfew in several towns and cities.

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has urged those opposing CAA to approach the Supreme Court for redressal of their grievances rather than taking up agitations. (PTI)

## ABSU celebrates International Women's Day in Udalguri

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, March 8:** The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) celebrated the International Women's Day with a two-day programme organized at the Udalguri College in Purni Goraibari in Udalguri district.

The programme that began on Thursday, concluded on Friday. The first day was marked with a special session for women, representing different district committees of the students' union. The session was inaugurated by Monalisa Daimary, a teacher of the Udalguri Higher Secondary School.

During the session, some of the key decisions were taken in connection with the Special Women Delegate Session held at the 56th Delegate Convention of ABSU in Golaghat. During the convention ABSU had taken a resolution to form the 'Bodo Mother Association', 'Boro Bima Goutum' and the adhoc body.

The ABSU has resolved to form the 'Bodo Mother Association' and in Bodo 'Boro Bima Goutum'. This organisation will function within the domain of ABSU to carry out their mission and vision with to work extensively for the social construction of a sustainable Bodo society—the Geremsa Boro Hari.

In the special session several

aims and objectives were adopted for the Bodo Mother Association, which are included implementing the missions of ABSU with special focus on women and children such as, 'Bodofa Mission for Sustainable Change' and 'Mission Quality Education Movement' to empower Bodo women economically, educationally and culturally. Their mission also aims to create a secure environment for women and children by eradicating superstition, child marriage, witchcraft, human trafficking, etc.

ABSU also aimed to eradicate physical, structural, direct or indirect violence against women and children, eradicate substance abuse, prevent all forms of anti-social activities, provide counselling to women, students and children in stress and destitute and conduct legal and health awareness amongst the women folk in the Bodo society.

ABSU president Dipen Boro hoisted the ABSU flag and paid floral tributes to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma and Gaide -Helena Basumatary on the occasion.

A rally was also carried out to mark the celebrations with the theme 'Total eradication of injustice against women, human trafficking, child marriage and witch hunting.'

Rashmi Brahma, assistant pro-

fessor of the Udalguri College flagged off the rally. An open discussion was chaired by Lila Basumatary, chief convener BMA.

ABSU president Dipen Boro inaugurated the open discussion. In his speech, Boro highlighted the issues in the Bodo society concerning women folk. He asserted that BMA will work together with ABSU to create an ideal Bodo Society by following the principles of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma for Geremsa Boro Hari.

Dr. Rita Boro, Asstt. Professor of Tanga College & Sahitya Akademi Awardee, graced the occasion as chief guest.

She has highlighted the struggles of women historically to achieve the rights as human being. The recognition of dignity of women at any stage of age and life must be respected and protected. Though it be marriage or any social events or rituals in our society.

During the occasion, Pratima Nandi Narzary, Sahitya Akademi Awardee 2023, Renowned writer, Kunjalata Daimary, International Player (Athletics), Eena Daimary, Owner of Bajwi Hotel, Rowta Renowned Entrepreneur and Mainaoshree Daimary, Youth Sahitya Akademi Awardee-2023 was offered warm welcome and felicitation with traditional Aronai and bouquet.

## International Women's Day celebrated in Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, March 8:** As part of the 'International Women's Day' celebrations, a three-day long exhibition of paintings titled 'Rang Aru Surare Sojao Aha' began at the Pranab Baruah Kolakshetra in Nagaon on Friday.

The exhibition that will conclude on March 10, has been organised by a team of eleven women artists from Nagaon and Guwahati.

The works of the artists whose works are being displayed in the exhibition are Bandana Nath, Paran Banti Devi, Arundhuti Chaudhary, Kukima Kakoti, Ditimoni Das and Rekha Dutta Saikia from Guwahati and Gitika Sarma, Geetanjali Baruah, Gargi Geetam Bora, Aradhana Baruah and Dipanjali Bora from Nagaon.

During the inaugural session, singers Chandana Bezbaruah,



Barnali Hazarika, Suranjita Baruah and Ujjaljoyti Das performed enthralled the audience with their performances.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Mousumi Kandali, noted Assamese story teller, critic of paint-

ings and historian of art in the presence of noted journalist and film critic Manoj Borpuzari, who was the chief guest for the occasion. Noted artist, Tikendrajit Saikia was also present in the programme.

## Webinar on life science held at Rabindranath Tagore University in Hojai

**HT Correspondent**

**HOJAI, March 8:** The department of botany of the Rabindranath Tagore University has conducted a webinar titled 'Unlocking Opportunities in Life Science: Exploring Fellowship and Internship Programs for Students' at its university campus in Hojai.

The informative and engaging webinar was chaired by the vice-chancellor of Rabindranath Tagore University, Amalendu Chakrabarty and registrar, Tilak Chandra Kalita was present as a guest. The webinar was hosted by head of the department of botany, Sushil Das as convener and assistant professor, Dhanwantari L. Sinha as co-ordinator of the webinar. A large number of students participated in the webinar. Sushmita Rajkhowa, a research scholar from the Indian Institute of Jodhpur acted as a resource person of the webinar. She highlighted about the funding agencies available at the national as well as international level, which offer fellowship and internship to students in the field of life sciences to pursue higher education in India as well as abroad.

Rajkhowa also made her presentation before the students and explained the detail procedure to fill up the application form for fellowship and internship and other related matters.



**NAGAON, March 8:** As a part of the mission 'My Bharat - Viksit Bharat@2047' launched across the country by the central government, the Nehru Yuva Kendra, Kamrup (Metro) in association with the Bishnuram Medhi Government Law College organized a district level neighbourhood youth parliament at the college premises on Friday.

Bhupen Malla Bujarbaruah, principal of the Bishnuram Medhi Government Law College inaugurated the programme by lighting the ceremonial lamp. Noted Assamese writer and columnist Mayur Bora, professors Lohit Sarkar, Sangeeta Rani Kalita and Daisy Changmai respectively addressed the programme as keynote speakers.

During the session, a mock parliament session was conducted in which the youths participated as speaker of the Parliament, Prime Minister, leader of the opposition, etc.

Chayan Shuklabaidya, district youth officer of NYK, Kamrup (Metro) mentored the entire programme, while Jiban Ch Doley, observer of the programme and accountant of the organisation offered the vote of thanks.

While addressing the occasion, Mayur Bora asserted that women could play a tremendous role in a healthy and strong nation. Educated women can build a strong society and take a leading role in population control, Bora said, adding that everyone should take the initiative to make women more empowered and educated.

## NSCN calls for immediate removal of unauthorized UNLF camps in Naga territory

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 8:** In a recent press statement, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) voiced its strong opposition to the establishment of UNLF designated camps in Naga territory in Manipur. Expressing deep concern over this unauthorized intrusion, the NSCN emphasized its duty to protect the Nagas and safeguard geopolitical interests.

"It is the primary duty of NSCN to protect its people and geopolitical issues", the statement said. The organization highlighted the importance of creating a stable and secure environment where unauthorised intrusion is prevented.

The NSCN reiterated its commitment to upholding agreements made during the ceasefire between the government of India and NSCN. It criticised the haphazard manner in which UNLF designated camps were set up, stating, "In the case of the government of India and UNLF, setting up designated camps was handled in a haphazard manner without considering the geopolitical sentiment."

The organization raised concerns about the motives behind the establishment of these camps, questioning whether the government of India aims to incite communal tensions between the Meiteis and the Nagas. It called for the immediate removal of UNLF designated camps from Naga territory to avoid any undesirable consequences.

The statement issued by NSCN underscores the need for all parties involved to adhere to agreed-upon protocols and respect the sentiments of the local populace. Failure to address these concerns could lead to further unrest and instability in the region.

## Indian Army conducts educational session on women's health in Manipur's Moreh

*Commemorating International Women's Day, lecture on menstrual hygiene, breast self-examination and family planning held in Manipur*



**GUWAHATI, March 8:** In a commendable initiative marking International Women's Day, the Indian Army organised a comprehensive lecture on women's health topics for the residents of D Monaphai, T Simol, and New Laikot villages in the border town of Moreh, Manipur. The lecture, titled 'Feminine Hygiene, Breast Self-Examination for Cancer, and Importance of Contraceptives', aimed to address prevalent issues surrounding women's health in rural areas.

The session, attended by 36 women spanning various age groups, focused on breaking the stigma surrounding menstrual cycles and related health concerns. Recognizing the challenges faced by women in these communities, the Indian Army took a proactive approach by identifying the specific needs and concerns of the village women.

Led by medical professionals, the lecture emphasised the importance of menstrual hygiene, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and early detection of gynecological diseases linked to poor hygiene practices. Additionally, the discussion covered the benefits of using sanitary pads, management of pre-menstrual symptoms, and proper disposal of menstrual products.

Moreover, the session included essential guidance on breast self-examination techniques to detect lumps or abnormalities early on, as well as the significance of contraceptives in ensuring effective family planning. By imparting this knowledge, the aim was to empower women with the tools needed to prioritize their reproductive health and overall well-being.

Following the lecture, a constructive post-discussion was held to dispel myths and stereotypes surrounding menstrual hygiene. The engagement of local elders and community members underscored the significance of such initiatives in fostering awareness and positive behavioral changes.

Expressing gratitude for the thoughtful gesture by the Indian Army, the community hailed the initiative as a timely and much-needed effort to address crucial health issues affecting women in rural areas. This event serves as a testament to the commitment towards promoting gender equality and empowering women to lead healthier lives.

As the world commemorates International Women's Day, initiatives like these stand as beacons of progress towards achieving women's health and well-being for all.

## Local entrepreneur Praneswari Brahma gets award in recognition for her achievements

## Women Entrepreneur Award to local entrepreneur on 'International Women's Day'

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, March 8:** On the occasion of 'International Women's Day' local entrepreneur Praneswari Brahma was conferred with the 13th Aijw Falangi Bantha (Woman Entrepreneur Award), 2024 at a programme held at the Gwjwn Dera, Chandrapara in Kokrajhar on Friday.

The award has been conferred on Brahma by the North East Research and Social Work Networking (NERSWN), a Kokrajhar based NGO working for social welfare. The award comprised of a citation, cash worth ₹ 20,000, a shawl and traditional Aronai.

Brahma is a successful tribal women vendor at Taraibari village in Kokrajhar. She was conferred with the award in recognition of her efforts as entrepreneur.

Social activist and writer, Rani Helen Wary and several dignitaries were also present during the function.

Along with the rest of the state, the 'International Women's Day' was celebrated with different programmes across all districts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) highlighting this year's theme 'Invest in women, accelerate progress'.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) extended his warm greetings and best wishes to all the



women of the region as well state on the occasion.

He said that the BTR government has been working relentlessly towards the welfare of the women across the region. His government has launched several social welfare oriented missions and schemes, which are meant for the progress of women.

"On the occasion of International Women's Day we commemorate the invaluable contributions and outstanding achievements of Nari Shakti. Our government in BTR steadfastly upholds the cause of

gender equality and women's empowerment," Boro said.

Meanwhile, the women's wing of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL)'s Debagar block committee also celebrated the occasion at the Debagar block party office amidst the presence of party workers, members and well wishers.

An open discussion on the theme of 'Invest in women, accelerate progress' was conducted on the occasion, which was chaired by Champa Roy, president of the women's wing of the UPPL's Debagar block committee. Party

leaders from the women's wing of UPPL's central committee and district committee leaders and block coordinator attended the programme.

Several women's wings of block committees in Kokrajhar also celebrated the occasion in their respective blocks during the day.

The Chirang district committee of UPPL women's day have also celebrated the international women's day at various places that saw a good response from the women fraternities across the district.

## SC quashes case against academic for denouncing abrogation of Art 370

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** The time has come to enlighten and educate the police machinery about the concept of freedom of speech and expression, the Supreme Court has said and set aside an order of the Bombay High Court against an academic accused of criticising the abrogation of Article 370 that bestowed special status on Jammu and Kashmir and greeting the citizens of Pakistan on the country's Independence Day.

The Maharashtra Police had registered an FIR against professor Javed Ahmed Hajam at Hatkananale police station in Kolhapur under Section 153A (promotion of communal disharmony) of the Indian Penal Code for posting WhatsApp messages that denounced the abrogation of Article 370 and congratulated the people of Pakistan on their Independence day.

"August 5-Black Day Jammu & Kashmir" and "14th August-Happy Independence Day Pakistan," he had written on WhatsApp.

"Now, the time has come to enlighten and educate our police machinery on the concept of freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution and the extent of reasonable restraint on their free speech and expression. They must be sensitised about the democratic values enshrined in our Constitution," a bench of Justices Abhay S

Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said. If a citizen of India extends good wishes to the citizens of Pakistan on 14th August, which is their Independence Day, there is nothing wrong with it, the apex court observed.

"Our country has been a democratic republic for more than 75 years. The people of our country know the importance of democratic values. Therefore, it is not possible to conclude that the words will promote disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious groups.

"The test to be applied is not the effect of the words on some individuals with weak minds or who see a danger in every hostile point of view. The test is of the general impact of the utterances on reasonable people who are significant in numbers," the bench said.

Merely because a few individuals may develop hatred or ill will, it will not be sufficient to attract Section 153-A of the IPC, it said.

The court said continuation of the prosecution of the appellant for the offence punishable under Section 153-A of the IPC will be a "gross abuse" of the process of law.

"Accordingly, we set aside the impugned judgment dated April 10, 2023 of the High Court of Judicature at Bombay and quash the impugned FIR," the bench said. (PTI)

# Let us create on India and create for world: PM

'Create such content that, along with you, the country gets more likes; we must engage with the global audience for it'

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged content creators on Friday to start a "create on India movement" and share stories on the country's culture, heritage and traditions with the world.

"Let us create on India, create for the world," the prime minister said after he presented the first-ever National Creators' Awards at the Bharat Mandapam here.

Among those awarded were Pankhti Pandey, who got the award in the "Green Champion" category, Keerthika Govindasamy in the "Best Storyteller" segment, singer Maithili Thakur got the "Cultural Ambassador of the Year" award, Gaurav Chaudhary bagged the honour in the "Best Creator in Tech" category and Kamiya Jani was felicitated as the "Favourite Travel Creator".

"People ask me, what is the secret of my success? I do not give an answer to everyone.... Will a restaurant owner show you his kitchen? Iswar ki kripa hai, mai samay se pehle samay ko bhansakta hoon (By the god's grace, I can sense what is coming). That is why I can say that these awards will have an important place in the future," Modi said.

He hailed the content creators as the country's digital ambassadors and said they are also brand am-



bassadors of "Vocal for Local". "Let us together start a create on India movement. Let us share stories related to India, India's culture, India's heritage and traditions with the whole world. Let us tell our stories to everyone. Let us create on India, create for the world," Modi told the gathering after presenting the awards.

"Create such content that, along with you, the country gets more likes. We must engage with the global audience for it," he said.

Asserting that the world's curiosity towards India is increasing, the prime minister urged the content creators to develop work in UN languages, such as German, French, Spanish etc., to amplify their reach.

Noting that the Lok Sabha polls are round the corner, he said, "I give you the guarantee that on the next Shivratni, probably it could be on some other date, it will be me who will preside over such a programme."

With the audience chanting "abki bar 400 paar," the prime minister said it is not Modi's guarantee but that of 140 crore Indians.

He urged the content creators to create awareness among youngsters and first-time voters that polling is not carried out to declare winners and losers, but for people to become a part of the decision-making process that crafts the future of such a massive country.

He noted that even though many countries became prosperous in

different ways, they eventually opted for democracy. "India has taken the resolve to become a developed nation by taking pride in 100 per cent democracy," Modi said.

The prime minister recalled his recent interaction with billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates about artificial intelligence and informed the gathering about the cabinet's approval for the India AI Mission.

Lauding youngsters and their talent, he touched upon the Semiconductor Mission and expressed confidence that India will lead the way, similar to the adoption of 5G technology.

The prime minister wished women on International Women's Day and urged the creators to increasingly make "nari shakti" a part of their content.

Modi said the "collaboration of content and creativity grows engagement, collaboration of content and digital brings transformation, and collaboration of content with purpose shows impact".

He urged the content creators to bring inspiration through their content and recalled that he had raised the issue of disrespect towards women from the ramparts of the Red Fort.

Modi also requested them to forward the spirit of equality among parents while raising boys and

girls. The prime minister said the content creators should showcase the capabilities of "nari shakti" (women power) and give ideas on depicting how a mother conducts her daily tasks and women from rural and tribal areas engage in economic activity.

"Content creation can help rectify wrong perceptions," he said.

Modi also recommended creating content that highlights the negative effects of drugs on youngsters. "We must say drugs are not cool," he added.

More than 1.5 lakh nominations across 20 categories were received for the awards. Subsequently, about 10 lakh votes were cast for digital creators in various categories. Finally, 23 winners, including three international creators, were selected.

Those awarded included Ranveer Allahbadia, who was named the "Disruptor of the Year", Jaya Kishor who was given the award for "Best Creative for Social Change", Lakshya Dabas who bagged the honour of the "Most Impactful Agri Creator". The "Best International Creator Award" was won by Kiri Paul from Tanzania, Drew Hicks from the United States and Cassandra Mae Spittmann from Germany. Hicks received the award from Modi. (PTI)

## Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra: No startups in the country, claims Rahul in Gujarat's Godhra

**GODHRA, March 8:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday claimed there were no startups in the country and those that did exist were under the control of foreign firms.

Addressing a small gathering in a Muslim-dominated area opposite Godhra railway station as part of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Gandhi slammed the Narendra Modi government's 'Startup India' initiative and promised to earmark Rs 5,000 crore to fund the sector if the Congress came to power.

"Have you seen any startups? Are they anywhere to be seen? Not a single one exists. And those which exist are in the control of foreign firms. We will create a Rs 5000 crore fund so that sons of poor farmers and labourers can open their own startups," he asserted.

He also said 30 lakh government posts were vacant and the Congress would fill them when it comes to power.

Gandhi claimed the Centre had waived off loans to the tune of Rs 16 lakh crore of big corporates but was

unwilling to provide the same relief to farmers, students and labourers.

On the second day of the Gujarat leg of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Gandhi on Friday resumed his journey from Dahod and reached Godhra in adjoining Panchmahal district. After addressing people in Jhalod in Dahod on Thursday, he had stayed overnight in a village there.

In the morning, Gandhi visited Kamboi Dham near Jhalod town to pay tribute to tribal icon Govind Guru.

When his yatra proceeded from Dahod, he was greeted by party functionaries and residents, while tribals performed a traditional dance at a traffic roundabout.

Gandhi, who was seated in his open-roof SUV, waved back at the crowd. He also cut a large cake that was presented to him by women Congress workers on the occasion of International Women's Day.

On the way to Godhra, Gandhi prayed at a Shiva temple on the occasion of Mahashivratri. (PTI)

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** The Income Tax Appellate Tribunal on Friday dismissed the Congress party's appeal against imposition of penalty for discrepancies in tax returns for previous years and said it was exploring all legal options and will move the high court against it very soon.

Sources said the tribunal had dismissed the appeal of the Congress for imposition of penalties of ₹ 210 crore by the Income Tax department here on Friday.

Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said the party is exploring all legal options and would move the high court "very soon".

"The BJP government has deliberately chosen the timing of this to coincide with national elections," Maken told PTI.



He said the I-T tribunal order freezing Congress' funds is "an attack on democracy" as it has come just ahead of national elections.

"How can one expect fair elections in such a situation when funds to the tune of ₹ 270 crore have been frozen or taken away by the Income Tax authorities

from Congress party's accounts," he asked.

Confirming the order, Congress' legal cell head Vivek Tankha said the Tribunal has not even followed its own past precedents in this regard and the party will be approaching the High Court soon.

"We are disappointed with the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal order. We will be moving the High Court very soon. They have not followed their own past precedents in granting relief on payment of 20 per cent penalty and that too to a national party which is now on the verge of contesting national elections, which is going to be notified soon," Tankha told PTI.

He appeared before the tribunal on behalf of the party appealing

against the I-T authorities order imposing penalty worth ₹ 210 crore for alleged discrepancies in I-T returns for previous years.

The Congress had earlier termed the Income Tax authorities' decision as "tax terrorism" coming ahead of general elections only to cripple the funds of the principal opposition party.

The Congress had earlier alleged that the Income Tax department has "withdrawn" a sum of ₹ 65 crore from its accounts in different banks "undemocratically" and claimed that it has freed another ₹ 205 crore of its funds.

Maken claimed that "democracy will be over in the country if the action of probe agencies goes unchecked" and said the Congress has full faith in the judiciary. (PTI)

## It would be privilege to contest upcoming Lok Sabha elections: Goyal

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** Union Minister Piyush Goyal, who is among the high-rung ministers in the Modi government that are being speculated for contesting upcoming general elections, on Friday said he is ready to take the plunge but it is for the party to decide on the issue. Goyal, son of former BJP treasurer Ved Prakash Goyal, has been a three-time Rajya Sabha member and if nominated, this will be his first Lok Sabha contest.

In an interview with PTI, he said it would be a privilege to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, but a decision in this regard has to be taken by the BJP party leadership.

On whether he would like to contest the elections from Maharashtra, he said it would depend upon the party.

Goyal holds three portfolios - commerce and industry, textiles, and food and consumer affairs. At present, the minister is a Rajya Sabha member from Maharashtra.

"Of course, I am very excited, I am looking forward to a decision being made by the party leaders and I do hope that I (will) get an opportunity to contest. It will be my privilege," he told PTI. When asked if he would prefer to contest from Maharash-

tra, Goyal said: "Party leaders take these decisions and we are all karyakartas (workers) of the party. For us whatever work, whatever constituency, the party gives us, it will be a matter of pride and privilege for being given the opportunity to contest".

The ruling BJP has named 34 Union ministers in the first list of 195 candidates. Union ministers whose names have been announced by the BJP in the first list of candidates include Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Bhupender Yadav, Mansukh Mandaviya, Sarbananda Sonowal, Kiren Rijjiu, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Arjun Ram Meghwal, G Kishan Reddy, Arjun Munda and Smriti Irani.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Modi has set a target for the BJP to win at least 370 seats on its own in this Lok Sabha election and more than 400 for the NDA.

The Election Commission is expected to announce the poll schedule soon and the elections are likely to be held in April-May. The BJP won 303 seats in the 2019 polls but currently it has 290 members in Lok Sabha for various reasons including some MPs recently resigning after winning assembly polls. (PTI)

## CBI searches residence, office of Shajahan Sheikh in Sandeshkhali

**KOLKATA, March 8:** CBI sleuths on Friday searched the residence and office of suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh in Sandeshkhali in connection with its probe into an attack on an ED team in the area, officials said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) also visited areas near his house in Akunchipara locality of Sarberia to collect evidence in connection with the attack. The officials later went to his office.

Sheikh, who has been suspended from the ruling Trinamool Congress, was arrested in a case related to a mob attack on ED officials at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal on January 5 when the central agency had gone to search his premises in connection with an alleged ration distribution scam. The 14-member team included six CBI sleuths, six central forensic officials, besides two ED sleuths who were injured in the January 5 attack.

A large contingent of central forces was deployed in the area for protection of the sleuths of the central agencies, the officials said. (PTI)

## Murmu presents President's Standard to 45 Squadron, 221 Squadron



**GHAZIABAD, March 8:** President Droupadi Murmu on Friday presented the President's Standard and Colours to four Indian Air Force units which she termed a "historic occasion".

Two squadrons - 45 Squadron and the 221 Squadron - received the President's Standard while the 11 Base Repair Depot and 509 signal unit received the President's Colours at a ceremony held at the Hindan Air Force Station here.

This is the first time that four units of the IAF have received the President's Standard and Colours together, an official statement said.

The President's Standard and Colours is the highest military honour for any armed forces unit. The four units selected for the coveted awards have stellar contributions to the IAF's history, it said.

Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari, Union Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways and Civil Aviation, Gen (ret'd) V K Singh, among other dignitaries were also present on the occasion.

Before the arrival of Murmu, a group of IAF contingents regaled the spectators with a band display followed by a ceremonial parade.

Four personnel, two of them carrying an encased Standard each, and the rest an encased Colour each, then placed them over a stack of drums in a nod to military traditions.

Murmu arrived at Hindan Air Force Station in a special IAF aircraft, a spokesperson of the Indian Air Force said.

The President is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The occasion coincided with the International Women's Day.

After receiving the guard of honour, Murmu presented the President's Standard to the 45 Squadron and the 221 Squadron and the President's Colours to the 11 Base Repair Depot and the 509 Signal Unit.

In her address, she termed the awarding of the honours to the four units of the IAF a "historic occasion" and hailed the contribution of the force and its air warriors in the service of the nation.

The 45 Squadron, also called the 'Flying Daggers', was raised in 1959. The squadron took part in 'Operation Vijay' for the liberation of Goa from Portuguese rule in 1960, the statement said.

In the 1971 India-Pakistan war, the unit was responsible for the air defence in the Punjab and Rajasthan sectors, flying 258 missions that were instrumental in safeguarding the forward air bases against enemy air attacks, it said.

The 221 squadron is known as the 'Valiants'. It was raised on February 14, 1963, in Barrackpore equipped with Vampire aircraft. Barely two years after its formation, the squadron was pressed into action in the Eastern theatre during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, where it made commendable contributions, it said.

In August 1968, the squadron was one of the first to be re-equipped with the Su-7 supersonic attack fighter.

During the 1971 India-Pakistan War, operating in the eastern theatre, the squadron undertook extensive counter-air, close air support and photo reconnaissance missions.

The 11 Base Repair Depot is a premier and only fighter aircraft base repair depot of the IAF that was established under Maintenance Command in April 1974 at Ojhar, Nashik.

Su-7 was the first aircraft to be overhauled by the depot. In the subsequent years, variants of MiG-21, MiG-23 and MiG-29 aircraft have been overhauled.

The 509 signal unit was established on March 1, 1965, and is presently functioning as an Air Defence Direction Centre in Meghalaya.

The watershed moments in the unit's history date back to the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 wherein it emerged as the epicentre of all air defence activities over East Pakistan.

A defining moment came with the precision strike on the Governor's House in Dhaka, orchestrated from the operations room of the unit. (PTI)

No. DSY/S/KIC/ 330994

**PRESS NOTICE FOR RECRUITMENT OF CONTRACTUAL POSTS IN SMALL KHELO INDIA CENTRE OF ASSAM AT DIMAHASO (JUDO)**

The Directorate of Sports & Youth Welfare, Government of Assam, invites applications from eligible citizens of India for filling up vacant Posts (Past champion Athletes) in Small Khelo India Centre (SKIC) at N.L.Daulagupa Stadium, Haflong, (JUDO) on purely temporary and contractual basis for three years.

Eligibility Criteria for Past Champion Athletes		
Order of Preference	Individual Sports	Team Sports
1 <sup>st</sup> Preference	Represented India at Recognised international competition under recognized NSF/Association of respective sport	Represented India at recognized international competition under recognized NSF/Association of respective Sport.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Preference	Medal winner at senior National Past Championship conducted by recognized NSF or Medal winner at Khelo India Games	Part of Medal winning team at senior National past championship conducted by recognized NSF or Part of Medal winning team at Khelo India Games
3 <sup>rd</sup> Preference	Medal winner at National AIU Past championship	Part of Medal winning team at national AIU past championship
4 <sup>th</sup> Preference	Represented State in Senior National Past Championship conducted by recognized NSF or Participation in Khelo India Games	Represented State in senior National Past Championships conducted by recognized NSF or Participation in Khelo India Games

Maximum age limit for applicants will be 40 years. However, relaxation may be accorded in deserving cases. Candidates are required to apply in Standard form along with self attested copies of academic Certificate, Mark sheet and other documents to be submitted to the undersigned in Office hours on or before 03-03-2024. No application will be accepted after expiry of the given date.

Sd/-  
Director  
Sports & Youth Welfare, Assam  
Rudra Singh Sports Complex,

Janasanyog/D/19110/23/9-Mar-24

No.TDB/6<sup>th</sup> ASFC/32/2021-22/191

Date: 07/03/2023

**TENDER NO-45 OF 2023-24 INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFBO)**

The BDO, Tamulpur Dev. Block, Tamulpur invited fresh bids from eligible contractors registered with Assam (Roads & Buildings) or contractors registered under Class-I (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads & Buildings), BTC as all for the following works are accorded administrative approval vide letter no- BTC/F/C-Cell(6<sup>th</sup> ASFC)-46/2024/Tamulpur-PI-I/12, Dated Kokrajhar the 27<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2024 under 6<sup>th</sup> ASFC for the year 2022-23 during 2023-24 as follows -

Sl. No.	Name of work	Sanctioned Amount in Rs.	BID Security	Completion period	Remarks
1	Const. of box culvert at Mazdia village under No. 4 Dakshin Kumarkata VCDC under 6 <sup>th</sup> ASFC for the year 2022-23 during 2023-24	8,00,000.00	The Bidder has to submit 2% in case of general and 1% in case of ST/SC as BID security in the Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Development Block, Tamulpur at the time of submission of BID.	180 Days from date of formal work order issued	Tender paper must be obtained on written request from the office of the BDO, Tamulpur Dev. Block, Tamulpur. Tender paper must be filled up addressing to all points/terms specified with the tender form otherwise tender will be treated as cancelled. BIDs will be issued to the contractors of their authorized agents from 9:30 am to 4:15 pm 07 <sup>th</sup> March, 2024 to 29 <sup>th</sup> March, 2024 in the office of undersigned on payment in the form of demand draft with 0.03% of sanctioned amount duly pledged to the Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar. Please note:- 1. Date of receiving application/issuing of BID documents from 07 <sup>th</sup> March, 2024 to 29 <sup>th</sup> March, 2024. 2. Date of receiving BIDs 29 <sup>th</sup> March, 2024 at 2:15 PM. 3. Date of opening Technical BIDs 29 <sup>th</sup> March, 2024 at 2:30 PM.

Sd/-  
Block Dev. Officer,  
Tamulpur Dev. Block, Tamulpur

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1533

## We have strongly taken it up with Moscow: MEA on Indians as support staff to Russian army

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** Several Indian nationals have been "duped" to work with the Russian Army and India has strongly taken up the matter with Moscow for their early discharge, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said strong action has been initiated against agents and unscrupulous elements who recruited the Indians on false pretexts and promises.

Jaiswal said India remains committed to ensure the early release of its nationals serving as support staff with the Russian Army.

The MEA spokesperson's comments at his weekly media briefing came days after Indian national Mohammed Asfan from Hyderabad, who was duped into joining Russia's war against Ukraine, was killed.

The Indian Embassy in Moscow on Wednesday confirmed Asfan's death in a post on X without mentioning the reason or circumstances behind his demise. Another Indian, who also had worked as a support staff to the Russian army, died several days back.

The MEA spokesperson said India is trying its best to bring back their mortal remains.

He around 20 people have contacted the Indian government and it is doing its best to locate them.

However, the exact number of Indians working as support staff to the Russian Army is not yet known.



In his remarks, Jaiswal appealed to Indian nationals to not get "swayed" by offers made by agents for support jobs with the Russian Army, saying it is fraught with danger and risk to life.

"Several Indian nationals have been duped to work with the Russian Army. We have strongly taken up the matter with the Russian government for early discharge of such Indian nationals," he said.

The MEA spokesperson said strong action has been initiated against agents and unscrupulous elements who recruited the Indians on "false pretexts and promises".

"The CBI yesterday busted a major human trafficking network conducting searches in several cities and collecting incriminating evidence. A case of human trafficking has been registered against

several agents," he said.

"We once again appeal to Indian nationals to not be swayed by offers made by agents for support jobs with the Russian Army. This is fraught with danger and risk to life," he said.

Jaiswal said India remains committed to ensure early release of the Indian nationals serving as support staff to the Russian Army.

"We remain committed to the early release of our nationals serving as support staff with the Russian Army and their eventual return home," he said.

According to media reports, many Indians recruited as security helpers in the Russian military, have been forced to even fight with Russian soldiers in certain areas along Russia's border with Ukraine. (PTI)

## Kovind-led panel in process of submitting report on simultaneous polls

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** The high-level committee led by former president Ram Nath Kovind is in the process of submitting its report to the government on 'one nation, one election', sources said on Friday.

Besides suggesting a procedure to synchronise the terms of state assemblies to ensure that all polls are held together from 2029 onwards, the committee is also likely to push for a common electoral roll for elections to Lok Sabha, assemblies and local bodies, including municipalities and panchayats.

Set up in September 2023, the panel headed by former president Kovind is mandated to examine and make recommendations at the earliest on the issue of holding elections simultaneously.

At least five articles of the Constitution along with provisions of the Representation of the People Act would need to be amended to hold synchronised elections.

The sources said these are -- Article 83 on the duration of the Houses of Parliament, Article 85 on the dissolution of Lok Sabha by the President, Article 172 on the duration of the state legislatures, Article 174 on the dissolution of state legislatures, and Article 356 relating to the imposition of President's Rule in states.

While the Election Commission is mandated to hold Presidential, vice-presidential, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and state legislature



polls, respective state election commissions hold local body polls.

Parties such as the BJP have told the Kovind panel that the local body elections should be held by state election commissions but in sync with Lok Sabha and assembly polls.

The Election Commission has said it would require an estimated Rs 10,000 crore every 15 years to procure new Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) if polls are held simultaneously.

In a communication sent to the government last year, the Commission noted that the shelf life of EVMs was 15 years and one set of machines could be used to conduct three cycles of elections in their life span if polls were held together.

Separately, the Law Commis-

sion is also on the verge of finalising its report on simultaneous polls and it may suggest a separate chapter in the Constitution on 'simultaneous elections'.

It is likely to suggest a roadmap on synchronising tenures of state assemblies in three phases by mid-2029.

According to sources, the Commission, under Justice (ret'd) Ritu Raj Awasthi, would recommend an amendment to the Constitution to add a "new chapter or part" on simultaneous elections.

The new chapter would address issues related to "simultaneous election", "sustainability of simultaneous elections" and "common electoral roll" so that the three-tier simultaneous polls could be held together "in one go", the sources explained.

The new chapter being recom-

mended will have "power of non-extant" to override other provisions in the Constitution dealing with terms of assemblies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Delhi HC expresses concern over trial court judge suggesting settlement in rape case

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** Asserting that rape cases cannot be settled out of court, the Delhi High Court has expressed its concern over a trial court judge allegedly suggesting a compromise between the perpetrator and the victim to resolve the issue. Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma said it is incumbent upon the judiciary to uphold the dignity and rights of victims of sexual assault, and when such a proposal for settlement comes from a judge, it runs counter to the principles of criminal justice system and fair trial.

The court's observations came while refusing to quash an FIR over alleged rape following a settlement reached between the parties purportedly following the judge's intervention.

"This court expresses concern over the conduct of the learned Trial Court Judge, if it is true, that the Trial Judge had suggested and assisted the accused and the victim, in a case under Section 376 (rape) of IPC, to settle the matter, while the same Court was recording the prosecution evidence," Justice Sharma said in a recent order.

"This court is disturbed by the fact that it was the learned Trial Court Judge, as stated at bar as well as in the petition which is accompanied by an affidavit regarding the truthfulness of aver-

ments made in the petition, who had enquired from the victim if she wished to enter into a compromise with the accused," Justice Sharma added. To avoid "asperations" against fair trial, the court directed that the trial in the present case be transferred to another judge.

The prosecutrix had alleged that the accused established physical relations with her without her consent, and blackmailed her by threatening to kill her family members and post her objectionable photographs on social media.

While seeking quashing of the FIR on the basis of the settlement, the accused said whatever happened between them was consensual and he would pay Rs 3.50 lakh to the prosecutrix as compensation.

The court said an offence of rape cannot be quashed on the basis of a settlement or compromise between the victim and the accused unless there are extraordinary circumstances to show abuse of the process of law or miscarriage of justice. The court said while on one hand the accused insisted he was in a consensual relationship with the alleged victim, on the other, he offered to pay her Rs 3.50 lakh.

"This raises significant doubts and uncertain-

ties about the claims made within the Settlement Agreement. If the victim's prior statements were indeed based on a misunderstanding arising from a consensual relationship, the need for monetary compensation to settle the matter becomes questionable. Conversely, if the accused is offering money to the victim, it may also imply an acknowledgment of guilt on his part, which contradicts the assertion of a consensual relationship," observed the court.

The court said the offence of rape was a heinous violation of a woman's bodily autonomy and allowing the settlement would trivialise the sufferings of a rape victim and reduce her anguish to a mere transaction.

"The very notion of suggesting a compromise in a case such as the present one reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature and gravity of offences like rape. These are not matters which can be resolved through payment of money or out-of-court settlements; they are crimes committed against the individual as well as society as a whole, for which accountability has to be fixed, perpetrators are to be punished and justice is to be delivered to the victims through the judicial process," the court said. (PTI)

## Indian delegation in Kabul meets senior members of Afghan authorities



**NEW DELHI, March 8:** India's points person on Afghanistan J P Singh met senior members of Afghan authorities in Kabul and the discussions focused on New Delhi's humanitarian assistance to Afghan people as well as use of Chabahar port by Afghan traders.

Singh, the joint secretary heading the division for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), held talks with Taliban's foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on Thursday.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the delegation met senior members of Afghan authorities, former president Hamid Karzai, officials of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and members of the Afghan business community.

"The delegation held discussions on India's humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan and also discussed use of Chabahar port by Afghan traders," he said.

An Afghan readout said Singh and Muttaqi discussed issues relating to security, trade and ways to counter narcotics.

Extending gratitude to India for its humanitarian assistance, Muttaqi said that Kabul wants to strengthen political and economic relations with India, it said.

Muttaqi called for facilitating issuance of visas by India for Afghan businessmen, patients and students, the readout added.

India has not yet recognised the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and has been pitching for the formation of a truly inclusive government in Kabul besides insisting that Afghan soil must not be used for any terrorist activities against any country.

India has been pitching for providing unimpeded humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to address the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the country.

In June 2022, India re-established its diplomatic presence in Kabul by deploying a "technical team" in its embassy in the Afghan capital.

India had withdrawn its officials from the embassy after the Taliban seized power in August 2021 following concerns over their security. (PTI)

## NIA, CCB detain two including cloth merchant in connection with cafe blast in Bengaluru

**BENGALURU, March 8:** A cloth merchant from Kaul Bazaar in Ballari district in Karnataka and a PFI cadre have been detained by the National Investigation Agency and Central Crime Branch in their joint investigation of the March 1 blast at the Rameshwaram Cafe here, sources said on Friday.

The teams suspect that one of the two detainees, who was an active member of the

banned Popular Front of India (PFI), was part of the plot.

The investigating team believes that he had proximity with some terrorist organisations.

Sources said the PFI cadre is believed to have brainwashed many people, including the man who planted the bomb.

On March 1, a man walked into the cafe and set down a

bag carrying an improvised explosive device (IED) fitted in it,

which had a timer set for an hour, police said, adding that the blast that took place an hour later injured 10 people.

The NIA has offered a reward of Rs 10 lakh to find the suspect, whose image has been captured on CCTV.

Meanwhile, the investigation teams found that the man who planted the bomb at the

food joint in Brookefield here travelled from Bengaluru to Tumakuru, Ballari, Bidar and then Bhatkal, sources said.

CCTV footages captured by the cameras at the city bus and bus stand shows him that he frequently changed his dress to hide his identity and mislead the investigators.

Meanwhile, the Rameshwaram Café, which was shut since the incident, reopened on Friday. (PTI)

## Most critical issue of 2019 amalgamation of RRBs was related to tech: Book

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** The most critical issue of the 2019 amalgamation of regional rural banks (RRBs) was that of technology, systems and procedures, as different banks followed different systems and procedures despite the same core banking platform, says a new book.

In his memoir "Banker by Chance, Leader by Choice", veteran banking professional Shiv B Singh, who has served over three decades in various capacities in the regional, national and international arena of banking, says the 2019 amalgamation of regional rural banks was peculiar in the sense that the perks and allowances of the sponsor banks were only to be made applicable after the merger.

"The most critical issue was that of technology, systems and procedures, as different banks followed different systems and procedures despite the same core banking platform. These issues were important because they could impact business continuity in a significant manner," he writes.

He also says that when he looks back at the hectic schedule of those amalgamation days, it



gives him a feeling of immense satisfaction and fulfillment.

"Being at the helm of affairs, this challenging amalgamation exercise was a great and unique learning experience, which broadened and sharpened my creative, imaginative, managerial and mental faculties, and enabled me to deal with many improvised situations and enriched me tremendously on the personal, academic and professional fronts," he writes.

Singh worked as an ad-hoc lecturer at a government college and with the Income Tax depart-

ment before joining the banking sector.

"Banker by Chance, Leader by Choice", published by Rupa, is the story of his rise as a banker - from being a junior-level officer at a public sector bank to becoming its chief general manager. Recently, he has transitioned to the position of executive director at a public sector bank.

Singh built his career in the banking industry, "which satisfied me both in terms of my financial standing and the social recognition I received".

He says the operational bank-

ing landscape has significantly changed since 2001.

"The most significant change was the treatment from the customers' point of view, where the customer became the bank's customer instead of the branch's customer," Singh writes.

"Another change was the introduction of alternative delivery channels in the form of automated teller machines (ATMs) and Internet banking, making banking 'anytime anywhere anyhow banking', which provided operational flexibility to customers," he adds.

During his nearly 30 years in banking, Singh has worked for about 12 years in the treasury - in foreign exchange and overseas, two years as AGM of a metro branch and two years as deputy zonal manager of a zone that drew most of its business from the metropolitan region.

"So, my last 15 years of work had been confined mainly to treasury operations, foreign exchange business, overseas assignments and the metro city with some amount of agriculture and MSME lending during my tenure as deputy zonal manager," he writes. (PTI)

### ENGAGEMENT EDUCATION EXECUTIVE, VIDYA SAMIKSHA KENDRA (VSK) UNDER SAMAGRA SHIKSHA AXOM

No. SSA/Esst/Engagement/VSK/622/2023/10920

The Samagra Shiksha Axom invites online applications from existing teacher working in the Government/Provincialized schools of Assam for filling up Education Executives on attachment basis in Assam Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK).

The online applications will be received from 09.03.2024 to 19.03.2024. The selected teachers will be attached at Assam Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK) as Education Executive for a period of 3 (three) years only and after completion of 3 (three) years term they shall be reverted back to the parent schools. The attachment of a teachers to VSK as Education Executive shall not give rise to any indefeasible right to be permanently absorbed or stay in VSK or continue on attachment as Education Executive.

Sl No	Name of the Post	Eligibility & experience	Age	No. of Posts	Place of engagement	Mode of engagement
1	Education Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers teaching in Govt./Provincialized Elementary/Secondary Schools of Assam for minimum 5 years teaching experience.</li> <li>Teacher working in the schools should be from Assamese, English, Bengali and Bodo medium</li> <li>Science and Mathematics Teachers will not be considered.</li> </ul>	Age should not be more than 40 years as on 01.01.2024	02	Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK), Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19	On attachment basis

#### Important Note

- The attachment of Education Executive will made through the following three stages.
  - Elimination Stage-** Written examination for short listed of teachers.
  - Class Room Demonstration** - The shortlisted teachers have to go through some video recorded classroom transaction and they need to submit their observation in front of Expert Teachers, Educationist, Retired Teachers, Awardees Teacher etc.
  - Computer skill assessment:** The short listed teachers shall have to mandatorily attend a computer skill assessment of basic operation and internet.
- Based on the above, Education Executive will be attached in the VSK.
- All such attached Education Executives will be provided rigorous training on all the activities of a school and on different programmes of Government.
- No additional including financial benefits shall be provided to the Education Executives and they will draw their salary against the parent post of teacher.

#### N.B.

- The link of the recruitment portal will be available in the Samagra Shiksha website <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>
- Read the User Guidelines carefully which is available on the recruitment portal on how to submit the online application form.
- Before filling the on-line application, applicant has to go through the User Guidelines for online registration and online application.
- Only eligible candidates will have to appear in test/interview, the exact date of which will be communicated separately.
- The office will not be responsible for any non submission of online application due to any error or other problem.



Sd/-Mission Director,  
Samagra Shiksha Axom  
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

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# It's tea, not coffee: Sonakshi Sinha on landing Bhansali's 'Heeramandi'

**MUMBAI, March 8:** Next time you visit Sanjay Leela Bhansali's office, have tea, not coffee, says actor Sonakshi Sinha while narrating a fun anecdote behind her casting in the director's upcoming streaming show "Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar".

Bhansali produced Sonakshi's 2012 film "Rowdy Rathore" and they have been trying to collaborate for a long time but nothing materialised.

"He has been very encouraging... We tried to work together but it didn't work out, and we were always in touch. Every time I went to his office, we would chat over coffee.

"I was like sir, 'Every time I come to your office, we have coffee and then I leave. I'm not having coffee with you, I will have tea'. I had tea (and) we had the same sort of conversation and I went home.

And then, I am in 'Heeramandi'. So, tea is the answer guys, not coffee," the actor said on day two of FICCI Frames 2024. Sonakshi, who plays Fareeda in the multi-starrer drama set during India's freedom struggle when courtesans ruled the cultural landscape, said she just loves the way Bhansali, known for films such as "Devdas", "Bajirao Mastani" and "Gangubai Kathiawadi", presents women on screen film

after film. "Sanjay sir and I have been trying

to collaborate for many years and I'm glad it happened with 'Heeramandi'. The way he portrays his women on screen, nobody is able to do that. He has got a very different vision for it in spite of it being all magnum opus... He takes good care of how his female characters are portrayed on screen, and that's something I appreciate about him," she said.

The eight-part series, which was teased during Netflix's mega Next On event recently, also features Manisha Koirala, Aditi Rao Hydari, Richa Chadha, Sharmin Segal, and Sanjeeda Shaikh.

According to Sinha, the director has given equal importance to all the female characters in the series.

"In 'Heera-

mandi', we have six different women with six different stories to tell, and each one has been importance... So, to be part of something like this is tremendous.

The fact that we are going global with Netflix, being able to reach out to so many people, this is something that everybody should be able to watch. I'm so glad to be a part of it."

Having worked with the national award-winning director, Sinha said she has blossomed into a "patient and stronger" actor. "I walked away as a more patient and resilient actor. That's a good thing, and good things take time and greater things take more time. To be a part of something like this does require a lot of patience. I know I do my job well. Here you have to mould yourself along with what has been created in front of you, the process of completely surrendering and if you are not able to do that, then you cannot be part of something like this. I think I walked away as a much stronger actor after 'Heeramandi'."

At this stage of her career, the "Dahaad" star said she wants to be "challenged" as an actor. She also expressed gratitude to Bhansali for having the "confidence" in her. "Every actor craves to be challenged. I've grown and learnt through experiences. I've started from scratch. I had no experience of being on a film set, and I used to not visit my dad's sets when I was a child." (PTI)

# Jio Studios announces new film starring Huma Qureshi inspired by real story



**MUMBAI, March 8:** Huma Qureshi has booked her next gig after "Maharani 3", an untitled movie that will be produced by Jio Studios & Echelon Productions.

The film, which was announced on the International Women's Day, will revolve around a woman autorikshaw driver and is based on a true story.

Qureshi, 37, said it was a "rare and cherished opportunity" to portray such a character in the film.

"It's particularly poignant that we announce this project on Women's Day," said actor in a statement.

"With her exceptional talent and dedication, we are confident that Huma will deliver a portrayal that truly does justice to her character and brings this inspiring story to life. We truly believe in women power and will continue to state that 'HAMARI CHORIYAN CHORO SE KAM NAHI HAI,'" said makers.

Directed by Vipul Mehta, the film is produced by Jyoti Deshpande and Vishal Rana. (PTI)

# Akira Toriyama, creator of 'Dragon Ball' manga, dies at 68

**TOKYO, March 8:** Akira Toriyama, one of the most influential and best-selling manga authors of all time, has died, his studio said Friday. He was 68.

Toriyama died March 1 of a blood clot in his brain, his production company Bird Studio said in a statement on Friday. A funeral service had been held with only his family and a few relatives, it said.

The Japanese author is best known as the creator of the popular Dragon Ball manga series, which has fans across the world and spawned a well-known anime series, video games and films. The manga series first debuted in 1984, depicting the story of a boy named Son Goku who is on a quest to collect magical dragon balls to protect Earth from alien humanoids called Saiyans.

In 1989, it was adapted into an anime and soon became one of the most globally recognized pieces of Japanese media. It has sold 260 million copies altogether, according to his

studio.

Toriyama worked for 45 years and still had unfinished work at the time of his death.

"It's our deep regret that he still had several works in the middle of creation with great enthusiasm," it said. "He would have had many more things to achieve. However, he has left many manga titles and works of art to this world."

He was a source of inspiration to many renowned Japanese comic book artists, such as Masashi Kishimoto, the creator of the popular series 'Naruto', and Eiichiro Oda, the creator of one of the longest-running animes 'One Piece.'

"We hope that Akira Toriyama's unique world of creation continues to be loved by everyone for a long time to come," his studio said. Many in Japan and from around the world paid tribute to Toriyama on Friday. (AGENCIES)

# Television actor Dolly Sohi dies due to cervical cancer

**MUMBAI, March 8:** Actor Dolly Sohi, best known for TV show Jhanak and Bhabhi, died on Friday morning at a hospital in Navi Mumbai due to cervical cancer, her brother Manpreet said. ADVERTISEMENT She was 47.

The actor, who was diagnosed with cervical cancer around six months ago, was undergoing treatment for the disease. "She is no more. She passed away around 4.00 am at Apollo Hospital. She had cervical cancer which had spread to her lungs. We had admit-

ted her last night to the hospital as her health had deteriorated," Manpreet told PTI.

A night before, Dolly's sister Amandeep Sohi, also an actor, passed away due to jaundice. "Amandeep passed away on Thursday due to jaundice at the DY Patil hospital," Manpreet added. Some of Dolly's notable performances include TV shows such as Kkusum, Meri Aashiqui Tum Se Hi, Kumkum Bhagya, and Parineeti. Dolly's last rites will be held in the afternoon. (PTI)

# This Women's Day, Bollywood hopes for better representation of women

**MUMBAI, March 8:** Hindi cinema has travelled miles from the stereotypical depiction of women either as long suffering wives and mothers or as the unidimensional love interest but it's a battle not yet won.

And 2023 is a case in point with even the success of a progressive "Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani" being drowned in the roar of an "Animal".

While Karan Johar's "Rocky Aur Rani", which many said was his career's most gender-realised film, did well, Ranbir Kapoor starrer "Animal" did three times its business with box office collections of around Rs 900 crore - notwithstanding criticism that it was misogynist and glorified toxic masculinity.

The other two films, which did blockbuster business last year, were Shah Rukh Khan's "Pathaan" and "Jawan", both action entertainers, which, despite having a male protagonist at the helm, gave enough space for women characters to shine.

Though the road ahead is long, there is much to be thankful for.

"Earlier, we never saw the heroine as more than an appendage to the hero but today they are shown as working women and people in their own right. There are also many more girls in the crew leading to a healthy ecosystem," Shabana Azmi, who played the role of a progressive grandmother with a past romance in "Rocky Aur Rani", told PTI.

The film, starring Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt, is a story of modern relationships but also about gender dynamics in families that need to evolve with time.

Azmi said female roles have become "more substantial".

She admitted there is "room for improvement" and that can only happen when mainstream heroes start accepting roles where women are protagonists.

"The budget of a female oriented film will always be lower than a film with a successful hero at the helm. But all in all, this is a much better era for women in Hindi cinema where scripts written by women are also being welcomed," said Azmi, a parallel cinema star who made a career out of playing women of substance in the 70s.

"Pathaan" had two principal female characters played by Deepika Padukone, a Pakistani spy with a conscience, and Dimple Kapadia, who essayed the no-nonsense commanding officer of the titular character.

In his second release of 2023, the plot of "Jawan" was propelled by stories of six women, who help Shah Rukh's character in his mission to achieve justice.

"Animal", which released later in the year, featured Bhatt's husband, Ranbir Kapoor in the role of a violent man seeking validation from his father.

It was amongst the most divi-

sive and hotly debated movies of the year with its depiction of women as submissive wives or mistresses.

Commenting on the representation of women in recent films, actor Richa Chadha cited films like "Animal" and Sukumar's "Pushpa: The Rise", both starring Rashmika Mandanna as a heroine depicted through a problematic male gaze.

Society, like cinema, goes through phases, said Chadha, who has seen "Pushpa" but not "Animal".

"There are some films that give space for some kind of anger, I look at it

that way. I feel if society is getting more and more angry, it goes in a certain direction (and) we have phases like this," said Chadha, who made her production debut with "Girls Will Be Girls".

Speaking at a recent FICCI Frames session, renowned producer Ekta R Kapoor spoke about the post pandemic challenges that stories women around women face.

Last year, Kapoor backed "Kathal", with Sanya Malhotra as a cop probing the case of two missing jackfruits, and

Bhumi Pednekar's "Thank You For Coming", a movie on female pleasure.

"It has become tougher since COVID-19 because it is easier to make a slightly misogynistic film, or a more machismo kind of film than celebrating womanhood or feminism. The word feminism is taboo in movies," Kapoor said.

"Thank You For Coming" may not have done well at the ticket window, but Chadha praised Kapoor for taking a chance on a bold narrative revolving around women's sexuality.

She is also looking forward to the producer's next film "Crew", a heist

comedy featuring Tabu, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Kriti Sanon as air hostesses.

"I think representation shifts, but then there are people like Ekta Kapoor, making a film called 'Crew', then we have had films like 'Thank You for

Coming' that were high on sexuality.

You are not able to discuss these things openly, it's stifling certainly for both men and women. It is not about how the film did eventually," Chadha added.

And 2024 has got a promising start with "Laapataa Ladies", directed by Kiran Rao. (PTI)



# ROHIT, GILL PUT INDIA IN DRIVER'S SEAT DESPITE LATE BATTING COLLAPSE

**DHARAMSALA, March 8:** Skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill's splendid hundreds gave India complete control of the fifth Test against England despite a late batting collapse that saw the hosts end day two at 473 for eight here on Friday.

India lost as many as five wickets for 97 runs in the final session after Rohit (103 off 162 balls) and Gill (110 off 150 balls) shared a stroke-filled 171-run partnership off 244 balls for the second wicket.

Debutant Devdutt Padikkal (65 off 103) showed a lot of class in his debut innings while Sarfaraz Khan (56 off 60) was guilty of throwing away his wicket first ball after tea. The home team, which began the day at 135 for one, led England by 255 runs at stumps.

Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir (4/170 in 44 overs), who was taken to the cleaners by the Indian openers, bounced back strongly to take three wickets in the final session. Left-arm spinner Tom Hartley (2/126 in 39) too was impressive towards the end of the day while Mark Wood (0/89 in 15) was the most expensive.

The pitch remains good for



batting and at 376 for three at tea, India looked set to bat England out of the game before the combination of good bowling and reckless batting kept the visitors alive in the match.

India scored at close to 4.5 runs per over until slowing down

significantly in the final session. Kuldeep Yadav spun the ball a lot more than fellow Indian spinners on day one but after a tough time in the first two sessions on day two, Bashir and Co. got a lot out of the surface.

Sarfaraz tried to cut a harmless

ball off Bashir and ended up giving an easy catch to Joe Root at first slip. Padikkal got a gem from the England off-spinner that spun away from middle stump to hit the top of the off-stump. Like Sarfaraz, Dhruv Jurel (15) too went for an avoidable shot and

perished.

After lunch, England captain Ben Stokes bowled Rohit Sharma off his first ball in nine months to give the visitors something to cheer about.

But Sarfaraz and Padikkal then got together and ensured runs kept flowing for the home team.

Stokes, who had been bowling only in the nets thus far, finally decided to roll his arm over in a match situation after nothing went England's way in the morning session. He had stopped bowling owing to a knee injury and had undergone surgery last year.

Bowling the second over of the afternoon session, Stokes produced a peach that seamed away a touch from good length to dislodge Rohit's off-stump.

In the next over, James Anderson bowled Gill with a beauty that seamed back in, leaving India at 279 for three.

In his debut game, Padikkal's off-side play stood out as he re-galed the crowd with exquisite back-foot punches and cover drives.

Sarfaraz, on the other hand, started slowly before changing gears both against pace and spin. What attracted most attention

was his attacking play against the express pace of Mark Wood.

His game against fast bowlers has been questioned but Sarfaraz was razor sharp on Friday as he dispatched Wood for a lofted back-drive before pulling him for a six over over backward square leg. He also played a ramp shot off Wood using the extra pace and bounce that he generated.

In the morning, skipper Rohit and Gill struck hundreds as India pressed the advantage in the game by reaching 264 for one at lunch.

Rohit and Gill walked out in the middle in bright sunshine and milked the conditions to take India well past England's first innings total of 218.

England tried everything to contain them, whether it was employing the leg-slip for Rohit when Bashir was in operation or Wood using the odd short ball against the overnight unbeaten duo with as many as six fielders on the leg side.

However, nothing worked for the visitors despite the Barmy Army making a lot more noise compared to Indian fans at the stunning HPCA stadium. Rohit and Gill collected 129 runs from 30 overs in the two hours of play.

Rohit and Gill gave themselves an over each after start of play before going for their strokes.

Off-spinner Bashir opened the bowling alongside Anderson and was put under immense pressure by Rohit, who deposited him for a straight six and a four in his second over to set the tone.

Gill, who played some audacious strokes on the opening day, carried on in the same vein as he took two steps forward against the great Anderson for a straight six, which was followed by a square cut.

The only real chance that England had in the session went begging when Zak Crawley could not latch on to a sharp catch offered by Rohit at leg-slip.

Wood resorted to the short ball tactic against the well-set duo but that did not work either.

Rohit completed his 12th Test hundred and second of the series by flicking Tom Hartley for a single.

Two ball later, Gill followed him into three digits by slog-sweeping Bashir for a four. After completing his second ton of the series, Gill took his helmet off and bowed to the spectators in the stands including his proud father Lakhwinder. (PTI)

## KA girls emerge champions as U-19 Girls Khel Maharan State Level Football Tournament ends



**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, March 8:** The five-day football extravaganza of the Under-19 Girls Khel Maharan State Level Football Tournament came to a close, with Karbi Anglong girls clinching the championship title. The tournament commenced on March 4 and was organised by the Director of Sports & Youth Welfare, Govt. of Assam, in collaboration with the District Administration, Karbi Anglong, and the District Sports & Youth Welfare department under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KACA).

The final match and closing ceremony took place at the Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) stadium here on Friday. An electrifying final match unfolded between Karbi Anglong girls and Dibrugarh girls. In the 70-minute match, the strong warriors of Dibrugarh girls launched attacks against the host district, Karbi Anglong girls. However, the Karbi Anglong girls exhibited a robust defense to ward off any danger coming their way.

While the visitors dominated the game and had ample opportunities to score, their misses in their attempts proved to be a drawback. Despite both sides displaying a strong and entertaining

match, the game ended scoreless at the conclusion of 60 minutes. An additional 10 minutes were given, and within the first five minutes, both sides failed to find the net. However, an opportunity arose for Karbi Anglong girls in the 67th minute with a free kick. Sonali Basumatary executed a perfect landing of the ball into the net, not far from the goal line, giving her team Karbi Anglong a 1-0 lead. Despite the Dibrugarh girls making all attempts in the remaining three minutes of additional time, the Karbi Anglong girls denied any chance to score, securing a 1-0 victory in the final match.

Following the final match, a prize distribution ceremony took place. Sonali Basumatary was adjudged the best player of the tournament and was awarded a trophy. The winning and runner-up teams received trophies, while players from both teams were awarded medals. The prize distribution and closing ceremony were attended by Executive Member (EM), KAC, Lunsing Teron; District Commissioner, Madhumita Bhagawati; General Secretary, KASA, Dr. Pankaj Teron; District Sports Officer, Rilip Ronghang, and several other sports persons.

## Kohli's longevity is connected to fitness, an example for young cricketers: Du Plessis

**BENGALURU, March 8:** Virat Kohli's unwavering passion for fitness is the secret behind his longevity at top-flight cricket and young cricketers should take a cue from that to build a career of their own, reckoned Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Faf du Plessis.

Kohli brought in a culture change in the Royal Challengers dressing room during his time as their skipper, making fitness a non-negotiable part of a player's life. "He's amazing, he trains hard, he's very fit. I feel in today's age of sport, you have to be like that if you're looking for longevity. So, he will be a great example," Du Plessis told Star Sports.

Du Plessis said talent alone

will not help a budding player to construct an extended career at top-level sport.

"The younger generation may feel like they can just come in and rely on their talent. Yes, they are good enough in terms of talent. "But in terms of longevity in your body to make sure you can play for as long as possible, fitness will definitely play a role," he said.

The former South African captain, himself a gym creature, said Kohli's hunger for physical fitness was their connecting point when he joined the franchise in 2022.

"There are quite a few things that Virat and I are very similar, alike in the way we see the game or think about the game. Obvi-



ously (we think about being) athletic, train hard, be fit, eat well.

"So, we look at a holistic ap-

proach to being a professional sportsman. I think that's why we connected so well in my first season at RCB. We were very

similar," he said.

Under Du Plessis, the Royal Challengers had reached the playoffs in 2022, while they finished sixth in the previous edition.

Former India and RCB pacer Varun Aaron, who recently announced his retirement, hoped Kohli would bat in this IPL like he did in 2016, beginning on March 22.

Kohli scored 973 runs in that season to top the batting charts.

"I hope he gets back to that kind of form (2016) in this IPL. The IPL is a long season and to continue that form is to be superhuman. During that season, the way he was batting, it was surreal to watch it from the sidelines," said Aaron. (PTI)

## Fighting Sindhu loses epic battle against Olympic champion Chen in French Open

**PARIS, March 8:** India's P V Sindhu produced a gallant fight before marginally falling short against reigning Olympic champion Chen Yu Fei of China in an epic quarterfinal at the French Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Friday.

On a comeback trail from a four-month-long injury layoff, Sindhu gave ample display of her strokeplay and physical fitness during a marathon one hour and 32-minute battle before settling for a 24-22 17-21 18-21 loss to the second seed and defending champion Chen in a riveting last eight battle here. The last time Sindhu had beaten the world no. 2 Chen was en route to her 2019 World Championships gold. Since then the Indian has lost to the Chinese

twice in the last two meetings although she held a better 6-5 head-to-head record against her opponent coming into the crucial tie. Playing a top-class opponent after quite sometime, Sindhu didn't show any sign off the left knee injury that had pushed her out of the circuit since October last year. There was nothing to separate the two as Sindhu produced an attacking display and also moved well on the court but a steady Chen Yu Fei managed to keep her nose ahead in the end.

Sindhu and Chen played some excruciating rallies with the Chinese using high tosses and lifts to keep the Indian at the back. But Sindhu tried to step up the pace. The result was both moved together till 6-6.

But Sindhu then dumped one at the net and sent another one wide while Chen unleashed a cross-court return to move ahead. The Chinese had five points at the break when Sindhu made a misjudgement at the backline.

An unperturbed Sindhu, however, slowly made her way back to first claw back at 15-15 to take a lead with a five-point run.

While the Chinese kept targeting Sindhu's body, the Indian managed to gather points with some delectable drops, cross court winners and some precise returns at her opponent's forehead corner.

From 19-19, the two moved neck-and-neck till 22-22 before Sindhu converted a third game point opportunity by unleashing a superb forehand cross court drop.

Sindhu made a confident 4-2 lead after the change of sides with Chen sending the shuttle long twice.

However, the Chinese turned the tables as Sindhu went wide twice and Chen produced a backhand drop and a cross court smash to lead 7-4.

The Indian drew parity again at 7-7 but Chen pulled away to 11-9 with a disguised return after Sindhu sprayed into nets twice. Sindhu kept the pressure on her opponent and restored parity at 13-13 with another delightful drop.

However, a rare service errors by Sindhu gave Chen an opportunity and she unleashed a straight smash and a body blow to move ahead. (PTI)

## Wushu c'ship Gold medallist felicitated at Demow



**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, March 8:** Abhijit Buragohain of Nitaipukhuri Nagaon in Sivasagar district, has brought laurels to the country and the state, clinching a gold medal in the 60 kg category for Junior Boys, representing the India Wushu Team at the Wushu Star International Championship 2024 held in Moscow recently. Abhijit Buragohain, son of Purnakanta Buragohain and Runumi Buragohain, is a dedicated player of the Sivasagar District Gohainbari Wushu Club. Abhijit Buragohain was accorded a warm welcome in Demow on Friday. A colourful procession was carried out from Demow Public Playground to Demow Raichai Rural Stadium on Friday where Abhijit Buragohain was present. Under the patronage of Sivasagar District Wushu Association, a felicitation programme was organised in Sivasagar District Wushu Chief Training Centre in Demow Raichai Rural Stadium on Friday. Thowra MLA Sushanta Borgohain was present in the felicitation programme as chief guest. From the Sivasagar District Wushu Association a citation, a cheleng chador and a flower bouquet was given to Abhijit Buragohain and Thowra MLA Sushanta Borgohain presented it to Abhijit Buragohain. Plabon Borah, Secretary of Sivasagar District Wushu Association anchored in the programme.

## Stokes is special, has turned England into an amazing team: Moeen Ali

**NEW DELHI, March 8:** All-rounder Moeen Ali has lavished praise on England skipper Ben Stokes despite the underwhelming Test performance against India, saying the all-rounder is special for the way he has transformed the side into an "amazing and entertaining" unit.

Ali, who has retired from the longest format, said Stokes deserves plenty of credit for ensuring that England are better than average.

"I had Joe Root and Alastair Cook as my captains, but Stokes was just different. The way he's taking the game and team forward, it's really amazing. He took England from not playing great cricket to amazing and entertaining cricket," Ali told 'ESPN-Cricinfo'.

England are trailing 1-3 in the

ongoing series and the fifth and final Test is currently in progress in Dharamsala. Ali also defended the visiting team's ultra-aggressive 'Bazball' approach, which has drawn criticism for being one-dimensional after India managed to gain the upper-hand.

"Everyone is talking about Bazball. But they actually don't believe much in (the term). They just want to play this brand of cricket. I think he is a special captain and a special player," said Ali. The Birmingham man voted in favour of the aggressive game that England follow under Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum, saying Test cricket is in need of this particular brand of cricket.

"They have taken to India on difficult wickets. I love that about Bazball. There's always a chance.



India are also taking the game on. Look at the way (Yashasvi) Jaiswal is playing. He is doing unbelievably well.

"It is the way the game needs

to go for people to watch. Test cricket also has to change. There's still time for proper Test match batting, but it needs to get forward. This is what Bazball is

doing," he explained.

The 68-Test veteran was also delighted to see the young crop of England spinners -- Tom Hartley, Shoaib Bashir and Rehan Ahmed -- giving a good account of themselves in the series against India.

"India is a very difficult place. I know the wickets have spun nicely, still they have carried their own. I thought Hartley did really well in the first game (in Hyderabad).

"No matter what wicket, on debut, under pressure, the way he has battled is really, really good. This is a very inexperienced bowling attack. It is not even experienced in domestic cricket. You have to give them a lot of credit," he said.

Ali will next be seen in action in the IPL and said his franchise

-- five-time champions Chennai Super Kings -- will always have an edge over their opponents because of the unpredictable strategies of their captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

The Super Kings are the defending IPL title-holders.

"Dhoni is a special player and a special captain. When you are playing for CSK with Dhoni as the captain, whether the team is weak or strong on paper, you always have a chance of winning," Ali said.

The spinner said despite playing three seasons for CSK, Dhoni still surprises him with his tactics. "I have played three seasons but I don't know what he is going to come up with. His strategic persona is really good. It is exciting as a player - what role he has for you," he said. (PTI)



Government of Assam

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**Barauni - Guwahati Natural Gas Pipeline under PM Urja Ganga project**  
Project Cost **₹4,000 crore**

**Capacity expansion of Digboi Refinery from 0.65 to 1 MMTPA**  
Project Cost **₹800 crore**

**Enhancement of Pumping Capacity of Barauni - Bongaigaon - Guwahati sector of Naharkatiya - Barauni Crude Oil Pipeline**  
Project Cost **₹600 crore**

**Guwahati Refinery Expansion from 1.0 to 1.2 MMTPA along with installation of CRU**  
Project Cost **₹500 crore**

**Replacement of Crude Oil Spur Line from PS-1 Duliajan to Digboi Refinery**  
Project Cost **₹50 crore**

**Revamping/Augmentation of facilities at Betkuchi (Guwahati) Terminal of IOCL**  
Project Cost **₹300 crore**

Railway projects

**Doubling of Dhupdhara - Chhaygaon section under New Bongaigaon - Goalpara - Kamakhya doubling project**  
Length- 34 km  
Project Cost **₹810 crore**

**Total cost: ₹2,400 crore**

**Doubling of New Bongaigaon - Sorbhog section under New Bongaigaon - Rangiya - Agthori doubling project**  
Length- 36 km  
Project Cost **₹520 crore**



**Total cost: ₹15,100 crore**

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