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- Yemen's rebels target Singapore-flagged ship in Gulf of Aden
- Biden says he'll sign proposed legislation to ban TikTok if Congress passes it
- Bihar govt will form committee to take stringent action against land mafia:Shah
- Positive talks held on Mahayuti alliance for LS polls, 80 pc issues resolved: Fadnavis



For All-round Development of Assam
Vikas Yatra



10 March 2024

Inauguration ● Foundation Stones ● Bhoomi Pujan

Sonitpur Hem Barua HS School Playground, Ghoramari, Sonitpur
10 am
Total project cost ₹1370 cr

Chief Guest
Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Guests of honour
Shri Ashok Singhal (Minister, Govt of Assam), Shri Pallab Lochan Das (MP, Tezpur), Shri Prithiraj Rava (MLA, Tezpur), Shri Padma Hazarika (MLA, Naduar), Shri Ganesh Kumar Limbu (MLA, Barchalla), Shri Krishna Kamal Tanti (MLA, Rangapara)

Anchor project

Inauguration Dhekiajuli LAC
Model Residential School at Chitalmari, Barchalla

Highlights: Administrative Building/School Building: G+1, Four 100-seater hostels, Teachers' quarter: 7 (28 units), Principal's quarter: 1, Assam type guest house: 1, Playground

Cost ₹30 cr

Other projects: 56 | Cost: ₹1340 cr

Majuli Ratanpur Gayan Gaon, Majuli
10:30 am
Total project cost ₹223 cr

Chief Guest
Shri Jogen Mohan
Minister, Govt of Assam

Guest of honour
Shri Bhuvan Gam (MLA, Majuli)

Anchor project

Bhoomi Pujan
Improvement and upgrade of road from Brahmaputra dyke from Patiagaon to Takarchuk via Bongaon

Highlights: Length: 44 km, Improvement and widening of existing road, Improved connectivity for the people of Majuli, Improved transport facilities for more than 41,000 residents across 88 villages, Easy access to essential services through reduction of journey time

Cost ₹102 cr

Other projects: 36 | Cost: ₹121 cr

Tinsukia Tingrai Club Field, Tinsukia
11 am
Total project cost ₹259 cr

Chief Guest
Shri Sanjoy Kishan
Minister, Govt of Assam

Guests of honour
Shri Rameswar Teli (Union MoS and MP, Dibrugarh), Shri Suren Phukan (MLA, Digboi), Shri Rupesh Gowala (MLA, Doomdooma), Shri Bolin Chetia (MLA, Sadiya), Shri Bhaskar Sarma (MLA, Margherita), Shri Punakan Baruah (MLA, Chabua)

Anchor project

Foundation Stone
Construction of Circuit House at Tinsukia

Highlights: Accommodation facility for Govt officials and other citizens, Equipped with modern facilities, Garden and green surroundings

Cost ₹21 cr

Other projects: 80 | Cost: ₹238 cr

Baksa Adalbari Playground, Baksa
1 pm
Total project cost ₹308 cr

Chief Guest
Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Guests of honour
Shri Pramod Boro (CEM, BTR), Smt Nandita Gorlosa (Minister, Govt of Assam), Shri UG Brahma (Minister, Govt of Assam)

Anchor project

Bhoomi Pujan
Improvement and upgrade of road from Barama to Nikashi

Highlights: Length: 25 km, Carriage way- 7 m and roadway- 10 m, About 20,000 people to be benefitted

Cost ₹90 cr

Other projects: 21 | Cost: ₹218 cr

Udalguri Bhergaon Stadium Field, Udalguri
3 pm
Total project cost ₹448 cr

Chief Guest
Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Guests of honour
Shri Biswajit Daimary (Speaker, Assam Legislative Assembly), Shri Pramod Boro (CEM, BTR), Shri Dilip Saikia (MP, Mangaldai), Shri Gobinda Chandra Basumatary (MLA, Udalguri), Shri Durga Das Boro (MLA, Kalaigaon), Shri Charan Boro (MLA, Majbat)

Anchor project

Foundation Stone Bhergaon LAC
Construction of road from Bogamati to Bhergaon via Naobandha village

Highlights: Road length: 25 km, The road connects Bogamati and Barnadi Wildlife Sanctuary with Tangla and Khairabari rail head, All-round development in education, health, and trade activities

Cost ₹132 cr

Other projects: 59 | Cost: ₹316 cr



Services sector, investments to boost

India, EFTA to sign trade pact today

NEW DELHI, March 9: India and four-nation European bloc EFTA will sign a free trade agreement on Sunday, which is likely to help promote investments and exports of key domestic services sectors such as IT, audio-visual, and movement of skilled professionals, an official said.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

The official said that for the first time in the history of free trade agreements (FTAs), a legal commitment is expected to be included in the pact about promoting target-oriented investment from EFTA to India and creation of employment.

India has sought an investment commitment of USD 50 billion during the first ten years after the implementation of the agreement and another USD 50 billion over the next five years from the member countries of the bloc and to facilitate the generation of 1 million direct employment in India through such investments.

This commitment would be linked to duty reduction under the agreement.

Sectors related to almost all the industrial goods exported from India to the bloc are likely to benefit from the agreement.

Another official said that Indian processed agricultural products may also get greater market access in EFTA countries. Besides, sectors like pharma, medical devices and processed food (these segments are covered under the production linked incentive scheme) are expected to figure in the agreement.

Items such as soya, dairy and sensitive agricultural products would be kept in the exclusion list, meaning no duty concessions would be provided in the agreement for these items.

The signing of the pact, officially dubbed as Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), follows approval from the Union Cabinet on March 7.

There is no official announcement of signing of the pact on March 10 so far.

The agreement has 14 chapters, including trade in goods, rules of origin, intellectual property rights (IPRs), trade in services, investment promotion and cooperation, government procurement, techni-



cal barriers to trade, and trade facilitation.

From the EFTA bloc, the four ministers who may attend the signing are Guy Parmelin, Swiss Federal Councillor and Head of the Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research; Bjarni Benediktsson, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland; Dominique Hasler, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liechtenstein; and Jan Christian Vestre, Minister of Trade and Industry of Norway.

India and EFTA have been negotiating the pact since January 2008 to boost economic ties. Commenting on the pact, economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that since 98 per cent of India's exports to Switzerland are of industrial goods and they are already entering at zero customs duties, there "would not" be any benefit from the agreement. "India's agricultural exports are minimal and unlikely to increase significantly due to strict quality standards and non-tariff barriers," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said. GTRI said that as per estimates, Switzerland exported services worth about USD 1 billion to India in 2022-23, with about half the earnings stemming from Indian tourists visiting Switzerland.

About EFTA: EFTA countries are not part of the European Union (EU). It is an inter-governmental organisation, set up in 1960, for the promotion and intensification of free trade. It was founded as an alternative

for states that did not wish to join the European community.

EFTA has 29 free trade agreements with 40 partner countries, including Canada, Chile, China, Mexico and Korea.

INDIA-EFTA Trade: India's exports to EFTA countries during 2022-23 stood at USD 1.92 billion against USD 1.74 billion in 2021-22. Imports aggregated at USD 16.74 billion during the last fiscal as compared to USD 25.5 billion in 2021-22, leaving a trade deficit of USD 14.8 billion. India-EFTA two-way trade was USD 18.65 billion in 2022-23 as compared to USD 27.23 billion in 2021-22. Switzerland is the largest trading partner of India followed by Norway. Switzerland is considered one of the world's most innovative economies. It had been consistently ranked number one in the Global Innovation Index. The bilateral trade between India and Switzerland stood at USD 17.14 billion (USD 1.34 billion exports and USD 15.79 billion imports) in the last fiscal. In 2022-23, India's trade deficit with Switzerland was USD 14.45 billion.

India's main imports from Switzerland include gold (USD 12.6 billion), machinery (USD 409 million), pharmaceuticals (USD 309 million), coking and steam coal (USD 380 million), optical instruments and orthopaedic appliances (USD 296 million), watches (USD 211.4 million), soybean oil (USD 202 million), and chocolates (USD 7 million).

Major exports from India include chemicals, gems and jewellery, shops and boats, machinery, certain types of textiles and apparel. Switzerland is the largest source of gold imports for India, with about 41 per cent share during April-October this fiscal, followed by the UAE (about 13 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent). The precious metal accounts for over 5 per cent of the country's total imports. Switzerland has some of the major pharma firms in the world and that include Novartis and Roche. Both these firms have a presence in India.

India's generic drug industry is estimated at about USD 25 billion and the country exports 50 per cent of its produce. The two-way trade between India and Norway was USD 1.5 billion in 2022-23.

Similarly, the bilateral commerce between India and Iceland stood at USD 15.36 million in 2022-23. With Liechtenstein, India's bilateral trade aggregated at USD 2.26 million in the last fiscal.

Under free trade pacts, two trading partners significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them, besides easing norms to promote trade in services and investments.

FDI from EFTA: India has received about USD 10 billion foreign direct investments (FDI) from Switzerland between April 2000 and December 2023. It is the 12th largest investor in India. (PTI)

Centre to take all measures to contain food prices, says Goyal

NEW DELHI, March 9: The Centre will pull all stops to ensure prices of essential food items from onion to tomatoes to pulses do not spike particularly during the elections, Union Minister Piyush Goyal said as he cited the Modi government's track record of controlling rates within days of any temporary hike. In an interview with PTI, Goyal, who is heading the food and consumer affairs ministry, asserted that the Modi government would continue to take measures to ensure that there is no stress on the household budget of "our Nari-Shakti". Replying to a query regarding the government's strategy to ensure that there are no spikes in prices of food items when the general election kicks in, the minister said, "We are going to be on top of it. And I can assure the people of India that this government cares for the women of India."

He highlighted that the government has spent in the last few years about ₹ 28,000 crore to the price stabilisation fund to support the effort to fight against food inflation. "We will continue to be there with our sisters and mothers and make sure that we do not give stress... We are pro-actively on the job to make sure that we respect our Nari-Shakti and respect that they need to get a better household budget," Goyal asserted.

The Election Commission is expected to announce the poll schedule soon and the Lok Sabha elections are likely to be held in April-May. The minister spoke at length about the government's various measures in the last few years to check prices of food items like onion, tomato, and pulses. "When the whole world was facing severe inflation, particularly food inflation, and never seen before levels, some countries of the developed world were showing 40-year high inflation, India was a bright spot in the subject of inflation," he said. During the UPA-era, Goyal said, the inflation was at high levels and food prices were going haywire. "If you look at the India story, even during the worst times, we were able to maintain our inflation at pretty much reasonable levels." (PTI)

Konoklota Mahila Urban Co-op Bank: Empowering women economically

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: The Konoklota Mahila Urban Co-operative Bank in Jorhat, Assam, emerges as a beacon of women's economic independence within the cooperative movement. Established in 1998 and named after freedom fighter Swahid Konoklota Barua, it stands as the sole all-women bank in Assam, boasting over 25,000 accounts and benefiting more than 300 self-help groups through its credit schemes. With a borrowing capacity raised from ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 50,000 for its members, the bank serves over 250 customers daily, prioritizing women's empowerment through tailored services and risk covers.

Laghu Udyog Bharati applauds transformative industrial policy UNATI 2024

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: Laghu Udyog Bharati, Purvottar Prant, extends heartfelt appreciation to the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, for unveiling the much-awaited Industrial Policy for North East, termed UNATI 2024. This transformative policy, aligned with the Act East Policy, is set to reshape industrialization in the region. Under the UNATI 2024 policy, entrepreneurs in the region can avail themselves of 30% Capital Incentive on Plant & Machinery/Construction of Building

Spearheaded by Padmashri Mrs. Lakhmi Baruah and currently led by Chairperson Mrs. Shakuntala Devi, the bank's expansion and governance are fortified by regular training, potentially provided by the Reserve Bank of India. With branches in Jorhat, Golaghat, and Sivasagar districts, the bank caters primarily to illiterate clients, with 85 percent belonging to marginalized communities. Recognized by the Assam Government as an exemplary cooperative bank, it has garnered accolades, including the Nari Shakti Award from the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the "Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Award" from the President of India.

and Durable Physical Assets in Zone A, and 50% in Zone B, with capacities of 5 Cr. and 7.5 Cr. respectively. The policy caters to both new and expanding industrial units, with a validity of 8 years from the date of commercial production. The organization commends the Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma, and Industry Minister Bimal Bora, along with Team Assam, for their efforts in realizing this transformational policy. LUB also acknowledges the Ministry of DONAR for their contributions to the policy's formulation.

Target of 370 seats tribute to abrogation of Article 370: Goyal

NEW DELHI, March 9: In the first admission of a link between the BJP target for ensuring general elections and abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, Union Minister Piyush Goyal said his party winning 370 seats will be a fitting tribute to the historic decision of the Modi government that has helped integrate J&K with the rest of the country.

In an interview with PTI, Commerce Minister Goyal asserted that the target of 370 seats for the BJP and 400 seats for the NDA comes from the conviction of good governance in the last 10 years by the Modi government and not over-confidence and arrogance.

He said the general election might throw a surprise and the final tally of BJP and NDA might be higher. Goyal did not comment on whether BJD will be part of the NDA, but welcomed all well-meaning good parties to be part of the journey to make India a developed nation by 2047.

Replying to a question on the realistic number that the BJP is targeting, he said, "Well I'm not an astrologer, but I can certainly say our target is 400 seats for the NDA and 370 seats for the BJP, a fitting tribute to one of the most important decisions this government has taken, one of the most important decisions that Parliament has blessed us with their full support..."

The Supreme Court has also held that the abrogation of Article 370 was constitutionally correct, he added. Goyal highlighted that the abrogation of Article 370 has led to the generation of economic activities in the Union Territory, besides a huge influx of tourists.

The Narendra Modi-led government, on August 5, 2019, abrogated Article 370, thus ending the special status given to J&K, and bifurcated it into two Union Territories -- Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh. He also talked about the Prime Minister's recent successful visit to Kashmir. (PTI)

POCO launches India's most affordable 5G smartphone

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: POCO India, in collaboration with Bharti Airtel, unveils the POCO M6 5G, setting a new benchmark for affordability in the 5G smartphone segment. Available exclusively on Flipkart from March 10, 2024, at an irresistible price of ₹ 8,799, the POCO M6 5G aims to democratize access to 5G technology across India.

With Airtel Prepaid connections, customers can enjoy the POCO M6 5G and avail themselves of a one-time 50 GB mobile data offer. Non-Airtel users can opt for doorstep SIM delivery by Airtel to unlock this benefit.

Driven by the MediaTek Dimensity 6100+ chipset, the POCO M6 5G promises seamless performance, complemented by its immersive 6.74" 90Hz display protected by Corning Gorilla Glass. Boasting a 50MP AI Dual camera setup, 5000mAh battery, and 18W fast charging, the device ensures an unparalleled user experience.

The collaboration between POCO and Airtel signifies a significant stride in making high-quality smartphones accessible to consumers nationwide.

With its exceptional features, competitive pricing, and the added advantage of Airtel's services, the POCO M6 5G is poised to make a lasting impression in the market.

Contd. from Page 3...

NE development crucial

courage and is a symbol of our government's recognition of the braveheart'. Modi, who donned a traditional attire and a headgear, and accompanied by the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, participated in a traditional Tai Ahom ritual performed on the occasion. 'Chief Virasat and Vikas (heritage and development) is the mantra of our double-engine government and we are committed to the development of the state and North East,' he said. Modi said the BJP government has also initiated expansion of the Digboi and Guwahati refineries, which will double the capacities, while the expansion of the Numaligarh refinery would treble its capacity.

He considers the people of the Northeast as his family members and several projects have been initiated for the development of the region,' he said. It is indeed a memorable day that 5.5 lakh houses, under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G), were handed over to families in Assam on a single day whereas 'earlier during the Congress rule, people did not even get a single house', he said. 'It is not that people have only got ownership of a pucca house, but they have got it with a toilet, gas and electricity connections and tap water supply,' Modi said.

In Assam, 18 lakh people have already got houses in their names with most of them registered in the names of women, he added. 'It is our effort to make the lives of women better and to empower them further, we have decided to strengthen the self help groups (SHGs)', he added. The presence of so many 'lakhpati baideos' at the meeting was also an example of how the lives of women have improved during the last ten years, he added. He said the inauguration and laying of the foundation stone of medical colleges and hospitals in the state will soon make the region a hub for healthcare facilities. The Prime Minister dedicated to the nation important projects like the 718km long Barauni-Guwahati Pipeline and a new medical college and hospital at Tinsukia. He also dedicated to the nation important railway projects worth more than ₹ 1,300 crore in Assam and laid the foundation stone of projects under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North Eastern Region (PM-DevINE) scheme including the medical college and hospital at Sivasagar and a Hemato-Lymphoid centre in Guwahati. He also laid the foundation stone of important projects of oil and gas sector including capacity expansion of Digboi and Guwahati Refineries along with installation of Catalytic Reforming Unit (CRU) and augmentation of Facilities at Betkuchi (Guwahati) Terminal of the Indian Oil Corporation Limited.

Earlier, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma delivered the welcome address of the function, which was attended by Union ministers Sarbananda Sonowal, Rameshwar Teli and several cabinet colleagues of Sarma amongst others.

Earlier the Prime Minister reached the maidam site on a helicopter from Arunachal Pradesh and after the Jorhat programme he flew from the Jorhat Airport to West Bengal. About the statue: Veteran sculptor Ram Vanji Sutar, a Padma Bhushan awardee, was entrusted with the work of making the statue, which was built at his studio in Ghaziabad in UP. The Statue of Valour is 84 feet tall, set on a pedestal of 41 feet, making the total height of the figurine 125 feet. It was unveiled at the Lachit Barphukan Maidam Development Project at Hollongapar near Teok. The area, spread over 16.5 acres, is being developed as a tourist spot, highlighting the history of the region. The foundation of the statue was laid by former President Ram Nath Kovind in February 2022. Sutar had crafted the Statue of Unity in Gujarat.

The Statue of Unity, dedicated to Sardar Patel, was inaugurated here by PM Modi on October 31, 2018. It is the world's tallest statue with a height of 182 metre (597 feet). The statue of Lachit Borphukan was transported in parts from UP to Assam over the last few months and re-assembled at the site.

The Statue of Valour was installed in the first phase of development at Hollongapar with the work for the second phase also underway. A gallery showcasing the history of the Ahom dynasty's 600 years of rule is being built, while another gallery is being set up to feature the contemporary history of the state. An auditorium with a capacity of 500 people is also being constructed. The total project cost will be ₹ 214 crore, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. (With inputs from PTI)

Modi lambasts Cong

of national highways were built in the Northeast, whereas in the last 10 years, more than 6,000 km of national highways have been built. We have done almost as much work in one decade as was done in seven decades," the PM said.

"When I laid the foundation of developmental projects in 2019, some people opined that I did that for 'chunava' (elections). But see, I did that for you, not chunava. No matter what the time, year or month is, my work is for the people," he said.

Modi said that keeping the Northeast in mind, the government had specifically started 'Mission Palm Oil'. "Today, the first oil mill under the Mission has been inaugurated. This Mission will not only make India self-reliant in edible oil, but will also increase the income of the farmers. I congratulate all the farmers of Northeast who have come forward for palm agriculture. A bright future awaits them," he said.

He said the Northeast and Arunachal Pradesh topped the country in several development works.

Modi on Saturday also inaugurated the Sela tunnel that will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang. "Some people thought that I laid the foundation of the strategic tunnel as an election agenda but they were proved wrong today," Modi said. The Sela tunnel, situated at an elevation of 13,000 feet, is strategically important due to its proximity to the Line of Actual Control (LAC), an official said.

"During my third term, my thrust will be on tourism, home-stay and start-ups for unemployed youths and I guarantee full support to those who want to begin such ventures," Modi added. (PTI)

World's longest twin-lane

this escape tube can be used for the movement of rescue vehicles and evacuation of stranded people. The tunnel has been designed for a traffic density of 3,000 cars and 2,000 trucks per day with a maximum speed of 80 km per hour.

Earlier the route to Sela Pass had only a single-lane connectivity and treacherous bends due to which heavy vehicles and container trucks could not go to Tawang, the BRO official said.

The Sela tunnel has been constructed using the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM). The execution of the mega project took over 90 lakh man-hours with an average of around 650 personnel and labourers working every day for the last five years. Altogether 71,000 metric tonnes of cement, 5,000 metric tonnes of steel and 800 metric tonnes of explosives were used for the construction of the project.

It will not only boost the defence preparedness of the Indian armed forces in the Tawang sector, but will also augment the socio-economic development of the border areas, he said. The project will "ensure all-weather connectivity to Tawang and forward areas bypassing the Sela top which will not only facilitate smoother movement of troops and supplies, but also reinforces our defence capabilities in the region", the official added. (PTI)

Country's growth cannot be

If the destiny of Chhattisgarh is to be realised, then the destiny of its farmers must also be fulfilled. "Only then the state can touch the heights of development," he added. BJP walks the talk but the Congress does the politics of 'parivarvaad', corruption and appeasement. "BJP does politics of justice and humanity. We are building a new India. Our resolve is to create a developed India," said the defence minister.

The BJP had asserted that when it gets a clear majority in Parliament, no power in the world will be able to stop the construction of a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya, Singh said. "Congress people used to ask about its date. We have told them the date and the PM has also performed the consecration of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya on January 22. Ram Lalla has come from his hut to his palace in Ayodhya and now the process of establishing Ram Rajya will start in India," he said. The country has been entering a new age, said the Union minister. When the BJP was elected at the Centre in 2014, Singh said, the party would say that it was committed to the welfare of villages, poor, farmers, people living in huts, unemployed youth and mothers and sisters. "You have seen that as soon as the government was formed under the leadership of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, we have taken rapid steps in this direction. Today, the situation is changing completely," he said. As many as 25 crore people in India were brought out of poverty. "I assure that this time we will again form the government under the leadership of Modi ji and will completely free India from poverty," Singh added. Regarding 'Shree Anna', he said, "Coarse food grains are also produced in Chhattisgarh. The PM has called it Shree Anna. He himself eats it. The country's defence minister also consumes coarse grains." During the G20 summit in the country last year, the heads of the countries who attended it were also served coarse food grains from the state, he said. Singh urged Chhattisgarh farmers to cultivate coarse grains and assured that the government would procure them for exports. (PTI)

No response from AICC over

of the MLAs to other political parties. A prominent figure in the state's political landscape, Tuki has been at the helm of the APCC for several years, overseeing the party's strategies and engagements.

In a major setback to the grand old party in the state earlier this month, Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Lombo Tayeng, a six-time MLA from Mebo constituency in East Siang district, joined the BJP. Two other senior Congress MLAs -- Ninong Ering and Wanglin Lowangdong -- also joined the saffron party. (PTI)

PM virtually inaugurates, lays

of national highways passing through the state. He also laid the foundation of Western Bypass for Agartala at ₹ 2,026 crore, 200-bed maternal and child health wing of Agartala Government Medical College at ₹ 192 crore, among other projects, it said. On the occasion, chief minister Manik Saha, while addressing a programme at Sabroom in South Tripura district, said that Northeast is witnessing development thanks to the Act East policy. He said people of the Northeast can easily access Chittagong Port of Bangladesh through Sabroom ICP. (PTI)

PM inaugurates rail

Sorbhog section, part of New Bongaigaon - Rangiya-Agthori doubling project were dedicated to the nation. These projects have been completed at a cost of ₹ 1328 crores. These projects will help in decongestion of both rail sections and help in smooth movement of train services. Socio-economic growth of people of the region will also get a huge boost due to increase in freight train movement.

Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister underlined that the northern part of West Bengal is the gateway to the Northeast and also provides trade channels with neighbouring countries. He emphasized the need for modernized rail and road infrastructure and mentioned the completion of work on the electrification of rail lines on Eklakhi - Balurghat, Raninagar Jalpaiguri - Haldibari and Siliguri - Aluabari sections will increase the speed of trains in the areas of North and South Dinajpur, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts, while the Siliguri - Samuktala route will reduce pollution in the nearing forest areas. The electrification of Barsoi - Radhikapur section will benefit both Bihar and West Bengal, he said.

Referring to the flagging off of new train service between Radhikapur and Siliguri, PM Modi said that the strengthening of railways in West Bengal will give momentum to new possibilities of development and make lives easier for the common people. The Prime Minister said that the government is committed to maintaining the same speed of development works with more investment in connectivity and introduction of high-speed trains as being launched in other parts. He also mentioned that with the introduction of the Mitali Express between New Jalpaiguri to Dhaka Cantt, rail connectivity with Bangladesh has started and both the Indian and Bangladesh governments have emphasized further enhancement of such connectivity up to Radhikapur.

Along with the various railway projects, the Prime Minister also inaugurated two National Highway projects in North Bengal, the virtually laid foundation stone of several developmental and infrastructural projects in Assam and inaugurated, dedicated and laid foundation stone of multiple development projects in Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

6 WORLD

- Yemen's rebels target Singapore-flagged ship in Gulf of Aden
- Biden says he'll sign proposed legislation to ban TikTok if Congress passes it

8 NATION

- Bihar govt will form committee to take stringent action against land mafia:Shah
- Positive talks held on Mahayuti alliance for LS polls, 80 pc issues resolved: Fadnavis

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BCCI triples per Test match incentive to ₹ 45 lakh, scheme to cost ₹ 45 cr

DHARAMSHALA, March 9: Living up to its promise of giving highest priority to Test cricket, the BCCI has decided to give an incentive of ₹ 45 lakh per game to all those who would play 75 per cent or more of the scheduled red-ball games in a particular season, Board secretary Jay Shah said on Saturday.

A Test player, who appears in a possible 10 Tests in a season will be richer by a whopping ₹ 4.50 crore as incentive apart from a possible ₹ 1.5 crore (15 lakh per game) in usual match fee.

Veteran cricketers Cheteshwar Pujara and Umesh Yadav, who did not get a contract this year, will be paid their "incentive" for the previous season. The top cricketers also get an assured retainer fee from their annual central contracts.

BCCI Secretary Jay Shah said the board will spend around ₹ 45 crore for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 seasons.

"With the scheme, the players will earn even more than the IPL contract. This show IPL is important but bilateral Test cricket is also very important. The total outflow will be ₹ 45 crore," said Shah during interaction with select group of journalists here.

In a post on X, Shah added: "I am pleased to announce the initiation of the 'Test Cricket Incentive Scheme' for Senior Men, a step aimed at providing financial growth and stability to our esteemed athletes. Commencing from the 2022-23 season, the 'Test Cricket Incentive Scheme' will serve as an additional reward structure on top of the existing match fee for Test matches, set at ₹15 lakh," he further stated. The incentives will be retrospective and would factor in players, who were part of Test cricket during the 2022-23 season.

How the math works

To put things in perspective, one can take the example of Indian skipper Rohit Sharma, who has appeared in all 10 Tests (World Test Championship final, 2 vs West Indies, 2 vs SA, 5 vs England) during the 2023-24 season.

Rohit will get ₹ 1.5 crore (₹15 lakhx10) in usual match fee and for giving priority to Test cricket, he will get another ₹ 4.5 crore (₹ 45 lakhx10). Hence, his earnings from Test cricket alone would stand at ₹ six crore. Add to it, he has an annual retainer of ₹ seven crore per season, which takes his earnings to ₹ 13 crore. This obviously excludes his match fees for playing ODIs (₹ 8 lakh per game) and T20Is (₹ 4 lakh per game) in a season. (PTI)

Lachit Borphukan, known for Battle of Saraighat, gets 125-foot statue in Jorhat ● Congress was insensitive to KNP: Modi

NE development crucial for Viksit Bharat: PM

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 9: Asserting that the Northeast's development is crucial to fulfill the objective of 'Viksit Bharat', Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday accused the Congress of ignoring the region for decades, even as Modi unveiled a 125-foot bronze statue of Ahom general Lachit Borphukan at his burial site in eastern Assam's Jorhat district.

Speaking at a public gathering in Meleng Meteli Pothar, after inaugurating projects worth ₹ 17,500 crore in Assam, the Prime Minister emphasised the significance of Northeast India's development for realising the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India).

He criticised the previous Congress government, stating that they had neglected the region for decades since independence. "During Congress rule, foundation stones of many development projects were laid, photographs were taken, but after that it was forgotten for years", Modi said.

It was left to the BJP government to complete many projects that had been started by the Congress, he added.

"Our government has given special emphasis on infrastructure, health and energy projects for the overall development of the region," he said. Around 27 rhinos were killed in 2013, but the number of such poaching incidents came down to zero in 2022 due to the NDA government's policies, he said.

Referring to the unveiling of the 'Statue of Valour' of legendary Ahom General Lachit Borphukan earlier at Hollongapar, the PM said this was a tribute to his (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



HT BRIEFS

Road mishap

BAKALIA: Four persons were injured in a road accident on Saturday morning at Natunbasti on National Highway. A car bearing the registration number 'ML-05S 9240', coming from Diphu collided head on with a tractor near Natunbasti road under Bakalia Police Station. The injured have been identified as Frotinam Marbaniah (32), Leadingstar Dongshap (32), Chesok K Sangma (34) and Jeremiah Snabi (35) of East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya. After first aid, the injured persons were sent to Guwahati for better treatment.

Two arrested

DIPHU: The police in Karbi Anglong raided a dhaba and apprehended 2 persons with heroin. Based on prior information the police raided Rimjhim Dhaba in Khatkhati in Karbi Anglong. During the raid the police apprehended the duo and seized three identical soap cases filled with brown coloured powder, suspected to be heroin, weighing 35.33 grams. The accused have been identified as Mughaka Zhi-moni (22), resident of Khekiho Village in Chumukidima district of Nagaland and Vinato Shobe (30), resident of Project Colony in Niuland district of Nagaland. The police are investigating the matter.

Fire

MARGHERITA: A devastating fire has erupted at the Malu Gaon coal mines of Tikak colliery, which falls under Northeastern Coalfields Coal India Limited in Margherita. No persons have been injured in the fire that broke out on Friday. However, locals alleged that no fire tender, state government officials, NEC officials and police personnel arrived on the spot to douse the fire.

Modi lambasts Cong for ignoring NE

ITANAGAR, March 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday claimed that the Congress would have taken 20 years to do the kind of development work executed by his government in the last five years in the Northeast.

The PM was addressing 'Viksit Bharat Viksit North East' programme in Arunachal Pradesh's Itanagar after unveiling development projects worth ₹55,600 crore in the region.

"The Northeast is going to become a strong link in India's trade, tourism and other relations with South Asia and East Asia. Today, projects worth over ₹ 55,000 crore have been unveiled here," he said.

"The Congress would have taken 20 years to do what we have done in the last five years in the Northeast," PM Modi said.

He said 35,000 poor families from the state got permanent houses during the day.

The Prime minister said that people can clearly see what "Modi's guarantee" is if they visit Arunachal Pradesh. "The entire Northeast is watching how Modi's guarantee is working," he said.

The PM also said when he was working for the development of the country, leaders of the opposition bloc INDIA were "attacking" him. "From Independence till 2014, 10,000 km (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

World's longest twin-lane Sela tunnel dedicated to nation

GUWAHATI, March 9: The world's longest twin-lane Sela tunnel, at an elevation of 13,000 ft in Arunachal Pradesh, was dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday.

The tunnel, constructed at a cost of ₹ 825 crore by the Border Roads Organisation, is strategically crucial as it is close to the Line of Actual Control (LAC), a BRO official said, adding that it would provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang.

The project comprises two tunnels, with the first one being a single-tube tunnel of 1,003 metres in length and the second being 1,595-metre-long, with an escape tube for emergencies. It has 8.6 km-long approach and link roads.

The escape tube, constructed parallel to the main one, is connected with cross passages every 500 m, the BRO official said. In case of emergency, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



EC Arun Goel resigns as LS polls approach

NEW DELHI, March 9: Election Commissioner Arun Goel resigned on Saturday, days before the expected announcement of the schedule for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

His tenure was till December 2027.

According to a law ministry notification, Goel's resignation has been accepted by President Droupadi Murmu with effect from Saturday. It was not immediately known why he stepped down.

Goel, a retired bureaucrat, was a 1985-batch IAS officer of the Punjab cadre. He had joined the Election Commission in November 2022. Following the retirement of Anup Pandey in February and Goel's resignation, the three-member EC panel has now only Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar. (PTI)

Country's growth cannot be imagined without development of farmers, villages: Rajnath

RAIPUR, March 9: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday said the country's growth cannot be imagined without the development of farmers and villages, and asserted that the Modi government was standing shoulder to shoulder with the cultivators.

Addressing a mega farmers' rally at Government Science College ground in Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur, he also targeted the previous Congress dispensation in the state, accusing it of indulging in corruption and derailing the state's development.

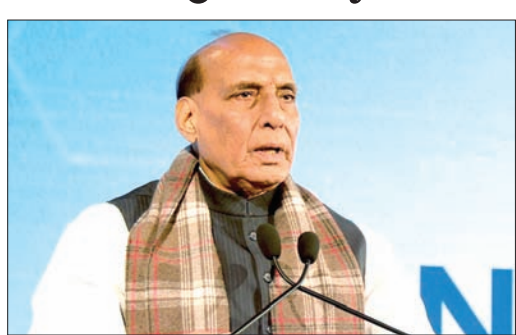
"...I am the son of a farmer and hail from a village. Farmers can yield gold from the soil with their efforts and hard work. My government is standing shoulder to shoulder with farmers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Centre has been taking several steps for the welfare of farmers," the minister said.

Without the development of farmers and villages, the growth of the country cannot be imagined, he said.

"In America, one bag of urea fertilisers is available for ₹3,000...India is the only (place) where urea is being provided to farmers at ₹ 300 per bag.

"The Russia-Ukraine war resulted in price rise but the Modi government did not allow prices of seeds and fertilizers to go up. We will not allow the problems of farmers to increase at any cost," he added.

Hitting out at the previous Bhupesh Baghel-led government in the state, Singh said, the Congress regime destroyed the state in five years. "Now I firmly believe that the Vishnu Deo Sai-led BJP government will bring the state back on the track of development with the support of the people... If anyone has the power to shape the destiny of Chhattisgarh, it is the Bharatiya Janata Party," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



No response from AICC over offer to resign as Arunachal Cong chief, so would continue: Tuki

ITANAGAR, March 9: Former Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Nabam Tuki on Saturday said that he had offered to resign from the post of the state Congress president but as he did not receive any response from the AICC, he would continue to discharge his responsibilities in that post.

Tuki dismissed reports that he had resigned from the post "on moral grounds" after the defection of three MLAs to the BJP.

Speaking to reporters, Tuki, the Sagalee MLA, said that he had sent a letter to the party's leadership on election preparedness in the state and in that letter, he had expressed his willingness to resign from the post till the elections were over.

"I had offered to resign from the post of PCC president because I am not able to assist those who intend to contest the upcoming assembly elections and campaign for them as I will also be contesting the polls. So, I thought of resigning from the post," Tuki said.

"However, I did not receive any response from the All India Congress Committee (AICC), so I would continue to carry out my responsibilities as the party's state unit president. I remain committed to serving the people of Arunachal Pradesh and the Congress," Tuki added.

APCC general secretary Gyamar Tana had on Friday claimed that Tuki has resigned on moral grounds as he could not prevent the defection (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM virtually inaugurates, lays foundation of projects worth ₹ 8,500 cr in Tripura

AGARTALA, March 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday virtually inaugurated and laid the foundation of projects worth ₹ 8,534 crore in Tripura, including an integrated check-post at Sabroom along the India-Bangladesh border, an official statement said.

The projects inaugurated by the Prime Minister include the ₹ 250-crore ICP and tap water connection to 1.46 lakh people of the state at ₹ 732.98 crore.

Modi also inaugurated the Eklavya Model Residential Schools at Rupaichari and Karbook in South Tripura district at ₹ 48 crore and four new schools at ₹ 10 crore. Several road projects were also inaugurated by him, including the up gradation of various stretches (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM interacts with women forest guards, mahouts, forest officials during visit

PM enjoys safari in Assam's Kaziranga

KAZIRANGA, March 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday enjoyed elephant and jeep safaris in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve in the state, an official said.

The PM, on his first visit to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, spent two hours in the park.

During the trip, Modi interacted with members of 'Van Durga', the team of women forest guards who are at the forefront of conservation efforts, elephant mahouts and forest officials. "Kaziranga is known for the rhinos but there are also large number of elephants, along with several other species," the PM wrote on Twitter.

He first undertook the elephant safari in Mihimukh area of the central Kohora range of the park.



Modi, donning jungle fatigue, a hat and a scarf, rode an elephant named 'Pradyumna' whose mahout was Raju, and passed through the safari route of Dagland and Fonomari area, the official said.

He was followed by a convoy of 16 elephants.

During the tour of the Kaziranga National Park, he fed sugarcane to three elephants - Lakhimai, Pradyumna and Phoolmai. The Prime Minister then undertook the jeep safari in the same forest range and stopped at the Daflang Watch Tower to get a view of the sanctuary. A tiger whizzed past the path of the Prime Minister's cascade, the official said, adding that PM Modi saw one-horned rhinoceros, wild buffaloes, deer and several birds in the jungle.

During the tour of Kaziranga, PM Modi took several pictures of the forest and wildlife.

The PM was accompanied by Kaziranga National Park director Sonali Ghosh. Other senior forest officials and security personnel were also present there.

"Interacted with Van Durga, the team of women forest guards who are at the forefront of conservation efforts, bravely protecting our forests and wildlife. Their dedication and courage in safeguarding our natural heritage is truly inspiring," the prime minister wrote on the microblogging site. The jeep and elephant safaris in the central Kohora range have remained closed for tourists since March 7 in view of the security arrangements for the Prime Minister's visit.

The jungle safari in the forest range for visitors will reopen on March 10. The Prime Minister had arrived at Kaziranga on Friday evening on a two-day visit to the state. (PTI)

PM inaugurates rail projects worth over ₹ 4500 cr from Siliguri

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated, dedicated multiple developmental projects of rail and road sector worth more than ₹ 4500 crores from Siliguri in West Bengal on Saturday.

The Prime Minister dedicated to the nation multiple electrification projects of 438.77 km of rail lines benefiting people of North Bengal and nearby region. The projects include Eklakhi - Balurghat section; Barsoi - Radhikapur section; Raninagar Jalpaiguri - Haldibari section; Siliguri - Aluabari section via Bagdogra and Siliguri - Sivok - Alipurduar Jn. - Samuktala (including Alipurduar Jn. - New Coochbehar) section.

He also dedicated other important railway projects including the project for doubling of railway line in Manigram - Nimitita section and automatic block signaling in Ambari Falakata - Aluabari, including electronic interlocking in New Jalpaiguri. The Prime Minister flagged off a new passenger train service between Siliguri and Radhikapur. Doubling of railway line in this section will facilitate movement of coal rakes to the thermal power plants. These rail projects will improve rail connectivity, facilitate freight movement and contribute to employment generation and economic growth in the region.

Earlier, the Prime Minister dedicated to the nation two railway doubling projects of 70.59 km rail lines from Jorhat in Assam. Doubling of Dhupdhara - Chhaygaon section, part of New Bongaigaon - Goalpara - Kamakhya doubling project and doubling of New Bongaigaon - (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Translation and multiculturalism: A global call

By: Dr. Neeru Tandon

“We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race” wrote Kofi Annan the seventh UN Secretary General and Nobel Peace Prize Winner on the most fundamental principle of peace: respect for diversity. The shared culture is a blessing and this can be achieved through translation of varied cultures. In translating texts we actually translate the cultures, this is voiced in the keynote address by Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee, an Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University.

Cultural differences should not separate us from each other but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity. Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for others. We may have different cultures religion and languages but this was the main focus in a dynamic three-day event held from 20th to 22nd February 2024, on ‘Translation and Multiculturalism’ in the Department of English at VSSD College, Kanpur, orchestrated a thought-provoking International Seminar on Translation and Multiculturalism.

The inauguration marked the launch of the India Reads Movement, highlighted by Prof. K Elango's insightful address and the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with ELTAI, followed by the lively address of Prof Ratan Bhattacharjee and MOU with Kaleidoscopic Indian American Society (KIAS), ushering in a new era of collaboration in the realm of translation studies. The Global Collaboration with VSSD College and Champions India Reads Initiative with MOU Signings at Translation and Multiculturalism Seminar opened a new vista of thinking and research. The Journal Illuminati in collaboration with KIAS is a landmark of research with academic luminaries from India Europe and America agreeing to contribute to it.

Distinguished guests, including Prof Vivek Dwivedi and Principal Prof. Bipin Kaushik, graced the occasion. I as the Convener felt proud to set the stage for the impactful discussions ahead. Neetu Singh, Joint Secretary of the Board of Management at VSSD College, provided guidelines for the sessions, emphasizing the importance of the linguistic and cultural exchange in the globalized world. The seminar's second session featured a keynote address by Prof. Ratan Bhattacharjee, exploring the role of translation in promoting multiculturalism and advocating for its significance in cross-cultural understanding. Dr. B.R Agrawal chaired the session, ensuring a smooth flow of discourse, while Rajesh K Yadav effectively moderated the discussions.

The subsequent session focused on “Indian Epics in English Translation,” adopting a lightning talk format. Dr. Nita Dave Jain chaired the session, guiding the audience through engaging discussions. Prof. B D Pandey, Prof Shrawan Kumar, Prof Nisha Gupta and Prof Anjita Singh gave enlightening talks. This session was ably moder-



ated by Dr Fatima Ashna. Prof. R P Pradan, at the seminar's conclusion, delivered a heartfelt vote of thanks, expressing gratitude to all participants, esteemed guests, and organizers for their invaluable contributions. Under the adept coordination of Dr. Pratyush Chandra, the International Seminar on Translation and Multiculturalism has not only provided a crucial platform for scholarly discourse but has also become a beacon of global collaboration. The distinguished presence of luminaries such as Dr Naveen Mohini Nigam, Prof. Arvind Dixit, Dr. A B Jaiswal, Prof. Manoj Awasthi, Prof. Anand Shukla, Prof. Nandlal, and Prof. Dopal added an unparalleled level of prestige to the occasion.

The overwhelming response to the seminar, with over 500 registrations from five different countries and enthusiastic participation from more than 40 institutions in India and abroad, has solidified the program as a genuine success. This international convergence of minds not only underscores the global resonance of the discussions but also highlights the substantial impact of exploring themes in translation studies and multiculturalism on a worldwide scale.

Moreover, the anticipation is palpable as more than 100 research papers are set to be presented in the next two days, adding depth and richness to the ongoing intellectual exchange. Dr. Pratyush Chandra's deft coordination and the active engagement of a diverse and international audience contribute significantly to the seminar's triumph, leaving an indelible impression on the exploration of linguistic and cultural nuances in the contemporary world. The seminar stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and the shared commitment to understanding and celebrating our diverse global heritage, it is absolutely necessary for effective and empathetic communication between different cultures. Translation, therefore, is critical for social harmony and peace.

As HOD and Convener I felt it necessary to raise the slogan ‘READERS ARE THE LEADERS’ to focus the importance of myth and culture of India including the teachings of Ram which is now spreading worldwide, and with the translation of the Bhagavad Gita into 59 languages, the entire world can internalize the exemplary values of Ram Krishna. The emphasis was on the projects of translating Indian epics that would enhance India's soft power, presenting a glimpse of

the country's rich culture and history, inspiring people worldwide to learn about India. Professor Neetu Singh, Joint Secretary of the Management Board at VSSD College, provided guidelines for the sessions, highlighting the significance of linguistic and cultural diversity in the global context. She emphasized that our culture is based on principles of equality, tolerance, and the concept of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (the world is one family).

The best way to promote our culture is through translation, sharing it with people around the world. MOU for running India Reads Campaign in VSSD College; Kanpur was signed in the presence of ELTAI Patron Prof. Elango who was the chief guest in the inaugural session today.

The book written by Dr. Shyam Babu on Ekam Manav Darshan translation done by Dr. N. M. Nigam as ‘Integral Humanism’ was released. The book was highly praised by the guests as being so relevant to current times. Eminent guests present were Dr. Shyam Babu, Prof. Nita Jain, Prof. B R Agrawal, Prof. Nivedita Tandon, Prof. Nisha Gupta, senior faculty of VSSD College were present. In a word the Conference on Translation and Multiculturalism roused interest in a global level. The young researchers are enthused to do their future projects on this area. The wonderful assistance from the young learners Vanshika Chaudhary, Samya Gupta, Researcher Shreya and students of earlier time Dr Shrawan Kumar now Dean of Humanities of Uttaranchal University made the congregation a huge success.

The significance of translation in our everyday lives is more multi-dimensional than we realize. Yes, English is a language that is pretty much everywhere. It is the third most widely-spoken language in terms of native speakers. This equals about 330 million people. If you include the people who can speak English as a second language, it is probably the most popular language in the world. But there is also the need for translating texts from various other Indian languages. There is a vast body of North East literature and language which is yet to reach a broader panorama in India and abroad. Translators will take note of this aspect for connecting different Indian cultures. (The author is a Ph.D., D.Lit, currently working as the HOD, English in VSSD College, Kanpur & may be reached at profneerutandon@gmail.com)

Nurturing a Frontier Naga Territory: A rule of the people, for the people and by the people

By: Dr. Aniruddha Babar

In the intricate web of constitutional governance and the geopolitical challenges faced by India, particularly in the northeastern state of Nagaland, the idea of establishing a Frontier Naga Territory emerges as a potential solution to address longstanding concerns related to the international borderland communities in the Eastern part of Nagaland. At the heart of this proposal lies a vision of transformation, one that not only addresses the concerns of the Government of India regarding the dynamics of international borders but also fosters a sense of unity, cooperation and justice among border communities of Eastern Nagaland. The Frontier Naga Territory needs to be envisioned as a natural border, constructed not with bricks and mortar but with the walls of familial attachment and cemented with the mutual love and respect that border communities share among their brethren across borders.

The proposed Frontier Naga Territory represents more than just a geographical delineation; it embodies a profound synthesis of socio-cultural heritage and economic revitalization, poised to redefine the landscape of the region. Rooted in the rich fabric of Eastern Naga people and their unique traditions and history, this innovative proposal offers more than just administrative boundaries; it presents a holistic solution to endemic challenges plaguing the area. By leveraging the inherent familial ties that transcend political borders, the proposed territory establishes a natural bulwark against the proliferation of illicit activities and the movement of contraband. This pioneering approach not only honours the age-old customs of the Eastern Naga community but also heralds a new era of prosperity and stability, promising to sow the seeds of harmony amidst the historically tumultuous terrain. Through a strategic amalgamation of cultural preservation and progressive development, the Frontier Naga Territory emerges as a beacon of hope, offering a paradigm shift towards sustainable peace, socio-political-economic justice and prosperity in the region.

By formalizing the Frontier Naga Territory, the government would not only acknowledge but also honour the deep-rooted bonds that have endured over time between the Naga communities spanning both India and Myanmar. This formal recognition would serve as a significant step towards providing a structured platform for fostering greater interaction and collaboration among the border communities of the two nations. Through the establishment of formalized structures, well-defined avenues for trade partnerships, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people initiatives would flourish, enriching the social and economic fabric of the region. Such engagements hold the potential to not only uplift the lives of those residing in the border areas but also play a pivotal role in fostering regional peace and prosperity. By facilitating dialogue and cooperation across borders, the formalization of the Frontier Naga Territory could serve as a beacon of hope for constitutional justice for the deprived Eastern Naga communities through sustainable development and harmonious relations in the region.

Central to the concept of Frontier Naga Territory is the empowerment of local communities to actively participate in the governance and development of their own region. Historically marginalized and neglected, border communities of the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) region in Nagaland have often borne the brunt of conflict and underdevelopment, perpetuating cycles of grave poverty and disenfranchisement. By granting them greater space in constitutional governance and decision-making authority, the central government will not only acknowledge their historical grievances but also provide a platform for them to redress past injustices and shape their own destinies. This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and agency among the local populace, catalyzing initiatives for inclusive growth that are rooted in the unique needs and aspirations of the communities themselves. Through collaboration and partnership between the government and these communities, the Frontier Naga Territory model stands poised to usher in a new era of development, equity, and sustainable progress in the region.

Empowering local communities involves more than just decentralizing administrative powers; it's a multifaceted strategy aimed at nurturing self-reliance and resilience from the ground up. Beyond mere administrative delegation, it encompasses the deliberate allocation of resources for comprehensive infrastructure development, ranging from basic amenities to robust transportation networks, thereby bridging the gap between rural and urban areas. Furthermore, it champions grassroots democracy by facilitating the election of representatives who intimately understand the intricacies of local dynamics and can effectively advocate for their constituents' interests at higher levels of governance. This bottom-up approach not only ensures that policies resonate with the distinct needs and aspirations of border communities of Eastern Nagaland, which may differ vastly from those of other areas as well as urban centers in Nagaland, but also cultivates a profound sense of ownership and pride in shaping their collective destiny. By empowering locals to actively participate in decision-making processes and equipping them with the necessary tools and resources, such as access to education and technology, communities are poised to chart their own course toward sustainable development and prosperity, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

The establishment of Frontier Naga Territory represents more than just a geographical delineation; it embodies a profound commitment to fostering peace, reconciliation, and nation-building initiatives. In the tumultuous landscape of Eastern Nagaland, where conflict has woven a complex fabric of economic disparity, political disillusionment, and social unrest, the creation of this territory signifies a pivotal shift towards a future characterized by harmony and progress. For too long, the region has languished under the shadows of turmoil, obscuring its vibrant cultural tapestry and untapped potential.

By embracing collaboration and mutual understanding, not only within its boundaries but also across borders, the government articulates a resounding message of optimism and renewal. This initiative not only seeks to address historical grievances but also seeks to catalyze a collective effort towards a brighter, more inclusive future, where the voices of all communities resonate in the symphony of nation-building. The Frontier Naga Territory, serves as a tangible manifestation of the eastern Naga people's aspirations, embodies their fervent desire for the reinstatement of constitutional rights and justice, heralding a unique experiment in governance with the pioneering model of FNT. This visionary initiative not only seeks to establish peace and foster economic empowerment but also symbolizes a profound shift away from the politics of injustice towards a future anchored in unity, diversity, and collective prosperity. More than just a geographical entity, the FNT stands as a beacon of the indomitable human spirit, evident to the resilience of a community determined to triumph over adversity. It encapsulates the unwavering hope of a people striving for a better tomorrow, where equity, dignity, and opportunity prevail for all who call it home.

The strategic importance of the envisioned Frontier Naga Territory is underscored by its geographical placement, strategically positioned as a natural border devoid of imposing concrete walls. Instead, its boundaries are to be defined by the intangible yet potent elements of familial attachment and mutual respect. Within this envisioned territory, the border communities forge an intricate web of deep-rooted connections that surpass mere geopolitical delineations. These ties, woven over generations, are imbued with a shared history and cultural kinship, creating a social fabric that can act as a robust cohesive force against external disruptions. The envisaged territory, therefore, transcends the conventional understanding of borders, offering a unique model where human connections become the bedrock of “social security” and stability, fostering a sense of unity and resilience that extends beyond physical demarcations.

Embedded within the fabric of contemporary Eastern Naga society lies a tapestry woven with threads of historical significance. The Eastern Naga community's trajectory is deeply intertwined with the annals of time, tracing back through centuries of shared experiences and cultural traditions. This historical backdrop, characterized by a resilient unity and a steadfast sense of identity, serves as the foundation upon which the proposed Frontier Naga Territory is built. By harnessing the historical camaraderie intrinsic to Naga heritage, this territorial initiative endeavors to fortify the community against external disturbances that have long loomed on the horizon. Through the consolidation of Naga inhabitants within a delineated territory, the government seeks not only to bolster strategic measures but also to cultivate an environment conducive to the effective operation of government and the governance. In recognizing the pivotal role of historical context, policymakers strive to navigate the complexities of contemporary challenges while honoring the enduring legacy of the Eastern Naga people.

The familial bonds that intertwine the Naga communities across borders serve as a poignant reminder of the resilience of human connections that defy the constraints of geopolitical boundaries. These ties, woven with the threads of shared heritage and history, possess a resilience that surpasses any man-made divisions, offering a beacon of hope for fostering harmonious relationships and mutual respect. In the landscape of the Frontier Naga Territory, these bonds manifest as a testament to the power of unity, showcasing how cultural commonalities can transcend political differences to cultivate an environment of collaboration and peace. By leveraging these familial ties, communities on both sides of the border-through the bridge that will be created by the Frontier Naga Territory in the Eastern region of the state of Nagaland- can embrace their shared identity, nurturing a sense of belonging that mitigates tensions and fosters stability. Through collective efforts guided by these shared values, the Frontier Naga Territory will emerge as a living testament to the potential for cooperation and understanding amidst diversity, paving the way for a brighter and more interconnected future.

In addition to addressing pressing ‘local’ concerns, the creation of a Frontier Naga Territory holds significant potential for fostering economic growth and cultural vitality. Positioned strategically between India and Myanmar, this territory stands poised to emerge as a pivotal trade nexus, facilitating the flow of goods and commerce across borders. Through the establishment of efficient trade routes and the enhancement of infrastructure, the region could evolve into a vibrant economic hub, offering opportunities for commerce and investment that could uplift the Naga populace and catalyze broader regional development. Moreover, beyond its economic prospects, the formation of this territory presents an invaluable opportunity for cultural exchange and enrichment, fostering greater understanding and appreciation among diverse communities. By leveraging its geographic advantage and nurturing its cultural heritage, the Frontier Naga Territory could not only bolster the prosperity of its inhabitants but also contribute positively to the broader socio-economic landscape of the surrounding region.

The establishment of the Frontier Naga Territory not only holds promise for economic development but also serves as a catalyst for profound cultural exchange. By allowing unhindered movement of individuals across its borders, the territory fosters an environment ripe for the cross-pollination of traditions, customs, and ideas. This cultural amalgamation has the potential to enrich the fabric of Naga society in the region, embracing diversity and fostering inclusivity. Through interactions spurred by the free flow of people, a vibrant fabric of cultures emerges, weaving together the varied experiences and perspectives of its inhabitants.

Such exchanges not only deepen the understanding of one another but also strengthen the collective identity of the Naga people, reinforcing the bonds that bind them together. In this dynamic landscape, cultural traditions blend and evolve, creating a unique and resilient community that celebrates its rich heritage while embracing the opportunities of a connected world. Establishing a Frontier Naga Territory entails navigating a complex landscape fraught with challenges despite its promising potential in mitigating border issues. The endeavor demands meticulous negotiations and tactful diplomacy to delineate boundaries effectively. Such a task mandates a nuanced strategy, requiring astute consideration of the myriad concerns held by all parties involved. It is imperative to uphold the rights and aspirations of the Eastern Naga populace while simultaneously addressing the local concerns of the Indian government. Striking this delicate balance necessitates a deep understanding of historical grievances, socio-political dynamics, and cultural intricacies inherent in the region. Moreover, fostering mutual trust and cooperation among stakeholders is paramount for the sustainable development and peaceful coexistence within the envisioned territory. In navigating these complexities, a comprehensive and inclusive approach is indispensable to forge a lasting resolution that fosters harmony and progress for all stakeholders involved.

In conclusion, the ascent of the Frontier Naga Territory stands as a practical and ingenious remedy for the multifaceted challenges confronting the denizens of the eastern expanse of Nagaland. This visionary concept, built upon the bedrock of historical bonds and cultural affinities within the Eastern Naga community, holds the promise not only to elevate overarching developmental measures but also to stimulate grassroots economic growth, political justice and cultural enrichment. As negotiations evolve, it becomes imperative for all stakeholders to engage in this endeavor with a collaborative spirit, recognizing the intertwined destiny that binds them. The establishment of a Frontier Naga Territory signifies more than a geographical delineation; it symbolizes a significant stride towards enduring justice, peace and prosperity in the region. By leveraging shared histories and fostering mutual understanding, this initiative has the potential to redefine the socio-economic landscape, bringing about a harmonious coexistence that transcends traditional boundaries and paves the way for a brighter and more unified future for the people of Nagaland. (The author is an academician in *Tetso College, Nagaland*)

Children struggling to survive amidst tough competition

By: Dr. Satyavan Saurabh

Actually, in this era, the entire young generation is troubled by terrible mental illness; especially student deviation has become a matter of serious concern. In our country, more than 15 out of every 100 students are being affected by suicide. They are found to be suffering from depression, anxiety, and self-harm. There is increasing tension regarding tough competition and discipline in studies etc., due to which the concern of not only the people associated with the education system but also the entire society is increasing. Family pressure, academic stress, and ambition to top studies have thrown a large section of students into deep mental depression. Children who do not fulfill their parents' dreams and perform poorly in exams have to be beaten at home. Under the pressure of exams and results, suicides of students are now becoming a common occurrence.

Mental stress has become the most common factor behind the exponential increase in student suicides. The graph of suicides of stressed students is increasing. As the exam days approach, the stress of the students starts going beyond limits. The entire young generation facing such situations during examination days has now become a matter of serious concern for the country, society, parents, and educationists. Till now, we have not been able to overcome many basic serious problems and challenges that have been prevalent in the education sector for decades.

Indian students face immense stress to compete and perform since competitive examinations have been made mandatory for admission to professional courses. The inability to handle pressure to perform, meet parental expectations, and achieve aspirations can lead to

psychological distress and later depression. The constant pursuit of academic excellence in the modern education system has inadvertently created an environment of intense pressure and competition among students. The excessive focus on academic achievement coupled with societal expectations and fear of failure has had a significant impact on the mental health of students. This has contributed to the increase in mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Given the increasing competition, many times there is constant pressure on students to perform well. They compare themselves to others and aggressively strive for perfection. This underlying pressure can manifest in various forms of mental distress, including anxiety, fear of failure, and low self-esteem. In severe cases, mental health problems can lead to self-harm, and may even lead to thoughts of suicide attempts.

The mental development of children is being hindered due to the heavy burden of competitive courses. Children are suffering huge losses due to this. A major reason for stress in the lives of children is that after long school hours, children start completing their homework as soon as they return home. After this, they run for tuition. Eating, drinking, sleeping, sports, everything becomes prohibited. They do not get time to relax and do other extra-curricular activities.

In such a situation, there is less sleep and a state of depression or severe stress for the students. In the present competitive era, cases of student suicide are continuously increasing. Exam-centric education, comparing academic excellence with the pressure of marks, studies, and performance are the key factors behind this depression in student suicides in India. A simple interview with any student preparing

for any competitive exam in India, be it JEE, NEET, or CLAT, will reveal that the major source of mental distress among students is the unbearable amount of pressure placed on them by almost every inserted by one. Every teacher and every relative reiterates the importance of studying hard and getting admission to a good college. While spontaneous inquiries about what the student aspires to do after graduating from school, or where his or her interests lie, are rarely undertaken.

The highly complex nature of all these exams (not all) essentially means that to crack them, parents have to fulfill their dream of getting their children admitted to prestigious coaching centers, making it difficult for the student in more ways than one. The problem increases as he is now under increased pressure to clear the examination to repay the money spent by his parents on coaching and he also has to face the additional pressures of the coaching institute. Unless this evil system is eliminated from the examination culture of the country, no visible change will be seen in terms of curbing the suicide rate among students. The government should take cognizance of this issue if we think that “today's children are tomorrow's future. Forced career choices lead many students to succumb to a tremendous amount of pressure, especially from their families and teachers regarding their career choices and studies. Educational institutions are not equipped to deal with the mental health issues of children and adolescents due to a lack of support and a lack of centers and trained human resources for guidance and counseling.

In such difficult times, there is a great need to study afresh the nature and tendency of suicide among students, because the entire young intellectual

property of the country is at stake, which will have far-reaching serious consequences that will bring deep worry on the forehead of the entire nation. Can the entire structure of developmental progress established on the shoulders of the youth may collapse. Students should take it as a challenge and face it with full potential. Examination is not a question of life and death. Instead of considering exam results as the ultimate basis of life, one has to create one's path to success. Without hard work, there is no success in any field of life. Parents have to understand how they should behave with their children at home. Tackling the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among students requires a multidimensional approach that involves individuals, institutions, and society as a whole. Redefining success and encouraging students to pursue their passions and interests is essential to promoting their mental health and well-being. Moving beyond a narrow definition of success based only on academic achievements allows students to explore their unique talents and find fulfillment in their chosen path.

Teachers should be trained as gatekeepers and innovative methods of examination should be adopted to reduce the risk factors of suicide. There is a need to appreciate the students and it is important to change how the Indian society views education. It should be a celebration of efforts and not marks. Effective counselling centers should be set up in all schools/colleges/coaching centers to address the anxieties, depression, and other mental health issues of the students. To address the growing crisis, there is a need to learn from past failures and take immediate steps involving all stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, institutions, and policy makers.

Gulzar's mastery: Jnanpith Award honors his poetic genius

By: Dipak Kurmi

While many are acquainted with Gulzar's enchanting film lyrics dating back to the 1960s, his literary endeavors often remain in the shadows, distinct from his cinematic contributions. However, for devoted Gulzar enthusiasts, there's exciting news – the eminent poet has been bestowed with the prestigious Jnanpith Award for the year 2023.

Every poet, in essence, is a trailblazer, a creator of new realms of thought. The seemingly ordinary titles of Gulzar's poems, such as 'Waqf', 'Khuda', 'Aansu', 'Dariya', 'Painting', 'Baadal', 'Raaf', 'Sketch', 'Guftgu', 'Post-Box', unveil a profound truth – his innovation lies in perceiving places, objects, and people through a fresh lens, offering novel interpretations with an array of words that prompt us to contemplate differently. Gulzar invites us on an expedition to unexplored mental landscapes, and upon return, we find ourselves pondering why we hadn't embarked on such contemplation earlier. This essence of Gulzar's poetic prowess radiates brightly each time his pen graces the paper.

Gulzar's poem 'Dastak' resonates with an eerie power, etching an unforgettable impression on those who delve into its verses. Set against the backdrop of a disrupted dream, the poem unfolds with the unsettling tapping at the door in the dead of night, emanating from unseen visitors across the border.

Embracing them into his abode, the poet extends the timeless embrace of Punjabi hospitality, a testament to enduring bonds that transcend geopolitical boundaries. A symbolic gift, the jaggeri (gur) presented by the guests holds profound meaning, symbolizing the sweetness of friendships forged in the abun-

dant harvests of bygone years, now marred by the scars of Partition and conflict. Yet, in the poignant moment of reunion, the dream is shattered abruptly, like glass, as the disquieting news of gunfire at the border pierces the tranquility of the night.

Dastak
Subah subah ik khwaab ki dastak par
darwaza khola, dekha
sarhad ke us paar se kuchh mehmaan aae hain
aankho se manus the saare
chehre saare sune saunae
paani dhoye, haath dhulae
aigan mein aasan lagvae...
aur tamam pe makki ke kuchh mote mote rot pakae
polti mein mehmaan mere
pichhle salon ki faslon ka gur laae the

Aankh khuli to dekha ghar mein koi nahin tha
haath laga kar dekha to tamam abhi tak bujha nahin tha
aur hoiton par mithe gur ka zaiga ab tak chipak raha tha
Khwaab tha shayad! Khwaab hi hoga!
Sarhad par kal raat, suna hai, chali thi goli
sarhad par kal raat, suna hai kuchh khwaabon ka khun hua tha!

In a stark contrast between warm hospitality and the harshness of violence, the

poem skillfully navigates the delicate tightrope between hope and despair, between the fragility of dreams and the unyielding reality.

Rich sensory details weave through the narrative, injecting it with a tangible realism. The lingering taste of gur on the lips serves as a poignant reminder of fleeting moments of joy amid the tumult of existence. Throughout the verses, a mournful refrain persists: 'Khwaab tha shayad, khwaab hi hoga' (Perhaps it was a dream! Yes, it must be a dream!). This haunting repetition resonates with uncertainty and disbelief, encapsulating the poet's inner turmoil as he grapples with reconciling the ephemeral nature of dreams with the harshness of truth.

In the days of Partition, a youthful Gulzar found solace in the pleasant memories of his childhood spent in Dina, his birthplace now situated in Pakistan. However, the seismic shifts of 1947 left indelible marks on Gulzar's psyche, bearing witness to apocalyptic experiences and harrowing scenes of barbarity. The echoes of that tragic epoch resurface in both his prose and poetry, etching a lasting imprint on his artistic expressions. As an Urdu poet at heart, Gulzar garners no less adoration from his Pakistani readers. He bestowed the endearing title of 'Baba' upon the late Ahmad Nadim Qasmi, a prominent short story writer and poet from Pakistan, symbolizing the affectionate bond forged through the guidance and encouragement Gulzar received from him.

Gulzar's love for languages knows no bounds. While he commenced his poetic journey in Urdu, a realm he still gracefully occupies, his linguistic repertoire extends across Hindi, Bengali, Bhojpuri, various Indian and Pakistani dialects, and even Sanskrit.

In the dance of his verses, a poem may initiate i n

Urdu but dons ornate embellishments from an array of languages.

'Urdu Zabaan', one of his poetic masterpieces, serves as a testament to the enchanting allure of the Urdu language. Within a single page, verses unfold, lavishing praise upon its richness and splendor. Describing the act of speaking Urdu as akin to the wafting fragrance of expensive qimam upon a betel leaf, the experience is portrayed as intoxicating – a sensation that engulfs the senses, leaving one mesmerized. Amid the intricate tapestry of Urdu, the poet discerns an air of aristocratic elegance, a noble dignity that transcends mere words, even when their meanings may elude comprehension. It stands as a language woven with the threads of history and tradition, bearing the weight of centuries past, yet perennially vibrant and alive.

Through the prism of Urdu poetry, the poem delves deep into the profound resonance that this language imparts to the human soul. It transcends mere communication, evolving into a vessel for cultural identity and a sense of belonging – a thread weaving individuals together across diverse backgrounds and origins. The poem's structure gracefully mirrors the fluid cadence of Urdu itself, allowing its essence to flow seamlessly.

The refrain, 'Ye kaisa ishq hai Urdu zabaan ka?' (What kind of love is this for the Urdu language?), echoes throughout, prompting reflection on the rarity of such a tribute within Urdu poetry. How many poets within the Urdu tradition have crafted odes to the very language they wield in their verses? The answer remains elusive – perhaps a few, perhaps none.

Let's delve into the realm of two succinct poems by Gulzar: 'Ruh Dekhi Hai Kabhi!' and 'Landscape.' While not inherently mystical, Gulzar occasionally conjures echoes reminiscent of Rumi, Hafiz, or Bulleh Shah. 'Ruh' plunges into the profound depths of the human spirit, posing intricate inquiries about the essence of the soul and its elusive nature. It challenges readers to reassess their perceptions of existence and question whether they have truly experienced the intangible facets of life.

The poet navigates a delicate path, urging readers to peer into the recesses of their being – a journey fraught with uncertainty and risk. The refrain, 'Ruh dekhi hai, kabhi ruh ko mehsoos kiya hai?' (Have you ever felt it?), encapsulates the central theme, beckoning readers into introspective dialogue.

With vivid imagery, Gulzar weaves a tapestry of sensations, enveloping the reader and drawing them into deeper contemplation. Yet, this task is not without challenges. The poet grapples with the daunting endeavor of awakening dormant minds from their existential stupor. In a world where spiritual guides or religious preachers often see their roles as mere recruiters to faith, Gulzar stands as a solitary figure, wielding his words as tools of enlightenment.

Ruh Dekhi Hai Kabhi!
Ruh dekhi hai?
kabhi ruh ko mehsoos kiya hai?
jagte jite hue dudhiya kohre se lipat kar
saans lete hue us kohre ko mehsoos kiya hai?
Ya shikare mein kisi jhil pe jab raat basar ho
aur paani ke chhpakoñ mein
baja karti hoñ talliañ
subkyañ leti hawaon ke
wo bain sune hain?

Chaudhvin-
rat ke barf se ik chand ko jab
dher se saae pakadne ke liye bhagte hain
tumne sahil pe khade girje ki diwar se lag kar
apni gahnai hui kohk ko mehsoos kiya hai?
Jism sau baar jale fir wahi mitti ka dhela
ruh ik baar jalegi to wo kundan hogi

Ruh dekhi hai, kabhi ruh ko mehsoos kiya hai?

In 'Landscape,' against the vast canvas of a desolate shoreline, a poignant tableau unfolds – an aged palm tree, weathered by the passage of time, stands in stark contrast to its youthful counterpart flourishing with vitality. This visual dichotomy reflects the profound duality inherent in life: one burdened by the weight of years, the other pulsating with the

promise of tomorrow. Amidst the haunting silence enveloping the scene, the elder tree, steeped in solitude, aches for the warmth of companionship. Its weathered form becomes a poignant symbol of unexpressed longing, personifying the human experience. The silent plea for conversation echoes the reader's own yearning for connection. As the poem reaches its climax, the elder tree implores its youthful counterpart: 'Yaar! Sard sannaata hai! Tanhaai hai! Kuchh baat karo!' (Friend, it is so cold, silent, and desolate! Say something!), adding a layer of emotional depth to the desolate landscape.

Within these words, we confront a timeless truth – a moment of vulnerability where language falters, and the weight of silence casts a profound shadow. It mirrors our own encounters, where the pause in dialogue compels us to search for words that can bridge the gap and dispel the uneasy stillness. Even as the poem reaches its conclusion, the lingering question persists – an invitation to introspect, urging us to reflect on the myriad instances in our lives when conversations stumble, leaving us to navigate through the echoing silence. In this poignant depiction of yearning and connection, we discover reflections of our shared humanity, serving as a poignant reminder of the enduring potency of words to mend the frayed strands of silence and weave bonds that transcend the sands of time.

Gulzar's creativity finds its emblem in innovation, particularly embodied in his creation of a poetic form known as Triveni – a concise three-line poem that stands distinct from Haiku. Gulzar elucidates the metaphorical underpinning of this technique by inviting us to envision the sangam, where Yamuna, Ganga, and Saraswati converge. While the two rivers are visible, the third remains concealed beneath the surface. In the Triveni, the third line encapsulates the reaction of the hidden Saraswati, rendering any speculative interpretation meaningless.

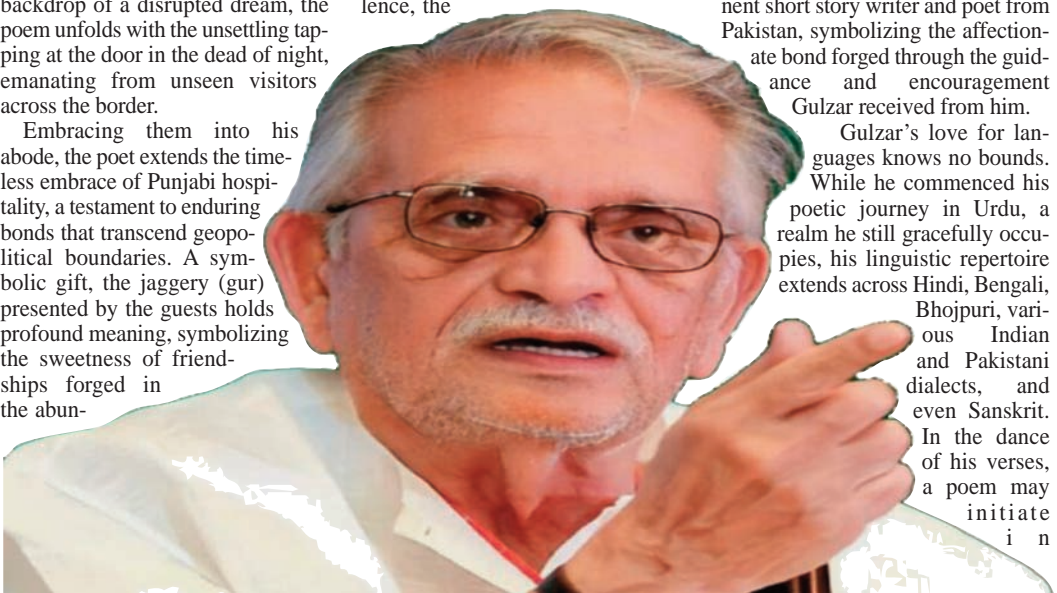
This concluding line might serve as an explanatory comment, elucidating the meaning of the preceding two lines or introducing a novel element.

In essence, it awakens us to a voice devoid of a face, yet its presence reverberates throughout. It is the voice of completeness often overlooked in our lives – a subtle reminder of the holistic perspectives we may overlook in the hustle of our existence.

The Jnanpith Award crowns Gulzar's literary journey, arriving just weeks after the publication of 'Baal-O-Par' – an opus spanning over 1,200 pages housing 650 poems, presented in both original Urdu (transcribed in Devanagari for accessibility) and translated into English by Rakshanda Jalil. Gulzar effortlessly transitions between languages, employing clear and simple expressions. However, the true challenge lies in encapsulating the mithaas (sweetness) inherent in his Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi verses. The poet meticulously scrutinized each line, dissecting the translator's output word by word. The outcome is a collection of translated poems that seamlessly mirror the original work, a remarkable feat underscoring the depth of linguistic nuance in Gulzar's poetry.

To label it a 'collected poems' implies a sense of completeness, an attempt to encapsulate the very essence of the poet. However, can a poet's oeuvre ever truly be confined to a single space? Can it ever be deemed concluded, even in the wake of the poet's departure from this world? Consider the example of Ghalib, whose ghazals continued to surface a century after his passing, unveiling layers of his artistry previously undiscovered. His words reverberate across time, resonating in the hearts of those who encounter them.

When we read Ghalib, we aren't simply perusing his work; instead, we partake in a timeless dialogue with the poet – a conversation that spans generations. This holds equally true for Gulzar, whose verses form an unending stream of consciousness, effortlessly flowing through the corridors of our minds. He speaks, and we, enraptured by the beauty of his words, listen intently. There's immense pleasure in suspending our judgment, quietly immersing ourselves in the poet's voice. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)



Bhaona: A critical overview

By: Arup Saikia

The first Bhaona performed in Assam through "Chinha Yatra". Chinha Yatra is the first pantomime drama of Saint Sankaradeva of Assam. Later in course of time, Bhaona penetrated all the nook and corners of Assam. Almost all sections of people residing in Assam embraced Bhaona culture. It's not confined to religious boundaries. Therefore Bhaona found acceptance among different ethnic groups irrespective of caste and religion. As a result of immense popularity Bhaona attained the status of national festival of Assam. There are many different types of Bhaona culture in Assam.

Royal recognition:
Like the Bihu of Assam, Bhaona also got royal recognition or partial patronage. It is also known that Bhaona was held at the royal court during the reign of Ahom monarch Rudrasingh. But all the Bhaonas performed in the royal court are not Ankiya or written by the creator Sankerdev. So far history traces, besides Sankerdev's Ankiya, the another prominent Bhaona was - Nrisingha Yatra. The famous Saint Doittari Thakur had authored the script. The Baresahariya Bhaona (People's Bhaona) was started during the reign of monarch Kamaleswar Singha in 1797 in Jamugurihat. There are many examples of Bhaonas held during the reign of Rajeshwar Singh, Kamaleswar Singh and others. Competitive environment was also created for the Bhaona artists. The good performers are rewarded with cash prizes. It is said that seven hundred acts performed throughout in the Bhaona held by His Majesty Rajeshwar Singh to show the kings of Manipur and this is another variety of, Nowgong's Hazari or Jamugurihat's Baresahariya Bhaona.

These examples can authenticate that Bhaona was a very popular and respected culture during the reign of the Ahom kings. The Ahom monarchs also maintained relationships with the monasteries (Satras). After the British took over the rule from the Ahom kings, a Golden Jubilee celebration was held in Sivsagar in 1887 during the reign of Queen Victoria. The devotees of Kamalabari Satra also performed a non-ankiya Bhaona. The scripts of the Bhaonas were written by the head of the monasteries.

Bhaona and bhakti movement:
Bhaona is a medium to popularize the Bhakti movement or cult. Bhakti cult is born out from the union of Vedic Lord Krishna worship and popular tribal cult. This religious doctrine is called Bhakti or Neo-Vaishnavism. According to scholars, the three terms - Bhagavat, Bhakti (Devotion) and Bhakta (Devotee), which occupy the main place in the path of devotion, refer to the owner of the property of a particular tribal group, i.e. Bhagavat. The person who receives a share of the property is called a devotee. And the devotion is the share of the property (Bhagavat). As time went on, Bhagavat is revered as God and the

devotee was considered as a follower of God. Subir Jaiswal, author of, The Origin and Development of Vaishnavism, says:

"The terms bhagavat, bhakti and bhakta are intrinsically related with one another, and that the bhagavat originally denoted Primitive tribal group which owned all tribal wealth, bhakti meant a share thereof and bhakta and individual who had received such a share. In course of time the bhagavat came to be regarded as god, and bhakta, who was a member of the tribe, came to be looked upon as belonging to him and as his devotees." The Kacharis lived near Batadrava or Bardowa, the birthplace of Sankaradeva. In short, Sankaradeva was easily acquainted with the tribal cultural environment from childhood. Therefore, there is no doubt that Sankaradeva had a deep understanding of tribal society.

So, it is quite natural that the saintly poet Sankaradeva was sympathetic to tribal life when he went to spread neo-Vaishnavism. This was a mixture of devotee-God or Bhagavat devotion, which emerged from a tribal background. Scholars believe that the Barahi king Mahamanikya, who patronized Madhav Kondoli, ruled in the present-day Nagaon region. As a product of the Bhakti movement, Bhaona is quintessentially related to the ethnic people of Assam. So ingredients of Bhaona are taken indigenously. (Details described in- Bhaona, it's origin and development)

Necessity of changes:
Change in the world is inevitable. Change begets beauty and beauty subscribes to our mindset to flourish culturally. Culture is a universal religion. It is natural that people's sense of humour changes with the passage of time. Bhaona was created 550 years ago based on the needs and sensibilities of the people of that era. Therefore, it is wrong to claim that the original Brajawali Bhaona Sankaradeva himself performed can satiate the artistic appetite of the people of modern world with immense historical value. The immense progress of science and technology deeply motivates everything.

Therefore, it is necessary to reform some aspects of Bhaona and provide a standardized form to improve the artistic aspects without destroying the originality. Accepting the changing times is the gateway to development. Therefore, it is essential to reach some scientific and universally acceptable conclusions through diligent systematic study so that the uniqueness of the Bhaona can be preserved. But we have to establish it as a more attractive, enjoyable and spectacular art form. It is worth mentioning that in order to establish Bhaona in the world arena, it is necessary to emphasize the artistic aspect rather than the underlying religious practices. The scientific and universally accepted or amused strategies of performance will guide the performers in the presentation of the artistic aspects of the Bhaona in all kinds of modern stages and repertoires.

Time span:

This matter I have written from the experiences of our foreign shows. The people of the developed countries remain very busy. They can't spare more than one hour or one and half hour time for cultural shows. In the past, and even now, in some places of Assam, the Bhaona haona starts in the evening and continues until next full light morning. Even gayan, bayan (Orchestra) or sutradhari (Anchor) take more than two hours. In today's busy society of the mechanical age, most people are not willing to enjoy Bhaona so long. Therefore Bilap, Poyar (Passionate expression of grief) or other dialogue should be shortened sustaining the tempo of the particular scene. Moreover the overall performance time of a Bhaona should be limited to two hours excluding orchestra and sutradhari. Bhaona is ofcourse traditional, but the technique of performance (Not style) should be like professional mobile theatres of Assam. The Assamese mobile theatre is the most popular performing show in terms of artistic presentation. Locally we expect Bhaona to be poised as popular professional drama of mobile theatre in all kinds of stages including makeshift.

Script selection:
Many people today also like to perform only Ankiya Naats of Sankaradeva only. They are mentally averse to perform other Bhaona dramas fearing to be deviated from the true path of Bhaona. This is absolutely not true. Sankaradeva only wrote seven Ankiya dramas including diminished Chinha Yatra. Art can't survive without entertainment. Nobody will artistically enjoy the same scene or drama years after years. So new creation of Bhaona scripts are essential. Which will echo new time tested dramatic innovation on the more root of Sankaradeva's Ankiya. Moreover there is no such thing regarding indigenous or non-Assamese theatrical institution. Ankiya Naats are itself the result of a combination of several theatrical institutions. Without exaggeration, Sankaradeva drew resources from non-Assamese Raasleela, Yakshagana, Indian classical dance forms etc including Assamese resources such as Ojapali dance, puppet dance, Kushangan, Deodhani dance, etc. It is worth noting that Saint Sankaradeva did not name the plays he wrote as 'Ankiya Naat'. He uses only words like 'Anka', 'Yatra' and 'Naat' to describe drama. So dramas of Bhaona can be created endlessly on pan-Bharat perspective. Yatra resembles the Bavai, Tamasha and Nautanki of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh respectively. Yatra derived its name from religious processions of devotees in Bengal. They move from one place to another singing and dancing to the tunes adoring lord Krishna. Summarily the term Ankiya labelled in the dramas of Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva may be to honour them by their follower saints. (The author is noted cultural enthusiast, writer and actor of Assam. He can be reached at arupsaikia07@gmail.com)

Art and culture: Icons to inspire new generation

By: Amar Krishna Paul

School final examination period is getting over soon. Having completed the examination, students will get at least 30 days of vacation. To utilise this vacation, the State Art and Culture Department and Union Ministry of Culture may organise cultural events to popularise the ethnic heritage among the students. These students will be the future of the nation. They should know their rich heritage and unique cultural identity. Leading cultural legends may impart special training on the rich traditions. In other words, the students may take wise lessons from the cultural icons to practice their very own heritage. The award-winning celebrities may inspire the young students to practice and preserve the rich culture including traditional music, song and dance of the Northeast.

It's a moment of joy. Majuli in Upper Assam has secured the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag, acknowledging its traditional arts of mask-making and manuscript paintings recently. The GI tag, bestowed by the Centre, recognises the rich cultural heritage and historical importance in connection with these traditional folk crafts. NABARD's Assam Regional Office, which has been facilitating the GI registration of unique products, stated that the GI tags are recognition of the rich cultural tapestry of Assam, with the two products representing its heritage.

Actually, Majuli's manuscript paintings describe Vedic scriptural stories like Lord Krishna's pastimes. It offers a pictorial presentation of colourful heritage in manuscript writing styles - Gargayan script, Kaithali, and Bamunia. The GI tag not only protects these crafts but also shines a global spotlight on Majuli's artistic prowess. Manuscript painting is practiced on the barks of Aquilaria malaccensis, locally known as 'Sashi' (agarwood tree). A long-lasting indigenous impermeable ink and colours extracted from natural ingredients are used to paint on the bark. Accordingly, the mask making of Majuli is an age-old art form in the island, dating back to the 16th century. It is one of the most famous traditional crafts still practiced in Majuli, the world's largest inhabited river island. It has been an integral part of the 'Sattriya' culture of Assam. It is largely practised in the Satras, Vaishnavite monasteries or centres of learning, and individual craftsmen residing in the villages of Majuli. Both the art forms grew in medieval Assam under the guidance of 'Sarvagunakar' Srimanta Sankaradeva.

If a person gets due recognition from competent authority for specific work in the form of award, honour during lifetime then it may be counted as the highest reward for him or her. Influencers and leading personalities are being awarded or honoured along with all states of India by different organisations serving at the national and State level from time to time.

On March 6, 2024 President Droupadi Murmu presented Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowships and Awards for the year 2022 and 2023 to leading personalities of India in music, dance, drama, art, etc. in New Delhi. She said that art is not just for the sake of art. It also has a social purpose. According to her, there are many such examples in history, when artists used their art for social welfare. Artists have been contributing to the awakening of society through their creations. Indian art is the best example of India's soft-power.

She opined, "Today mental issues like stress and depression are increasing. There are several reasons for this. One of the reasons could be focusing more on material happiness rather than spirituality. Connection with art makes us creative. Art provides a way to discover truth and gives meaning to life."

It fact, the President conferred Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards (Akademi Puraskar) for the years 2022 and 2023 to 91 eminent artists (two joint award) in the field of performing arts in the special investiture ceremony held on March 6, 2024 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi. Out of 94 artists selected for Akademi Awards, three (3) artists could not attend the award ceremony due to ailing health. The Akademi Awards have been conferred since 1952. These honours not only symbolize the highest standard of excellence and achievement, but also recognize sustained individual work and contribution. The honour of Akademi Fellow carries a purse money of ₹ 3, 00, 000 (Ru-

pees three lakhs) while the Akademi Award carries a purse money of ₹ 1,00,000 (Rupees one lakh), besides a Tamrapatra and Angavastram.

The first citizen of the country gave away fellowships and awards to a few artists and drama personalities from Northeast India. They include - Dulal Roy (Guwahati, Fellowship Award), Gobinda Saikia (Sattriya), Karuna Borah (Other Major Traditions of Dance and Dance Theatre- Ankiya Bhaona), Helen Giri (Folk & traditional Music 2023, Meghalaya), S. Noyonshakhi Devi (Manipuri), Gunakar Dev Goswami (Direction), Olen Megu Damin (Folk & Traditional Music & Dance, Arunachal Pradesh), Tarawati Bori (Folk /Traditional, Music, Assam), Chingtham Ranjeet Khuman (Thang Ta, Manipur), Lakshahira Das (Overall contribution in performing arts, Assam), Latasana Devi (Manipuri dance), Bhaben Borbayan (Sattriya), Urmika Maibam (Manipuri), Dimpee Baishya (Sattriya), Chow Saratham Namehom (Folk Music, Arunachal Pradesh), Binita Devi (Puppetry, Assam), Moirangthem Kendra Singh (Nata Sankirtan, Manipur), Pukhrabam Reepa Devi (Manipuri), Mukunda Saikia (Sattriya), and so on.

A citation about Assam's noted drama personality Dulal Roy asserts: "Born on April 1, 1943 in Guwahati, Assam, Dulal Roy is an alumni of the National School of Drama, New Delhi and the Film & Television Institute of India. Dulal Roy, has left a mark on the theatrical landscape with his profound and thought-provoking works. With a career spanning several decades, he has crafted plays that resonate with audiences across generations. Dulal Roy's plays delve deep into the complexities of human emotions and societal issues, offering poignant reflections on life and its myriad facets. His narrations are rich with compelling characters, intricate plots, and powerful dialogues that captivate audiences and leave a lasting impact. As an actor, director and playwright, Dulal Roy has shown his strong competence in many languages. Dulal Roy has served as the Project Director of Sattriya Kendra, Guwahati and In-charge of Sangeet Natak Akademi's North East Centre, Guwahati. He has also served as a member of many prestigious committees. Dulal Roy has received numerous awards and honours like the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, Chamanlal Memorial Award, Natasurjya Phani Sharma Award, and Natya Bhaskar Samman. Dulal Roy is elected Fellow of Sangeet Natak Akademi for his contributions to Indian theatre."

The way forward

The Sangeet Natak Akademi under the National Akademi of Music, Dance and Drama, New Delhi, has been carrying out the work for preservation and promotion of performing arts in different parts of the country and strengthening and protecting our intangible cultural heritage. The Central Government should increase the budgetary allocations for boosting the rich and colourful heritage of the Northeastern States.

Of late, the Arunachal Pradesh Government has erected a statue of legendary music composer and singer Bharat Ratna Bhupen Hazarika at Bolung village in Lower Dibang Valley. The ten feet bronze statue, sculpted by Biren Singh Guwahati, was erected in the village in 2017. Hazarika also produced the first Arunachalee content based film in Hindi 'Mera Maa Mera Dharam' in 1976 and shot his Assamese film 'Rashmi Rekha' in 1971-72 in Arunachal Pradesh, the 'Land of Dawn-lit Mountains'.

To sum it up, India is inching ahead keeping an equal pace with other countries of the world in bagging a wide range of awards and honours. This is a good trend. In a word, the concerned agencies and government departments must keep a regular tab on the yeoman's services of the noted people of all states to honour them with awards from time to time. The upcoming generation will definitely learn many wise lessons from leading legends in art and culture. With the help of new media platforms, the tech-savvy new generation will also be motivated by them to carry forward the rich heritage of NE at the international arena soon. (The author is a Guwahati-based writer and analyst on Current Affairs. He can be reached at amarkrishnaghy@gmail.com)

PM unveils ₹ 290 crore devp projects in Meghalaya

'Northeast is the 'Ashtalakshmi' of India'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, embarked on a significant journey to the Northeast, inaugurating a plethora of developmental projects aimed at fostering growth and prosperity in the region. A total of ₹ 55,600 crores worth of projects were inaugurated, spanning across various sectors crucial for the region's growth.

Attended by chief ministers and dignitaries from all Northeastern states, the programme was virtually attended by Phagu Chauhan, Governor of Meghalaya, Conrad K Sangma, chief minister of Meghalaya, among others.

As the Farmers' Hostel and Training Centre was inaugurated, 500 farmers attended the Farmers' Hostel and attended the inauguration virtually.

Prime Minister Modi inaugurated multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 290 crore in Meghalaya, including laying the foundation stone for key initiatives. Notable projects for which



the foundation stone was laid include the construction of an IT Park in Tura and the expansion of a new four-lane road, along with converting an existing two-lane road into four lanes at New Shillong Township.

Additionally, Prime Minister also inaugurated a Farmers' Hostel-cum-Training Centre in Upper Shillong, along with avenues aimed at promotion of sports,

tourism and education in the state.

The Farmers' Training Centre in Upper Shillong, established on May 2, 1973, significantly contributed to the advancement of farmers in East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Southwest Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi, and Eastern West Khasi Hills through various training programs.

However, due to the deteriorating condition of the old Assam

type building, a new construction was initiated under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme RKVY 2018-19 was completed in 2023-24. The Training Centre aims to modernise farming practices, promote organic farming, distribute inputs, and raise awareness about nutritional values.

In his address, the Prime Minister emphasised the vision of 'Viksit Bharat- Viksit Northeast,' underlining the government's relentless pursuit of development and prosperity in the region. He launched the Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialisation Scheme (UNNATI), a groundbreaking initiative aimed at bolstering industrial development in the Northeast with a holistic outlay of ₹ 10,000 crore.

PM Modi further said, "Northeast is the 'Ashtalakshmi' of India. Our government is committed to development of the Northeast."

Chief minister Conrad K Sangma, taking to his X handle, thanked the Prime Minister and wrote, "Viksit Bharat Viksit

North East' programme has given us the vision and confidence that under your leadership our Nation and the region can move forward. Your commitment for accelerating progress and development is guiding us to work with the common agenda of making Northeast the growth engine of India."

Highlighting the government's focus on women empowerment, the Prime Minister spoke about the Government's ambition to have 3 crore Lakhpati Didi.

Notably, Meghalaya's efforts in uplifting women through various projects and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), significantly increasing their economic participation and empowerment has been commendable with the number of SHGs rising from 4,500 to 45,000 in just 6 years.

As a symbol of unity and celebration of development in the Northeast, Prime Minister Modi urged people to illuminate their mobile phone flashlights, commemorating the transformative journey ahead.

Zero development under BJP rule: Manipur Cong

IMPHAL, March 9: The Manipur Congress party on Saturday accused the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre as well as in Manipur of misleading the people with false narratives of development and youth empowerment.

Addressing the media at Congress Bhavan in Imphal on Saturday, Congress leader and former legislator from Ukhrul, Alfred Arthur alleged that nothing meaningful change in the field of development and youth empowerment was brought about in the last ten years of BJP-led NDA government at the Centre. In the state too, the BJP-led government did not bring any change. There is no development or empowerment of youth in the state, he said.

While they did nothing, these governments are blaming the previous Congress government only to cover up their failure and fooling the people with false narratives of development and youth empowerment, he alleged.

Citing an example, Alfred pointed to Sangshak village in Ukhrul district where no improvement in the economic status of the youths of the village is seen despite 10 years of BJP rule.

During Congress rule, the job card holders used to get jobs for a

maximum number of days in a year under MGNREGA, he claimed. However, since the BJP-led government came to power, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of days, he added.

Under the scheme, a job card holder has to get 100 days of work in a year. However, under the incumbent government, the job card holder could not get a job for even 10 days in a year.

This showed a drastic decline in social security of the citizens under the BJP government.

Foundation stones for various development projects worth crores of rupees were laid by the leaders of the BJP-led NDA across the country but no ground work for years, he said. Alfred said that in fact, there is zero development in the country as well as in the state under the BJP rule and stressed the need for urgent action to address the ever increasing unemployment among the youths of the country and state.

Attending the press conference, Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) vice president Hareeshwar Goswami reiterated the purpose of AICC leader Rahul Gandhi's ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra and said that unemployment is a crucial issue of the country. (NNN)

Arunachal: BJP MLA Phosum Khimhun dies at 63

ITANAGAR, March 9: BJP MLA Phosum Khimhun died in a hospital in Itanagar on Saturday morning following cardiac arrest, his family said.

Khimhun, the MLA of Changlang South in Changlang district, was 63. He is survived by his wife and two children.

He was first elected from the seat as an Independent MLA in 2004. In 2009, he won the seat as a Congress nominee.

In the 2014 Assembly elections, he again won as a People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) candidate and retained the seat in 2019 as a BJP candidate.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu expressed sorrow over the death of the lawmaker.

"I am shocked at the passing away of Hon'ble BJP MLA Shri Phosum Khimhun from Changlang South assembly constituency. My deepest condolences to the bereaved family members, friends, kin and followers!" he posted on X.

The chief minister said that Khimhun was dedicated to the service of his people, the region's development and the growth of Arunachal Pradesh.

"Will ever miss his camaraderie, commitment and concern for the state's inclusive progress. May Lord Buddha grant eternal peace to the departed soul and strength to his near and dear ones to cope with this agonising moment," he added. (PTI)

NEST (I) submits DPR to restart Uranium mining in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, March 9: The North East Sunshine Trust (India) has recently submitted a detailed project report (DPR) to the Centre for restarting the Uranium mining project in Meghalaya.

In a letter to Union Minister of State, Department of Atomic Energy Dr Jitendra Singh on February 26, founder trustee and chairperson of NEST (I) Elizabeth Mathews Nongbri said, "A detailed project report on the restarting Uranium Mining Project in Meghalaya has been prepared by our team."

Nongbri said that, "In November 23, during a National Ex-Servicemen Convention at Kurukshetra, I met with Col Pravat Kumar Panda (Retd), Independent Director, Uranium Corporation of India Ltd (UCIL). He brought up the subject of restarting the Uranium mining project in Meghalaya. As you are aware GOI surveys indicate vast deposits of Uranium in West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya.

Exploratory efforts to mine this extremely valuable and precious resource seventeen years ago could not progress, due to vested interests stonewalling the efforts by building up adverse public opinion against the venture. UCIL was forced to shut down its office in Shillong. The agreement between the Centre and State of 2009 to permit lease of land in West Khasi Hills for pre-mining activities, was

cancelled in 2016. The estimated quantity of the deposits is vast, adding up to enormous commercial value. While other states like Jharkhand have been able to benefit from the much smaller deposits in their area, Meghalaya is sitting on such an enormous quantity of natural resources and is unable to benefit from it."

"NEST (I) with its grass roots contacts and expertise available would be in a position to make this a workable proposition. We have the necessary withdrawal in terms of engagement with the local people, ability to convince them of the vast benefit accruing to the region, and the prospects of a vastly improved lifestyle in case of relocation," she stated.

Giving a brief summary of the Policy Document and Framework for Execution, the letter to the DAE said that "the proposed uranium mining projects in Meghalaya, spared concerns from various stakeholders.

Past opposition led to revocation in 2016, but the Central government persists. Stakeholder concerns include environmental impact, socio-economic implications, and a lack of transparent communication."

It also said that "the primary objective is to develop and implement sustainable solutions addressing uranium mining concerns in Meghalaya.

The plan aims for a balanced ap-

proach reconciling economic aspirations with the preservation of cultural and environmental heritage, setting a model for responsible resource utilisation."

"Guided by the principles of transparency, environmental stewardship, social equity and community empowerment, the action plan emphasises understanding stakeholder concerns, conducting independent environmental impact assessments, adopting best practices, exploring alternative economic development, and strengthening the legal and regulatory framework. Recognising the importance of grass-roots organisations, the plan proposes their empowerment as a counterbalance to existing opposing organisations. Initiative includes recognition, capacity building and inclusion in decision-making, fostering dialogue, and building trust. Integrated seamlessly into the existing action plan, this addition contributes to community representation and collaborative decision making," it further added.

Nongbri in her letter also said, "Our interactions at the grass root levels indicate that a favourable environment to recommence the activities could be created, provided that some members of our Trust are involved in decision making points in UCIL."

"Some members of the local communities, who have formerly served

with the Soil & Conservation Department, Government of Meghalaya, are now part of our team. They would be instrumental in generating a favourable public opinion for restarting the project. They have requested for a formal facilitation of a visit to UCIL's ongoing mining projects in Jharkhand, in order to be able to prepare a credible case for garnering sufficient public support," she said while adding, "We have done a lot of hard work in carrying out interactions and meetings with citizens who are the major stakeholders in restarting mining operations."

She further claimed that the economic benefits accruing to the rural population from resumption of this activity will bring enormous benefits to them. Besides, the valuable natural resource will greatly assist the vision of the PM in actualising a state of Viksit Bharat.

"We request for an opportunity for some members of our women team, who are Viksit Bharat Ambassadors from matrilineal Meghalaya, to be able to physically present the Policy Document and Framework for Execution to the PM and concerned officials of UCIL at New Delhi, as convenient. Incidentally, Meghalaya ranks as one of the three most impoverished states in the country," she concluded in the letter. (NNN)

Manipur begins deportation of Myanmar nationals

IMPHAL, March 9: Seven Myanmar nationals who entered Manipur illegally were recently deported with officials saying that it was the first batch of 78 foreigners to be deported in the next four days.

An official source said that the seven Myanmar nationals were taken up to Moreh by a chopper from where they would be handed over to the officials of the Myanmar authorities at the Indo-Myanmar border gate.

A total of 78 Myanmar nationals who were in the foreigner detention centre in Imphal will be deported in batch-wise from March 8 to March 11. Among the 78 foreigners to be deported in the next four days included 51 women, five children and 22 men.

The first batch of seven Myanmar nationals (women and children) was taken to Moreh by a chopper from Imphal airport. The immigrant office on the Indian side will hand them over to the Myanmar authorities.

"First batch of Myanmar nationals who entered India illegally deported today," Manipur chief minister wrote in his Facebook page.

Singh added, "Although India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it has given shelter & aid to those fleeing the crisis in Myanmar on humanitarian grounds with a systematic approach."

An official source said that a total of 78 Myanmar nationals who entered Manipur illegally will be deported from March 8 to March 11, in batches. (NNN)

FKJGP opposes re-opening of Uranium mining

SHILLONG, March 9: The Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo People (FKJGP) earlier on Friday expressed strong opposition against the attempt by the NEST (India) to restart the uranium mining project in Meghalaya.

The NEST (India) had recently submitted a DPR to the Union Minister of State, Department of Atomic Energy Dr Jitendra Singh for restarting the uranium mining project in the state.

In a statement, FKJGP general secretary Eldie N Lyngdoh said that the state government is demanding not to allow such organizations to create law and order situation in the state due to the issue of uranium mining.

"In fact, the issue of uranium mining in Meghalaya is already a closed chapter due to stiff opposition from the public," he said. He also warned the NEST (India) to refrain from making such an attempt to revive the uranium mining failing which the FKJGP would have no option but to step in and do what is necessary.

"The FKJGP along with other NGOs, will never allow mining of uranium in Meghalaya as it is a matter of life and death of the people and the state," he stated. (NNN)

PM virtually inaugurates projects in Nagaland

KOHIMA, March 9: Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated the completed projects and laid foundation stone of new projects of NE States, including Nagaland under CS schemes from Arunachal Pradesh on Saturday.

The PM inaugurated a total of 7 completed projects and laid foundation stones of 5 projects which include widening of important roads in Wokha and Zunheboto districts of Nagaland.

The virtual launching of the Viksit Bharat - Viksit Nagaland was live-screened by the NIC wherein Dy CM Y Patton; minister road and bridges G Kaito Aye; minister power, parliamentary affairs K G Kenye and chief secretary J Alam including the AHOs and HoDs of the concerned department and several state government officials were present. (NNN)

Marcuise distributes inputs for Upper Chibok Watershed Project

HT Correspondent

WILLIAMNAGAR, March 9: Meghalaya Soil and Water Conservation minister, Marcuise N Marak, distributed inputs for Upper Chibok Watershed Project at Bawe Duragre playground near Williamnagar on Saturday.

During the distribution of the beneficiaries of watershed project, Marcuise said that developmental projects are being streamlined through various departments of the government and to uplift the standard of living of the people of the state.

The soil and water conservation department has spent about Rs 400 crore to construct small multipurpose reservoirs to revive the sources of water in the state.

He also lauded the initiatives taken by Corbeth Homa D Sangma, the divisional officer of Soil and Water Conservation, Williamnagar.

495 ILP defaulters detected in Kohima

KOHIMA, March 9: A total of 495 Inner Line Permit (ILP) defaulters were detected within Kohima district in the past recent days, an official statement said.

A verification drive was carried out all over Kohima district from March 6 to 8 by a Task Force team consisting of the district administration and police to detect illegal immigrants, Inner Line Permit (ILP) defaulters.

During the verification, cases of expired ILP permit and non-possession of ILP permit were detected and accordingly penalties were imposed as per section (2), (3) and (4) of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) 1873.

A total of 495 ILP defaulters were detected within Kohima district, out of which 308 were detected from Kohima area, 59 from Chiephobozou sub-division and 128 from Sechü Zubza subdivision. A total amount of Rs. 2,15,400 (Two lakh fifteen thousand four hundred) was realised as penalty and has been deposited as Government revenue.

The Task Force constituted will be conducting periodic checking for detection of illegal immigrant and ILP defaulters within Kohima district. (NNN)

Meghalaya Govt champions community empowerment and urban development

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 9: The Government of Meghalaya steadfast in its commitment to fostering community empowerment, promoting cleanliness, and driving urban development was on full display as chief minister Sangma himself spearheaded various activities on Saturday as a part of the ongoing 'My City' campaign, showcasing the government's dedication to citizen involvement and urban progress.

A notable highlight of the campaign was the allocation of cheques worth Rs 11.75 lakhs to 12 localities for cleanliness and beautification initiatives. These funds are earmarked for a range of projects including the redesigning of bus-stops, ensuring litter-free streets, organizing community cleanliness drives, waste collection efforts, and enhancing urban landscaping.

Distinguished dignitaries including Dr. Vijay Kumar D, IAS, Commissioner and Secretary, S C

Sadhu, Deputy Commissioner of EKH, E Kharmalki, Director of Urban Affairs Department, Government of Meghalaya, and PK Boro, CEO of Shillong Municipal Board, actively participated in the campaign, further underlining the government's commitment to sustainable urban development.

Chief minister Sangma's interaction with shopkeepers in Dhanakheti, Shillong, urging them to uphold cleanliness standards and install dustbins in their establishments, reflects a grassroots approach to urban revitalization. Moreover, the launch of the "Reimagining Streets Initiative" at the MIIT campus in Shillong marks a pivotal step towards creating pedestrian-friendly spaces, with plans to develop 12-15 kilometers of footpaths in the city's initial phase.

In his address, chief minister Sangma reiterated the government's emphasis on infrastructure enhancement and community participation in driving the state's de-



velopment agenda. He highlighted the importance of the Quarterly Cleaning Drive Program, emphasizing the need for a shift in mindset, infrastructural improvements, and sustained community engagement.

A significant aspect of the campaign is the government's commitment to regular funding, with provisions set to allocate funds every three months for cleanliness



In the 2023 Assembly polls, he was defeated by Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha.

Saha emphasised that as part of the INDIA opposition bloc, the Congress will contest the Lok Sabha polls in collaboration with the CPI(M). With the Congress

announcing its candidate in the West seat, the CPM is expected to field a candidate in the Tripura East constituency, a seat reserved for the Scheduled Tribes.

"We want to strengthen the unity of all opposition political parties against the BJP and appeal to all political forces to unite against the saffron camp to save democracy," he told reporters.

Saha clarified that the understanding between the Congress and CPI(M) as INDIA alliance partners extends to the state as well.

Regarding seat sharing with Congress in Tripura, veteran communist leader and former chief minister of Tripura, Manik Sarkar affirmed that their party is against the BJP and is in favour of uniting the entire opposition. He added, "Our doors are open for discussion." (PTI)

Meghalaya making substantial investments towards various initiatives including the creation of parking spaces, beautification projects targeting junctions and localities, and infrastructure upgrades aimed at empowering communities.

With ongoing projects worth approximately 520 crores and plans for administrative and knowledge cities totalling around 9,200 crores, Meghalaya demonstrates a holistic approach to development. Initiatives like the Martin dumping ground cleanup project underscore the government's commitment to sustainable urban growth and environmental stewardship.

Chief minister Sangma issued a poignant call to action, urging every citizen to take responsibility for maintaining cleanliness in their surroundings. With a steadfast vision and unwavering commitment, Meghalaya charts a course towards a future where each citizen contributes to shaping the destiny of the state.

Bihar govt will form committee to take stringent action against land mafia: Shah

'People like Lalu Prasad have done nothing for the betterment of OBCs and extremely backward classes'

PATNA, March 9: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said the newly-formed NDA government in Bihar will set up a committee for taking stringent action against land mafia allegedly patronised by RJD president Lalu Prasad.

Shah made the statement at a public meeting in Paliganj, about 50 km from Patna, organised by the BJP OBC Morcha.

"People like Lalu Prasad have done nothing for the betterment of OBCs and extremely backward classes. All they have been doing is grabbing land belonging to 'pichhda' and 'ati-pichhda'," he alleged.

The allusion was apparently to the land for jobs scam, pertaining to the RJD supremo's tenure as the railway minister in the Manmohan Singh government, being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Many members of Prasad's family have been named as accused in the case.

Shah said, "Today, I want to warn all the land mafia. The double-engine government is back in Bihar. The NDA government will take stringent action ('ulta latkakar sidha kar degi') against all the land mafia."

"A committee will be set up by the new NDA government to look into all cases of land grabbing and recommend stern action," said Shah, who was on his



first tour of Bihar since the BJP returned to power in the state, following the return of chief minister Nitish Kumar to the NDA.

He also berated the opposition, alleging that the top brass of the Congress and RJD always worked for the interest of their families but did not do anything for the poor.

"The top brass of the Congress have always taken care of their families. In the name of backward people, Lalu-ji also lived his entire life for his family. Sonia Gandhi's only goal is to make Rahul Gandhi the prime minister, while Lalu-ji's aim is to make his son the chief min-

ister," he claimed.

"If anyone can do good for the poor then it's only Narendra Modi and the BJP," he added.

Shah, who was addressing the "pichhda ati-pichhda sammelan", also slammed the Congress, an ally of the RJD, for its failure to honour former Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, an OBC stalwart.

He underscored that Thakur had formed his government, which is remembered for introducing quotas for the backward classes, with the support of Jan Sangh, the BJP's predecessor.

"Our 84 MPs had also supported the

government of VP Singh who implemented the recommendations of Mandal Commission. Rajiv Gandhi had given a two-hour-long speech, vociferously opposing quotas for OBCs," he said.

Shah also teased Prasad by recounting the arrest of BJP stalwart Lal Krishna Advani in Bihar three decades ago.

"Was it not Lalu who got Advani-ji arrested? But he could do nothing when PM Modi presided over the consecration ceremony at Ayodhya," he said.

In 1990, Advani was mobilising public opinion in favour of the Ram temple through a "Ram Rath Yatra", which was stopped with his arrest in Samastipur.

Prasad was then the chief minister of Bihar and he prides himself on having ordered the move which is said to have earned him the unflinching support of a generation of Muslims in the state.

The Congress-RJD combine was also flayed by the home minister on the issue of Article 370, which was "done away with by Modi in his second term as the PM, and Kashmir was fully integrated with the nation".

Shah, who is widely regarded as BJP's principal strategist, expressed confidence that the NDA will once again sweep the Lok Sabha polls in Bihar, riding high on the goodwill enjoyed by Modi and the "double-engine government" in the state. (PTI)

Fire breaks out inside MP secretariat complex, nobody injured



BHOPAL, March 9: A major fire broke out on the third floor of a building in the Madhya Pradesh secretariat complex 'Vallabh Bhawan' here on Saturday morning, but no one was injured and the flames were extinguished after five hours, officials said.

Personnel of the Army, National Disaster Response Force and police firefighters joined the municipal fire brigade in fire-doubling operation.

It being a Saturday, the government offices inside were closed and the premises were almost empty when the fire broke out around 9.30 am, sources said.

While chief minister Mohan Yadav directed officials to take necessary steps to prevent such incidents in the future, state Congress chief Jitu Patwari claimed it was a "conspiracy" to destroy the evidence of corruption.

Patwari and Leader of Opposition in the assembly Umang Sarang staged a sit-in outside the secretariat for a couple of hours, seeking a CBI probe into the fire.

"The fire has almost been put out," the Bhopal Municipal Corporation's Fire Of-

ficer Rameshwar Neel told PTI around 3 pm.

Around 40 to 50 fire tenders and water bowers (tankers) including a few from the Army fought the blaze, he said.

Asked if sacks containing papers lying on the secretariat premises had been removed before the fire started, Neel said he had no information in that regard.

Some sanitation workers near gates 5 and 6 noticed smoke coming from the building around 9.30 am and alerted authorities, sources said.

"I was in Bhopal, and I learnt that a fire has broken out on the third floor of the old building of Vallabh Bhawan. I sought information from the collector and asked the chief secretary to monitor the situation. The fire has been brought under control," chief minister Yadav told reporters.

"A directive has been issued to (take steps to) prevent such incidents and ensure that no papers and no important files are destroyed. I hope that such incidents do not recur," he added.

Patwari claimed this was the fifth incident of fire at Vallabh Bhawan since the BJP came to power in 2003.

"Which files have been burnt? Of which departments?" the Congress leader asked in a statement, alleging that the fire was a "conspiracy" of the BJP government steeped in "corruption, indebtedness and crime" to destroy the evidence.

State BJP spokesperson Pankaj Chaturvedi dismissed Patwari's tirade, stating that the opposition party has not established a single charge of corruption in all these years and it should instead look at the record of the UPA government. (PTI)

NCB arrests ex-DMK functionary in international drugs trafficking case

NEW DELHI, March 9: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Saturday said it has arrested Jaffer Sadiq, a former DMK party functionary in Tamil Nadu, in connection with an international drugs trafficking investigation case estimated to be worth more than Rs 2,000 crore.

Sadiq was arrested on Saturday from Delhi, NCB deputy director general (operations) Gyaneshwar Singh told PTI.

The federal anti-narcotics agency has termed Sadiq as the "mastermind and kingpin" of this illicit network spread between India, Australia, and New Zealand.

Sadiq, a producer of Tamil films, was recently expelled by the ruling DMK from the party after his name and purported links to the drugs network were mentioned by the agency. He was the Chennai West deputy organiser of the DMK's NRI wing.

The opposition BJP and AIADMK in the state have been targeting the DMK over the matter.

Last month, the NCB said, it arrested three people, all hailing from Tamil Nadu, and seized 50 kg of narcotics-making chemical pseudoephedrine during a raid at a godown in Delhi.

The searches by the NCB along with the special cell of the Delhi Police came about on a tip-off they received towards the end of 2023 from the Australian and New Zealand authorities about "large quantities" of pseudoephedrine concealed in desiccated coconut powder and mix food powder being smuggled into their countries from India.

An additional input from the US DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) indicated that the source of these consignments was in the national capital, the NCB had said in a statement.

The three arrested persons allegedly said that a total of 45 pseudoephedrine consignments were sent by them over the last 3 years, containing about 3,500 kgs of pseudoephedrine valued at over Rs 2,000 crore in the international market, as per the NCB.

The NCB since then had been looking for Sadiq to "ascertain the source" of this pseudoephedrine and had also raided his premises in Chennai recently.

Alleging that the state has turned into a den of drugs under the DMK rule, AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said on Friday that Chief Minister M K Stalin owes an explanation to the people on how Jaffer Sadiq gained access to a senior police officer.

"Jaffer Sadiq became close to the DMK leadership and even obtained a gift from a DGP. This is very unfortunate and anguishing and needs to be condemned," Palaniswami told reporters in Chennai. Pseudoephedrine is a highly addictive synthetic drug, and even though it has some legal uses, it is classified as a controlled substance in India, bringing strict regulation on its production, possession, trade, export and use.

Illegal possession and trade of pseudoephedrine is punishable up to 10 years of imprisonment under the NDPS Act. (PTI)

On basis of caste census, economic mapping will 'uproot' 50 pc reservation limit: Rahul

NEW DELHI, March 9: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday underlined his party's resolve to conduct a caste census if voted to power, asserting that based on this right step along with economic mapping, the 50 per cent cap on reservation would be "uprooted".

Gandhi said the Congress' slogan is "count" because that would be the first step towards justice.

In a post in Hindi on X, the former Congress president said, "Have we ever wondered who is poor? How many are there and in what condition? Is it not necessary to count all this?"

The caste survey conducted in Bihar revealed that 88 per cent of the poor population comes from Dalit, tribal, backward and minority communities, Gandhi said.

"The figures from Bihar are just a small glimpse of the real picture of the country, we do not even have an idea in what condition the poor population of the country is living in," he said.

"That is why we are going to take two historic steps -- caste census, economic mapping -- on

the basis of which we will uproot the reservation limit of 50 per cent," he said.

This step will "X-Ray" the country and provide correct reservations, rights and share to everyone, Gandhi said.

"This will not only help in making the right policies and

plans for the poor but will also help in rescuing them from the struggle of education, earning, medicines, and connect them to the mainstream of development," the Congress leader said.

"Therefore, wake up, and raise your voice, caste census is your right and it will take you out of the darkness of difficulties, towards the light," he said.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said a comprehensive socio-economic caste census will

help the government to understand the various aspects related to the people.

This will reveal the financial condition of every family as information related to property, debt burden, land and income will be available, Ramesh said.

"The existing caste structure of the country will be known. It will be known which group is prosperous and which is struggling with deprivation," he said.

Data on economic deprivation from the 2011 socio-economic caste census have been used by the central and state governments for a number of purposes -- from identifying MN-REGA beneficiaries to food security beneficiaries, he said.

The socio-economic caste census was a revolutionary step in



Blow to Cong as former Union minister Suresh Pachouri, ex-MP Rajukhedhi among leaders who join BJP

BHOPAL, March 9: In a significant political development in Madhya Pradesh, veteran leader and former Union minister Suresh Pachouri bid adieu to his five-decade allegiance with the Congress, and joined the BJP on Saturday. Pachouri, accompanied by former MP Gajendra Singh Rajukhedhi and a cadre of ex-MLAs, joined the BJP in a ceremony in presence of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, state BJP president V D Sharma, and former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan at the Bharatiya Janata Party's state headquarters.

This move marks a notable setback for the Congress party in Madhya Pradesh, as an increasing number of its members are opting to join the ruling alliance. Pachouri, 71, a long-time associate of the Gandhi family, had a notable political career within the Congress, having served as minister of state for defence

and as a four-time Rajya Sabha member. His criticism of the Congress post-defection highlighted the party's shift towards caste-based politics. At the function, Pachouri said he had entered politics to serve the society and the Congress would talk about establishing a casteless society.

"...But now they are talking about caste. In the last few days, the political and religious decisions (taken by the Congress) made me uneasy," he said, apparently referring to the party's move to decline the Ayodhya Ram temple consecration ceremony invitation.

"I have served in the Defence Ministry. Never were questions raised about the Army's bravery. There was never a talk to provide 'evidence' (as sought by Congress leaders regarding the 'surgical strikes')." Pachouri said while defending his decision to shift from Congress to the BJP. (PTI)

Shah, Naidu hold second round of talks over TDP-BJP alliance

NEW DELHI, March 9: Telugu Desam Party president N Chandrababu Naidu held second round of talks with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J P Nadda on Saturday as the two parties worked to seal their alliance for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Lok Sabha and assembly polls will be held simultaneously in Andhra Pradesh. Rebel YSR Congress Party MP K Raghu Rama Krishna Raju said the alliance will soon be officially announced and said the coming together of the BJP, TDP, and Jana Sena Party is essential to rid the state of the "devil" ruling it -- a swipe at Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy-led party. Naidu, a former Andhra Pradesh chief minister, and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan had met Shah and Nadda on Thursday too.

Senior TDP leader and Rajya Sabha MP K Ravindra Kumar had on Friday said that the BJP, the Jana Sena, and his party have decided in principle to work together for upcoming polls and the modalities are being worked out. (PTI)

Navy commanders explore ways to boost combat prowess in strategically-located island territories

India recently commissioned a new naval base at Minicoy in Lakshadweep islands to enhance its combat prowess

NEW DELHI, March 9: Top commanders of the Indian Navy carried out a comprehensive review of the security challenges facing the nation in the maritime domain and vowed to work towards boosting the combat capabilities of the force including in the strategically-located island territories.

India on Wednesday commissioned a new naval base, INS Jatayu, at Minicoy in Lakshadweep islands to enhance its combat prowess amid China's increasing forays into the Indian Ocean region.

Ways to further strengthen India's maritime prowess figured prominently at the naval commanders' conference that concluded on Friday.

While the inaugural session of the conference was held onboard aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya on March 5, much wider deliberations on operational issues took place in the national capital on March 7 and 8.

The Navy said the proceedings in Delhi included a review of major operational,



material, infrastructure, logistics and personnel related initiatives.

"Besides, the senior naval leadership reviewed existing and future plans, including capability enhancements in the island

territories, to mitigate contemporary and future challenges in the maritime domain," it said in a statement on Saturday.

"Service chiefs of the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force also engaged with the

naval commanders, sharing their assessments of the operating environment, outlining readiness levels to defend national interests amidst prevailing and evolving security challenges," it said.

The Navy said numerous areas and domains to enhance tri-services synergy and cooperation figured in the discussions.

It is learnt that the naval commanders also deliberated on the overall situation arising out of Houthi militants targeting various cargo vessels in the Red Sea and other strategic waterways in the region in response to Israel's military offensive in Gaza.

In the last few weeks, the Indian Navy extended assistance to a number of merchant vessels in the Western Indian Ocean following attacks on them.

In his inaugural address at the conference, defence minister Rajnath Singh commended the "brave and prompt" response by the Indian Navy to the recent incidents and developments in West Asia and the adjoining seas.

Singh exhorted the commanders to remain poised for operations across the spectrum of conflict while underscoring the leadership role expected of the Indian Navy towards ensuring peace and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region.

In addition, he emphasised the importance of tri-services jointness and integration to favourably shape and influence the future battlespace.

The naval commanders' conference serves as a platform for naval commanders to discuss important security issues at the military-strategic level as well as interact with senior government functionaries under an institutionalised framework.

On the sidelines of the conference, the naval commanders also interacted with various think tanks during a 'Sagar Manthan' event on Friday.

The forum provided an opportunity to engage with MSMEs, innovators and academia to deliberate ways, means and novel avenues to enhance self-reliance in defence production. (PTI)

New office in Guwahati, Tezpur, Dibrugarh

LIC HFL non-performing assets low in Assam against national average: CEO

By Hiranva Barman GUWAHATI, March 9: LIC Housing Finance Limited managing director and CEO Tribhuvan Adhikari said that non performing assets of Assam is all time low of 2.8 percent against national average of 4.26 per cent.

Talking to The Hills Times, Adhikari said that Indian economy is witnessing a robust growth with increase in individual purchasing power.

"The outlook for housing market is robust due to pause in rate-hike cycle, in addition to strong economic growth. The infrastructure push initiated by the government has resulted in improved demand across the country. Affordable housing segment remained strong in tier-2 and tier-3 markets. We remained focused on this segment, as it gives an opportunity to millions of aspiring Indians to own their home with a moderate budget. In addition to business growth, our endeavour has been to improve service standards through ongoing digital transformation of our processes. Jan-Feb-March are usually the most important business months for us and going by the current trends, we expect to close this financial year with healthy numbers," Adhikari said.

He said that in Assam and Tripura LIC Housing Finance has disbursed ₹ 2,668 cr as loans in Northeast for the quarter ended in



December 2023. The total loan disbursement for eastern India stands at 13785 cr for the same period. Nationwide loan disbursement is ₹ 2,81,606 crore against individual loan disbursement of ₹ 2,38,500 crores.

New LIC HFL offices are coming up in the country with three branches in Assam. One each in Dibrugarh, Di9spur and Tezpur. Adhikari further said that LIC

HFL is coming up with new individual loan scheme with interest loans starting from 8.35 per cent.

Acknowledging the low digital footprint of LIC HFL the managing director said that a revamped approach towards digital presence is now been mulled upon. A new mobile app on the occasion will be launched next month. This app is expected to consist of new features and updates.

Currently, digital app HOMY of LIC HFL is catering services to mobile users.

During the nine months ended December 31, 2023, total disbursements stood at ₹ 40705 crs as against ₹ 48088 crs for the same period of the previous year. Out of this, individual home loan segment registered disbursement of ₹ 34803 crs, as against ₹ 41053 crs.

Total disbursements under project loans stood at ₹ 1059 crs as against ₹ 1143 crs for nine months ended December 31, 2022.

The Company's Revenue from operations during this period was ₹ 20292 crs as against ₹ 16242 crs, up by 25%. Net Interest Income (NII) for nine months was ₹ 6413 crs as against ₹ 4340 crs during the same period of previous financial year, up by 48%

Profit before tax (PBT) for nine months in FY2024 was ₹ 4577.74 crs as against ₹ 2112.22 crs during the same period previous year, up by 117 %. Net profit after tax for the nine months ended December 31, 2023, was ₹ 3674.59 crs as against ₹ 1710.75 crs during the same period previous year, up by 115 %, a press release stated.

LIC HFL based is strong in Mumbai, Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Chennai, Bangalore. In Assam it is showing tremendous growth particularly in North Guwahati as recently it is going to be an industrial hub.



Artistes from Mahagami Gurukul Arts Research Foundation, Aurangabad performing "Abhirma" choreography by renowned Odissi and Kathak Exponent Parwati Dutta organised by Sangeet Natak Akademi at Srimanta Sankardeva International Auditorium in Guwahati. UB Photos

State BJP president welcomes PM's initiative in state

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: State BJP president Bhabesh Kalita welcomed the projects worth ₹ 18,000 cr inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to the state.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is on a visit to Assam, inaugurated ₹ 18,000 crore projects for the state and sent a new message towards development of the state. The Prime Minister's initiative for the comprehensive development of the state was welcomed by the State President Bhabesh Kalita.

Kalita through a press statement stated, "The erection of the 84-foot-high statue of Lachit Barphukan, the symbol of courage and bravery of Assam, will establish the heroic story of this great hero of Assam on the entire country and world map. The state president thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for visiting Kaziranga as the first Prime Minister of the country to do so. He said the Prime Minister's visit to Kaziranga will open new horizons in the tourism sector in the state. Bhabesh thanked the PM for approving projects to increase the treatment capacity of Digboi and Guwahati refineries and said that this decision will have far-reaching impact on the



economy of Assam. Assam has set a record for the highest number of PMAYG beneficiaries in the country in a single day by distributing 5 lakh 55 thousand and 555 Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana houses to beneficiaries from the same place under the Prime Minister's Divine Scheme. The President added that the dual railway was a long-standing

demand of the people of Assam and Prime Minister Narendra Modi fulfilled this long-standing demand by inaugurating the 176 km dual railway from Dhupdhara to Shailgaon. He also thanked the Prime Minister for inaugurating the ₹ 3,992 crore project for the oil and natural gas pipeline from Barauni to Guwahati.

Maple Bear Canadian Preschool celebrates 5th Annual Day

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: Maple Bear Canadian Pre-school located at ABC, Guwahati celebrated its Annual Day for the year 2023-24 with full enthusiasm and cheer at Pragiyoti ITA Cultural Centre Machkowa on Saturday.

Renowned social worker Kamla Goyal, Praveen Goyal, young women entrepreneur Nidhi Praveen Goyal inaugurated the Annual Day function by lighting the lamp in the presence of many prominent dignitaries and personalities.

Owner Nidhi Praveen Goyal said that the theme for the Annual day was 'Gratitude' for little kids as to inculcate thankfulness and love for everyone from their beginning. Toddlers and Kids have performed various mesmerising performances including tribute to Assam's Hero Bir Lachit Borphukan.

She further added that the purpose of organising such events is to offer a platform full of opportunity



for these young ones to showcase their talent, gain experience and exposure. The children who performed were amongst the age group of 2 to 6 years. The event also had a parenting session by Dr Pooja Jaiswal on Child Nutrition. Parents and audience were enthralled by the multifaceted cul-

tural features and folk dance performances by little dancers. The programme ended with the graduation ceremony of class Senior Kindergarten where parents and teachers were seen being emotional. Few parents spoke about the excellent school management and education delivered by Maple

Bear, they were happy with progress of their ward. Maple Bear is a part of an international pre-school chain that offers pre-school and day care facilities based on Canadian methodology which is in absolute sync with New Education Policy 2020, Government of India, a press release stated.

Guv and First Lady visit Dibrugarh



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria along with the First Lady Anita Kataria visited the Mancotta Tea Estate in Dibrugarh on March 9.

The duo also witnessed the sunset at the Bogibeel bridge in Dibrugarh followed by a visit to the Dibrugarh Water Supply Project under AMRUT. They also offered prayers at the Jagannath Temple in Dibrugarh.

Body recovered

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: Body of a young man identified as Ajit Boro has been recovered from Nandini Lodge at Basistha in the city on Saturday.

Sources said his body which was recovered from room no 306 from the lodge was marked by injuries.

Basistha police has been currently investigating the matter.

Pisach poster releases today

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: The first look video and poster of Assamese movie Pisach will be unveiled at Jyoti Chitran on Sunday.

Assamese actor Jatin Bora and singer Simanta Sekhar, Bidya Sagar will be present on the occasion.

Unforgettable Performances, New Competitions, and Record-Breaking Attendance

Alcheringa attracting crowd on Day 2



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 9: Alcheringa, the annual cultural festival of the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati continue to enthrall visitors on its second day. It began on March 8 marking an unforgettable day filled with a plethora of events and activities that captivated the entire campus. Alcheringa 2024, the cultural extravaganza hosted by the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, continued to captivate audiences on its second day with a series of electrifying events, remarkable competitions, and sensational performances.

Day 2 witnessed the introduction of new and exciting competitions, including BeatBash and Rap Battle, adding a fresh and dynamic dimension to the cultural festivities. These competitions showcased the incredible talent and creativity of participants, drawing immense enthusiasm from the audience. During the daytime, Alcheringa 2024 presented two pro shows that left attendees in awe. Italian female artist Assurdite graced the stage, delivering a mesmerizing performance that transcended cultural boundaries. Following her act, DJ Roy took

control of the decks, setting the crowd on fire with his infectious beats, creating an atmosphere of pure euphoria. As the sun set, anticipation reached its peak for the much-anticipated Crescendo Night, touted as the most awaited night in the entire North East India. The highlight of the night was the breathtaking performance by the renowned and immensely popular singer, Armaan Malik. The soulful tunes and charismatic stage presence of Armaan Malik captivated the audience, creating an unforgettable experience for the 45,000 people who attended.

The Crescendo Night of Alcheringa 2024 has now become a historic moment, marking its place as one of the most successful and memorable events in the cultural landscape of the region. The overwhelming response from the audience showcased the festival's ability to bring together people from diverse backgrounds and create an atmosphere of unity and celebration.

Alcheringa 2024 continues to be a beacon of creativity, talent, and cultural exchange, reinforcing its position as one of the premier cultural festivals in India. The organizers express their gratitude to the performers, participants, and the enthusiastic audience for making Day 2 an exceptional success. As the festival progresses, Alcheringa promises even more excitement, entertainment, and cultural immersion for the days to come.

The Media and Outreach Head for Alcheringa 2024, Lakshya Kohli said that on the second day of Alcheringa, the atmosphere buzzed with excitement and anticipation as multiple events unfolded throughout the day. The crescendo night lived up to its expectations, delivering a memorable experience for all. Armaan Malik, a renowned artist, took the stage as the headlining performer. The crowd erupted in cheers as he graced the event, creating an electric atmosphere that resonated throughout the venue.



Assam Pradesh Mahila Congress president Mira Borthakur campaigning along with other Mahila karyakartas for upcoming Lok Sabha election in Guwahati. UB Photos

Movie Sringkhal screened at Cotton University on the occasion of International Women's Day

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 9: Guwahati: On the occasion of International Women's Day, the Department of Mass Communication, Journalism, and Media Studies, Cotton University, in collaboration with the Assam State Film (Finance and Development) Corporation (ASFFDC) organized a special screening of the movie Sringkhal (2014) directed by Prabin Hazarika at the university premises on March 8, 2024. The film with its themes of widowhood in rural Assam aligned with the spirit of International Women's Day.

The screening was attended by the faculty members, students and staff from various departments of the varsity. Director Prabin Hazarika who could not attend the screening due to some unavoidable circumstances extended his best wishes to the organizers over phone.

Following the screening, the viewers also took part in an

interactive session which was moderated by Ashutosh Roy, a postgraduate student of the department. During the interactive session, students shared their feedback and reflections on the film, discussing its themes, portrayal of characters, and its relevance to contemporary societal issues. The students appreciated the nuanced writing of Dr Bhabendranath Saikia and relatable aspects of village life and culture shown in the movie. While discussing the use of visual symbolism in the movie, the students also shared insights about the way in which pigeons were being used to represent desire, peace and well being which runs as a dominant theme in the movie. Dr Sayanika Dutta, HoD, Department of Mass Communication, Journalism, and Media Studies, Cotton University also pointed out how the character's strength and versatility, combined with her vulnerabilities, contributed to her portrayal as an

empowered woman. She also offered insightful critiques of the film.

The interactive session provided a platform for meaningful

dialogue and exchange of ideas among the attendees, fostering a deeper understanding of the film's message and its significance in the context of International Women's Day. It underscored the importance of fostering dialogue and understanding on gender-related issues at large. The event was coordinated by faculty members of the Department Dr Kuntala Das and Kalpajyoti Bhuyan.



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Shakti opened the door for fusion music in India: Grammy winner V Selvaganesh

NEW DELHI, March 9: Percussionist V Selvaganesh says fusion band Shakti, which last month won the Grammy for its latest album, has inspired many young musicians since its formation in the 1970s.

The 57-year-old musician credits founding members of Shakti -- guitarist John McLaughlin, percussionists Zakir Hussain and TH 'Vikku' Vinayakram, and violinist L Shankar -- for starting India's first fusion band.

"John ji, Zakir bhai, L Shankar ji, and my father (Vinayakram) are the musicians who opened the door for new music, fusion music."

"Of course, before that Pandit Ravi Shankar ji had collaborated with western musicians, but as a band Shakti is the gate opening for each and every fusion band in India. If you see it from that moment, the youngsters who start a group, this band is the inspiration for them," Selvaganesh told PTI in an interview.

The percussionist, who plays kanjira and ghatam, was in the winning team of McLaughlin, Hussain, vocalists Shankar Mahadevan and violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan.

He narrated a mythological story to describe his involvement in creating 'This Moment', which recently won the Grammy in the best global music album category. Shakti, founded in 1973, has undergone several changes with new members joining over the years.

Drawing a parallel with a squirrel in the Hindu epic Ramayana that helped build the bridge to Lanka by carrying pebbles, Selvaganesh credits the founding members for the success and believes the new members are "just add-ons".

"I follow in their footsteps because they never expect anything, they just give their 100 per cent to music. They just work. And after 50 years of this band, it was considered the best global music album. So that goes to the founders, that's their property, their treasure. We are all just add-ons," he said.

"In Ramayana, when they were building the bridge to Lanka, there was one squirrel that came to help, so I feel that way. But I am taking honour and Shakti is my family too," he added.

The Chennai-based percussionist joined the band in 1999 when it was rebranded as 'Remember Shakti' along with mandolin player U Srinivas and then Mahadevan.

Over the next few years, a number of artistes worked with the group, including flute maestro Hariprasad Chaurasia, percussionist Taufiq Qureshi, and santoor player Shivkumar Sharma.

The band regrouped in 2021 to create another album under the name of 'Shakti', as a result of which 'This Moment' was released in June 2023.

Selvaganesh said he has learned to take his legacy in his stride and stay receptive to new ideas, a lesson he learned from his father, a ghatam pioneer.

"I am never nervous because my mind is always open to learning. One thing I have learned from my father is to keep it open. Sitting and learning is one thing but what you learn stays on-stage forever with you. When you make a mistake, you learn. I never get nervous, I get excited at every concert," he said.

The musician will be presenting the 'Ghatam Symphony' at the second edition of Mahindra Percussion Festival at Bengaluru's Prestige Srihari Khoday Centre for Performing Arts on March 23 with his father, brother Umashankar and son Swaminathan. (PTI)



Kartik Aaryan starts shooting for 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3'

MUMBAI, March 9: Actor Kartik Aaryan on Saturday started shooting for the third installment of the horror comedy franchise "Bhool Bhulaiyaa", which he described as the "biggest film" of his career.

The actor, who also starred in 2022's "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2", shared the update on his Instagram page.

"Starting the biggest film of my career today. #Shubharambh #BhoolBhulaiyaa3," Aaryan captioned his picture seeking god's blessings. (PTI)

'SHAITAAN' OPENS AT ₹ 15.21 CRORE

MUMBAI, March 9: Supernatural thriller "Shaitaan" has earned Rs 15.21 crore in net box office collections (NBOC) on the opening day, the makers said on Saturday.

Directed by Vikas Bahl, "Shaitaan" stars Ajay Devgn, Jyotika, and R Madhavan. Described as a gripping tale with elements of black magic, the film released on Friday.

Presented by Jio Studios, Devgn Films and Panorama Studios, the movie is produced by Devgn, Jyoti Deshpande, Kumar Mangat Pathak and Abhishek Pathak. (PTI)



Anupam Kher remembers Satish Kaushik on his 1st death anniversary: I miss you, your jokes

MUMBAI, March 9: "Cheerful, lively, and innocent" is how actor Anupam Kher remembered his late friend and frequent collaborator Satish Kaushik on his first death anniversary.

Kaushik died on March 9, 2023 following a heart attack while he was on his way to a Gurugram hospital. The actor-filmmaker was 66. An alumnus of the National School of Drama and the Film and Television Institute of India, Kaushik was best known for his roles in films such as "Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron", "Mr India", "Deewana Mastana", and "Udta Punjab". On Saturday, Kher shared a one-minute clip of Kaushik watching a video which the latter described as a "wonderfully poetic depiction of friendship". "My dear Satish! Exactly one year ago today, on my birthday, March 7, I showed you this video of friendship in your office! And you didn't know that I was recording your reactions on my mobile! Today on 9th March it has been one year since you passed away. "But for me you will always remain like this... cheerful, lively, innocent and an unmatched gift of friendship!!! I don't miss you! Because you never went anywhere for me!! No! This was a lie! I miss you, your stupid jokes and your words so much! #SatishKaushik," he captioned his post on X. (PTI)

Bhubaneswar glams up with BP Fashion NXT Festival

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 9: Glamorous fashion show ft. Sanya Malhotra, a stunning collection by designer Nachiket Barve, thumping music by Ritviz and Progressive Brothers, high-on-style experiences from buzzing lifestyle brands -- here's what unfolded at India's first fashion festival India, March, 2024: Redefining fashion beyond the runway, Blenders Pride Fashion NXT Festival hosted a first-of-its kind avant-garde festival experience in the city on the 2nd of March. As India's first experiential fashion festival, it brought together a host of stellar high-on-style experiences across luxury fashion, upbeat music performances and immersive pop-ups curated by some of India's coolest lifestyle brands.

Festival goers were in for a mag-

netic new experience that was steeped in fashion and style. The evening hosted a stunning fashion show curated by ace designer Nachiket Barve and an innovative showcase called Fashion NXT Spotlight curated by Fashion Design Council of India with 9 leading Indian designers -- Alpana Neeraj, Bloni, Antar Agni, Mandira Wirk, Geisha Designs, Verandah, Shweta Kapoor, Taniya Khanuja and Nitin Bal Chauhan. While Nachiket along with the ever-glamorous actor Sanya Malhotra showcased his collection 'La Dolce Vita', marrying travel-inspired elements with a striking palette of black and gold, the Fashion NXT Spotlight presented emerging fashion trends across 3 unique themes that are at the apex of evolving fashion: WANDERLUXE, representing influence of luxury in holi-

day wear: GLOSS & GLAM, representing modern glamour in high fashion; and INTER-GLAMATIC, representing fashion inspired by futurism.

The evening peaked with electrifying music performances featuring an opening act by DJ Rabab, upbeat show by Progressive Brothers and a foot-tapping show by none other than Ritviz, making festival goers groove



through the evening. The evening was hosted by VJ and actor Anusha Dandekar who only added to the style quotient of the festival. The festival also featured a lineup of stellar collaborations with

sought-after lifestyle brands like Nasher Miles, All You Can Street, Doodle Maps, Beardo and The Styling Room by Anisha Gandhi. These brands hosted a series of pop-ups with innovative DIY experiences, live art of merch, styling stations and much more, keeping festival goers engaged and entertained throughout the evening.

Kartik Mohindra, Chief Marketing Officer, Pernod Ricard India said, "As we continue to trailblaze the fashion landscape in India, Blenders Pride Fashion NXT Festivals bring an impressive new format that diversifies our experiences into newer towns. We're excited to collabo-

rate with some of India's best fashion designers, celebrities and lifestyle brands, that share our vision in becoming an immersive gateway into the world of style and glamour." Talking about the Fashion NXT Festival, designer Nachiket Barve said "Blenders Pride Fashion NXT Festival in Bhubaneswar has set an example for what it means to take fashion beyond the runway, that's more immersive for younger people."

Actor Sanya Malhotra said, "It is exciting to be a part of India's first fashion festival! The experience Blenders Pride Fashion NXT Festival has put together for Bhubaneswar is magnetic."

Ranji Trophy Final: Mumbai eye 42nd title but Vidarbha to pose tough challenge



MUMBAI, March 9: Led by an astute captain in Ajinkya Rahane, Mumbai will look to maintain their hegemony on Ranji Trophy with a 42nd title but a gutsy and battle-hardened Vidarbha won't make it easy for the legacy champions in the much-anticipated final starting here tomorrow.

In Mumbai, coming second best is never a consolation and nothing short of a title would satisfy the connoisseurs of Mumbai cricket sitting in the Garware pavilion of the Wankhede Sta-

dium. Someone, who engineered India's greatest overseas series win in Australia three winters back, Rahane's international career has seen a sharp slump and right now he is not even in national reckoning. Sample this. Even a specialist pacer Mohit Avasthi (192) has scored more runs compared to Rahane (134) who has had a dismal average of 13.4 throughout the tournament. However Rahane's leadership

skills have proven to be second to none as the old warhorse used his resources pretty well to take the team to its 48th summit clash.

He couldn't avail the services of an injured Suryakumar Yadav. Sarfaraz Khan wasn't available after being picked for India A and subsequently for the Test series. Shreyas Iyer avoided a few games on pretext of injury.

Prithvi Shaw (5 games), having recovered from injury only was available towards the business end. Shivam Dube, Shardul

Thakur also played half of the games.

But in Mumbai, it is the team that plays and they have known how to win Ranji Trophy even when a Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Dilip Vengsarkar weren't available and the tradition has continued.

Even though his individual form deserted him, Rahane and his men found their way through all challenges en route to the final this year. They meet their match in two-time champions Vidarbha,

who brought their 'A' game forward on key moments.

Umesh Yadav, a man with 150 plus Test wickets, with a brand new ball can still ask probing questions to Mumbai's semi-brittle top-order.

The spotlight will be on middle-order batter Shreyas Iyer, who had just lost his BCCI Annual Contracts for giving precedence to cash-rich IPL over domestic cricket. A hundred in Ranji Trophy final would certainly give him a lot of confidence.

Mumbai's batters have not piled up runs in large numbers like those from their opponents through this season to make the final, but their lower-middle order has stood up to the occasion and delivered in crunch situations. The likes of wicketkeeper-batter Hardik Tamore (252 runs), who has floated from top to lower order while making significant contributions in the last two knockout games, combined with the brilliance of Tanush Kotian (481), Shams Mulani (290) and Tushar Deshpande (168) have all delivered whenever the chips have been down.

Dube and Thakur have hit important hundreds in knock-out games. India U-19 star Musheer Khan has given a fine exhibition of himself proving to be the gel that holds the batting line-up together, Mumbai present a strong challenge for the Vidarbha side. (PTI)

India will target 30 medals in Paris Paralympics: new PCI president Jhajharia



NEW DELHI, March 9: India will target 30 medals in the upcoming Paris Paralympics, 11 more than the country won in the last Games in Tokyo, new Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) president Devendra Jhajharia said on Saturday, just after he was elected to the top post.

India had won 19 medals (5 gold, 8 silver, 6 bronze) in the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021, including a javelin silver from Jhajharia himself.

"Our target for Paris Paralympics (August 28 to September 8) is to win many more medals than the 19 we won in Tokyo. Iss baar, tees paar (will aim for 30-plus medals)," Jhajharia said.

"This government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is giving a lot of emphasis to para sports and para athletes. We have done well in the 2016 Rio Paralympics and then we won 19 medals in Tokyo and we have shown that India is an up-and-coming country in para sports."

A medal count of 30 may take India to top-10.

Two-time Paralympics gold medalist Jhajharia was on Saturday elected unopposed as PCI president, succeeding another celebrated para athlete Deepa Malik. The 42-year-old javelin thrower, who had won a gold medal each in the 2004 Athens and 2016 Rio Paralympics in the F46 disability category, was the

only candidate in the fray for the top post.

He said the mission of the new dispensation under him will be "developing para sports in the 700 districts of the country".

"We need to work different things, in small steps, there is no dearth of para athletes and no lack of facilities in India, what we need to do is good management. "There are a lot of para athletes in the TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme). We had Para National Games recently where the government spent about Rs 30 crore."

Jhajharia said he had never thought of occupying the top administrative post when he started his career more than two decades ago. "I have toiled hard in the most difficult way and I have never thought of becoming PCI president," he later told PTI separately.

"My mission is that, I have toiled hard to overcome difficulties in my life, I will now work hard so that our differently-abled athletes don't have to face them," said Jhajharia, who lost part of his left arm after coming in contact with an electric wire while climbing a tree in his hometown when he was eight years old.

"For the responsibility (of PCI president) I am getting, I want to congratulate the seven crore differently-abled people of India." (PTI)

National Games gold medallist Parvej Khan becomes first Indian to qualify for NCAA track event final

NEW DELHI, March 9: National Games gold medallist Parvej Khan on Saturday became the first Indian to qualify for the final of a track event in the NCAA Championships of the United States, one of the most competitive collegiate competition in the world, as he made the grade in men's one mile event in Boston.

Khan clocked 3 minutes 57.126 seconds to finish third in the one mile preliminary run and make it to the final in the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships.

The 19-year-old was representing University of Florida as he earned a college scholarship there last year.

The 19-year-old Khan, who belongs to a farming family in Mewat region in Haryana, had won the 1500m gold in the 2022 National Games with a new personal best of 3:40.89 in Gandhinagar.

One mile run though is not popular among Indian athletes and is not in the Olympic and World Championships programme.

Three Indians -- Tejaswin Shankar

(2018 and 2022 in high jump), Mohinder Singh Gill (triple jump) and Vikas Gowda (2006 in discus throw) -- have all won gold at the NCAA championships.

"Pumped to see Parvej Khan (ONLY Indian flag) to make @NCAATrackField finals for @GatorsTF in a track event EVER) if it's a slower race he is winning hands down! If I were coaching his competitor I'll tell them to run the first few laps like their life depends on it. He WILL hunt you down!," Shankar tweeted.

Khan won the 800m gold at the U-16

Nationals in Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh, in 2019, took bronze over the same distance at the Khelo India Youth Games (U-18) the next year before winning his first senior race -- the 1500m at the National Open Championships in Warrangal in 2021.

He bagged a 1500m silver National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships in Chennai in 2022 and won a gold over the same distance in the National Open in Bengaluru in the same year. (PTI)

Anderson captures 'Peak 700' in lap of Dhauladhar, Tendulkar terms it 'magnificent'

DHARAMSALA, March 9: England veteran James Anderson added another glorious chapter to his remarkable tale of longevity when he became the first pacer and the third bowler overall to take 700 Test wickets here on Saturday.

Anderson reached the milestone in his 187th Test by removing India's Kuldeep Yadav, caught behind on day three of the fifth Test here. He lured the Indian tail-ender into a drive and induced the outside edge.

The 41-year-old was on 699 scalps overnight after dismissing Shubman Gill with a beauty on day one.

The only other pacer to have taken 600 Test wickets or more is his former teammate Stuart Broad, who retired last year with 604 in the bag.

Sri Lankan spin great Muttiah Muralidaran has 800 scalps to his name, the most in Tests, followed by the late Shane Warne (708).

India spin great Anil Kumble is fourth in the all time list with 619 wickets in 132 Tests.

Having started when greats like Sachin Tendulkar, Ricky Ponting and Brian Lara were in their prime, Anderson also asked tough questions to the immediate next generation including Virat Kohli, Steve Smith and Kane Williamson.

And in this series, he challenged a Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill, who were toddlers when he made his debut.

No one could have put it more aptly about his longevity than Sachin Tendulkar.

"The first time I saw Anderson play was in Australia in 2002,

and his control over the ball looked special. Nasser Hussain spoke very highly of him back then and today, I am sure, he would say, "Maine bola tha" — that he had called it so early," Tendulkar wrote on his official 'X' handle.

"700 test wickets is a stellar achievement. A fast bowler playing for 22 years and performing so consistently to be able to take 700 wickets would have sounded like fiction until Anderson actually made it happen. Simply magnificent!," the legend further added.

India could only add four runs to their overnight tally to end up at 477, gaining a 259-run first innings lead.

Anderson remains at the top of his game, both physically and skill-wise having made his international debut back in 2002.

England skipper Ben Stokes had spoken highly about his illustrious teammate ahead of England's final Test on the long tour of India.

"Jimmy coming up to 700 wickets, it's phenomenal to think about, especially as a seam bowler. Amazing career to date, and I can't see him stopping. I have played with Jimmy for a long time and I've never seen him as physically fit as he does right now.

"Being 41, showing that hunger and desire to get better every single day is testament to his attitude and commitment to the game," said Stokes.

Besides close to 200 Tests, Anderson has played 194 ODIs and 19 T20s. He is 13 short of completing 1000 wickets in international cricket. (PTI)

I know what it's like to lose to Indian 'B' Team: Paine

NEW DELHI, March 9: Tim Paine absolutely loves watching bitter rivals England lose any series but the former Australia captain knows what it is like to be beaten by an Indian 'B' team in Test cricket.

No one knows what it feels like to lose to an second-string Indian side better than Paine, who was the Australian captain during 2020-21 Border-Gavaskar Trophy, where India claimed a famous 2-1 series win away from home.

Devoid of then captain Virat Kohli, who flew back home after the first Test, Rohit Sharma, who was ruled out of

the first two games, pacers Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav who were out with injuries, and no Ravichandran Ashwin and Jasprit Bumrah, who were unavailable for the final Test in Gabba, Ajinkya Rahane led a pack of spirited youngsters to hand India a memorable series victory.

"I know what it's like to be beaten by an Indian B team. Unfortunately, it happened to us on our home soil.

"But yes, some huge names out for India, which should have certainly helped the English," said speaking to another former Australia captain Brad Haddin

major controversy when he criticised Jonny Bairstow after the stumping controversy during the 2023 Ashes series and labelled England skipper Ben Stokes as "selfish" after reversing his decision to retire from ODIs before the 2023 World Cup.

Haddin too agreed that England were undone by an Indian 'B' team in the ongoing series.

"But they have been playing against the Indian B team because there has been no Kohli, no Shami, Bumrah got rested last Test, KL Rahul is out and Rishabh Pant is still making his way back from that accident,"

said Haddin. The former Australian stumper, however, lauded India's bench strength and had words of appreciation for the younger generation, who shone bright in the ongoing series.

"They are not their strongest team but it just goes to show that the depth in Indian cricket is huge because there are some big names coming into this next era of Indian cricket.

"(Yashasvi) Jaiswal is leading the charge; young (Dhruv) Jurel was magnificent in the last Test as well. So India are looking very strong," Haddin said. (PTI)

Sunny Singh Gill carries rich family legacy, set to become first referee of Indian descent in EPL

LONDON, March 9: Sunny Singh Gill was standing at the proverbial career crossroads one year ago. He had the option to continue as a prison officer or concentrate on carrying forward his family's rich footballing legacy by chasing his refereeing dream.

Cut to 2024, the 39-year-old will script history at Selhurst Park on Saturday when he becomes the first Indian-origin and British South Asian to referee in an English Premier League fixture (Crystal Palace vs Luton).

"This weekend I'll be proud to see Sunny Singh Gill taking to the pitch as the first South Asian to referee a Premier League match," said British PM Rishi Sunak, addressing an awards ceremony organised by the Asian Media Group (AMG) earlier this week. "It is a reminder of the incredible contribution of South Asian people to our economy and our society. It's a reminder too of the values we share: hard work, family, educa-

tion and enterprise. There is so much for us to celebrate," he said.

It will not be the first time that a member of the trailblazing Gill family claims a slice of history though. Sunny's father Jarnail Singh was the first turbaned referee in the history of English League football (EFL). He officiated 150 matches between 2004 and 2010.

"Football has always run in the family," Sunny said.

His brother Bhopinder was the first Sikh-Punjabi to serve as a Premier League assistant referee when he ran the line during the Southampton versus Nottingham Forest game last year.

"Me and my brother grew up loving the game and like most young kids, we just wanted to play but in our household, it was a bit different because when we were going to primary school, we knew our dad was going out to referee on a weekend," he told EFL last year.

"There were times he was a fourth official in the Premier



League and our friends would say they saw him on Match of the Day!" But it was not refereeing that he dreamed of as a child. Like umpteen children in Britain, Sunny too aspired to play football professionally. "I remember when I was nine

years old we went to watch Arsenal play Everton, that was our first Premier League game," Sunny said.

"Dermot Gallagher was the referee and dad was the fourth official. At that age you don't really think about being a referee.

"I remember looking around Highbury and watching Ian Wright for Arsenal thinking, 'wow, this is what I want'.

"We took a picture on the pitch underneath the goalposts and all I thought about was how amazing it would be to score a goal there, not give a penalty there or something!" He was scouted by Queens Park Rangers but was released soon after the trials at the club's youth academy. But his passion for football remained intact. It wasn't until watching his father referee a game between Wolves and Burnley in front of 35,000 fans that Sunny understood what his calling was.

"After watching him walk out of the tunnel that day that's

when I thought, 'yeah, I want to be a referee'. I was a little bit older and more realistic and I knew what it was like to go through that matchday routine as a referee." At 17, Sunny took charge of his first Sunday League. But the teenager found it difficult to handle footballers on the field and went on a five-year hiatus from officiating. "I got put off it. Part of it was because I wanted to play football with my friends, but also I was only 17 and refereeing was hard. "Players behave in a certain way. I was young, perhaps a little bit immature and I didn't have the man-management skills to cope with that." An encouraging chat with his father put him back on the path of refereeing. In April 2021, Sunny (fourth official) and Bhopinder (assistant) became the first pair of British South Asians to officiate in the same Championship match and in November last year, he became the first South Asian since his father to referee a Championship game. (PTI)

India make it 4-1 with crushing win in Dharamsala

DHARAMSALA, March 9: Ravichandran Ashwin took a famous five-wicket haul in his 100th Test as India thrived on the impatience of England batters for an emphatic innings and 64-run victory in the final chapter of an action-packed five-match contest, handing the visitors their heaviest defeat in the 'Bazball' era.

With the series already in bag, India were playing for crucial World Test Championship points and England made their job simpler by self-improving on day three here.

England were bowled out for 195 towards the end of the afternoon session with Ashwin running through their reckless batting line-up to end with a match haul of nine wickets.

Joe Root was the lone ranger for his team and batted beautifully for his 84 off 128 balls. He was the last batter to be dismissed.

England's second innings moved at a rather frenetic pace as the batters went on the offensive in their bid to survive against the Indian spinners but failed yet again.

The game appeared to be going only one way when India took a huge 259-run first innings lead in the morning session by posting 477 all out in response to England's 218 on day one.

Ahead of the final game of their long tour, Stokes had dismissed theories of the departure lounge syndrome but with the way his batters per-

formed, it seemed they were in a hurry to get back home.

The attack at all costs approach clearly did not work for them in India and the debacle has given them plenty to ponder before the start of the English summer.

For India, the series was a remarkable success considering they had the likes of Virat Kohli and Mohammed Shami unavailable throughout.

The youngsters, led by Yashasvi Jaiswal, grabbed the opportunities in the seniors' absence to give the team management more options for the future.

The writing was on the wall after Ashwin ran through England's self destructing top-order to leave them reeling at 103 for five at lunch.

England skipper Ben Stokes (2) cut a sorry figure after falling to Ashwin at the stroke of lunch with a straighter one.

With Rohit Sharma not taking the field due to a stiff back, Bumrah led the side in the middle besides opening the bowling alongside Ashwin.

Ashwin once again got the better of England opener Ben Duckett (2). The southpaw, who had struggled to defend against Ashwin in the previous games, charged down the wicket for a counter-attacking hit but was nowhere near the pitch of the ball, resulting in a bowled dismissal.

Ashwin had a leg slip in place for Zak Crawley

(0) with the pitch offering a fair amount of turn and bounce.

The England opener got an inside edge on to the pads and deflected straight into the hands of Sarfaraz Khan at leg-slip.

Ollie Pope (19), who is a tentative starter, was Ashwin's third victim. It was an error in judgement again from an England batter as he went for an audacious sweep off a delivery that went straight with the arm and was also on the shorter side.

Jonny Baristow (39 off 31), also playing his 100th Test like Ashwin, joined Joe Root in the middle and went on the offensive from the word go. Playing with the spin, Baristow hammered three thundering sixes off Ashwin on the on-side before being adjudged lbw off Kuldeep Yadav. It was another boom and bust knock that Baristow played in the series.

He exchanged a few words with Shubman Gill stationed at first slip and lost his concentration in the process.

Not confident of defending against Ashwin and Co., England continued to use the long handle after lunch and failed miserably.

Ben Foakes went for a wild slog sweep off Ashwin only to miss the ball completely, giving India's premier spinner his 36th five-wicket haul in Tests. Bumrah's fiery spell in the afternoon got



him wickets of Tom Hartley and Mark Wood, putting India on the cusp of a massive win.

In the morning, the visitors took less than 20 minutes to wrap up India's innings with veteran

James Anderson finally getting to the 700-wicket mark. Young off-spinner Shoib Bashir had Jasprit Bumrah stumped for his second five-wicket haul in his debut series. (PTI)

Khel Maharan U-19 football: KA beat Goalpara 2-1

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, March 9: Karbi Anglong defeated Goalpara by 2-1 in the Assam Khel Maharan Under-19 football tournament. Karbi Anglong Sports Association and Hanjanglangso Sports Association hosted the game at Hanjanglangso Playground, Karbi Anglong. In the first half, Karbi Anglong won by a goal. In the second half, Goalpara equalised the game with a goal. Later Karbi Anglong gave another goal and by the end of the match, it was in favour of Karbi Anglong with 2-1.

AIFF to hold its AGM in Itanagar today

ITANAGAR, March 9: The All India Football Federation (AIFF) will hold its Annual General Body Meeting (AGM) here on Sunday, amid administrative "mess" in the national body in the aftermath of the sacking of its secretary general and its legal head.

The AGM is being held a day after the final match of the National Football Championships for the Santosh Trophy, being organised by Arunachal Pradesh Football Association.

The agenda items listed for the AGM are more or less routine matters, though members can raise issues if accepted by the general house.

The last AGM was held in July 2023 in Bengaluru on the day of SAFF Championships final which India won, and the mood was upbeat at that time.

This time around, the AGM is being held after the controversial sacking of Shaji Prabhakaran as AIFF secretary general and allegations of "corruption" made against president Kalyan Chaubey by former legal head Nilanjana Bhattacharjee.

Chaubey had, however, termed the allegations as baseless and had served a legal notice to Bhattacharjee whose service was also terminated by the AIFF earlier this month. (PTI)

Several matches took place simultaneously across venues. In TU playground the match took place between Tamulpur and Karbi Ang-

Williamson makes 51 in his 100th test as New Zealand leads Australia after Day 2 of 2nd test

CHRISTCHURCH (NEW ZEALAND), March 9: Kane Williamson gave the fans what they came for with a fighting half century in his 100th test Saturday

on the second day of the second test between New Zealand and Australia.

After his first innings ended in disappointment, Williamson delivered in his second with his 34th test half century from 105 balls in a 105-run partnership for the second wicket with Tom Latham.

The pair steered New Zealand from 6-1 to 111-2, erasing Australia's first innings lead of 94, before Williamson was out for 51.

At stumps New Zealand was 134-2 and led by 40 runs. Latham was 65 not out, his highest test score against Australia, and Rachin Ravindra was 11.

"They are quality bowlers and obviously the pitch has offered a little bit throughout, so it's nice to put together a bit of partnership and hopefully tomorrow we can put a few more on there and have another go," Williamson said.

"They made it tough out there. There's a bit in the surface, a bit of bounce. But credit to Tom Latham, he led the way and has played beautifully."

From the start, the test at Hagley Oval has had the sense of a pilgrimage for fans who came to pay tribute to Williamson and New Zealand captain Tim Southee in



their 100th tests.

Williamson received a standing ovation on his way to crease in New Zealand's first innings on the first day Friday. He made only 17 as New Zealand was bowled out for 162. Southee made 26 which was the third-highest total in the New Zealand innings.

Marnus Labuschagne returned to form Saturday with an innings of 90 in Australia's first innings of 256 as the tourists took that 94-run first innings lead. Matt Henry took 7-67 for the second seven-wicket bag of his career and his second five-wicket haul of the series.

New Zealand was 6-1 in its second innings when Williamson walked to the crease, again to a standing ovation.

The banks and bleachers of Ha-

gley Oval have been packed on both days and at Williamson's appearance have risen as one to acclaim. On Saturday, Australian fans in gold and New Zealanders costumed as lifeguards or cave-men or storybook characters — it was "dress-up day" — were equal in their ovation.

This time Williamson lived up to the welcome and his innings helped New Zealand balance the match after Australia held the upper hand on the first day and the start of the second.

Australia resumed Saturday at 124-4, needing just 38 runs to match New Zealand's first-innings total. Labuschagne was 45 not out and nightwatchman Nathan Lyon was 1.

Lyon frustrated New Zealand by

making 40 as nightwatchman in the first innings of the first test which Australia won by 172 runs to take a 1-0 lead in the two-test series.

He repeated the dose, making 20 in a 51-run partnership with Labuschagne which carried Australia within four runs of the New Zealand total.

Labuschagne went on to a half century from 90 balls — his first in his last six test innings. He was closing on his first century in 15 innings when he fell for 90 in the last over before lunch.

Henry took three of the four wickets that fell before stumps on day one and added four more without threatening his career-best figures of 7-23, also achieved at Hagley Oval, his home ground.

Mitchell Starc made 28 and captain Pat Cummins 23 as Australia boosted its lead to 24.

New Zealand had a major setback when it lost Young in only the third over of its innings. But Latham and Williamson stayed together for the next 36 overs and when they finally were separated, New Zealand held a slim 17-run lead.

The crowd cheered every aspect of Williamson's innings, acknowledging each of his six boundaries with prolonged applause. The din was even greater when Williamson followed Latham to his half century in 153 minutes. (AP)

Khel Maharan: Sonipur beats Udalguri 3-1 on concluding day

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 9: The state level A-19 football (men) competition for Khel Maharan 2023 that kicked off in Tezpur on March 5 at Tezpur University concluded on Saturday.

The day ended with a thrilling final match between Sonipur and Udalguri which was won by Sonipur team in 3-1 in try back. The event hosted by Sonipur was formally inaugurated by sports minister, government of Assam, Nandita Garlosa in presence of Tezpur MLA, Prithviraj Rava, Sootea MLA, Padma Hazarika, district commissioner, Deba Kumar Mishra, registrar, Tezpur University, Biren Das among others.

Several matches took place simultaneously across venues. In TU playground the match took place between Tamulpur and Karbi Ang-

long wherein Tamulpur emerged victorious with a 2-0 win.

Other matches included Dima Hasao vs. Udalguri which was won by Udalguri in 3-1 and Chirang vs. West Karbi Anglong and it was won by Chirang in 4-2. At Tezpur Polo Field, the match was held between Charaideo and Nalbari where Charaideo secured a 3-0 win over Nalbari, while Kamrup (M) triumphed over Jorhat with a score of 2-1.

Meanwhile in Dhekiajuli Bhotpara Stadium, the match took place between Bajali and Darrang wherein Bajali dominated with a 3-0 victory against Darrang, and Sonipur outplayed Dhubri with an impressive 8-3 score-line. Likewise in Nagsankar Stadium, Sootea Hojai secured a narrow 1-0 win against Biswanath, while Dhemaji emerged victorious over Tinsukia with a 2-0 score-line.

The competition continued on March 6 and 7 with intense matches taking place at various venues, leading up to the semi-final stage. In the semi-final at Polo Field on March 8, Sonipur defeated Dhemaji with a commanding 3-0 win while in Tezpur University Udalguri secured their spot in the finals by defeating Dibrugarh with a 2-0 victory promising more thrilling matches as it progressed towards the final showdown.

The closing ceremony was graced by the secretary, department of sports and youth welfare, Assam KJ Hilali, Tezpur MLA, Prithviraj Rava, DC, Deba Kumar Mishra, VC, TU, Shambhu Nath Singh, registrar, TU, Dr. Biren Das, DSO, Sonipur Pranjal Dihinia among others.

The 37-year-old said the mindset to add new dimensions to his bowling has worked well for him. "If I am confident that I can try something, I don't hold back. I have kept my ears and eyes open to listen to good feedback."

"Unless I try, I will never be able to learn. I am not saying sticking to one method won't work. But thankfully experimenting and learning has helped me," said the Tamil Nadu man.

Ashwin marked his spell on Saturday (5/77) and the one in England's second innings at Ranchi (5/51) as his best outings in the five-match series.

"I was really happy with the way the ball came out (in those spells), as most pleased with this performance and the second innings in Ranchi. "In India sometimes the beauty is what's gone by. What went by was on his head (the way he set up Ollie Pope in Ranchi). I was expecting him to reverse there," he added.

Ashwin lavished praise on left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav, who ended up with 19 wickets from four Tests.

"The way the ball is coming out of Kuldeep's hands is unbelievable. Watching a wrist spinner in such a flow and the kind of switches he has been able to make through the series and over the last 10 months is so heartening to see. I can't be happier for somebody," said Ashwin. (PTI)

Kuldeep bowled England captain Ben Stokes with a delivery that spun in from off-stump while right-hander Crawley got castled by his stock ball that turned in sharply from the fifth-stump line to disturb his stumps.

Rohit Sharma heaped praise on Kuldeep's work ethics.

"He's got a lot of potential and when the chips were down in the first innings (here), he bowled really well. He came back and worked at NCA after his injury. He is putting in a lot of effort and the most pleasing thing was his (improved) batting," said Rohit. (PTI)

I am least insecure about what people feel about me experimenting: Ashwin Dharamsala, March 9: Ravichandran Ashwin worked on different actions and speeds throughout the Test series against England and the master off-spinner said experimenting while shutting out external noises was integral for his success in the varied Indian conditions.

Ashwin, who played his 100th Test here, finished the five-match series as the top wicket-taker, bagging 26 wickets.

"Throughout the series I have gone to different actions, speeds and releases. India is different, each ground has a challenge. I am least bit insecure about what people feel about me," Ashwin said at the post-match presentation.

Fantastic to see players gravitate towards terrific leader Rohit: Dravid

DHARAMSALA, March 9: Rohit Sharma's captaincy was rather understated vis-à-vis Ben Stokes' on-the-edge methods, but India head coach Rahul Dravid was delighted to see the players identify themselves with the Mumbai's leadership principles.

Under Rohit, India never made tall claims even once but silently and categorically nullified the visitors' much-talked-about 'Bazball' and grabbed the five-match series 4-1.

"I'm privileged to work with a lovely team. I'm learning from them all the time. Rohit has been fantastic to work with. I think he's a terrific leader, and the guys gravitate towards him phenomenally, which is fantastic to see," said Dravid told broadcasters after the match.

Dravid said India's series win was dotted by several shining moments but acknowledged that the return of Ravichandran Ashwin from a personal emergency underlined the character of this outfit.

"I'd just say Ashwin coming back to the team after what he went through (as the stand-out moment). Ash wanting to come back and contribute to the team... I think, for me, it signified what this team is about and what the character of this team is."

"I think that was just for me, probably the standout moment of the series. It really gladdens your heart as a coach to the kind of environment that that had been created," said Dravid.

Ashwin had to leave for Chennai because of a family emergency on the second day of the Rajkot Test, but the veteran off-spinner rejoined the action on the fourth day of the third Test.

There have been talks about the doors of the Indian team being shut now for players like Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer after they defied the BCCI diktat to play in Ranji Trophy.

But Dravid did not buy into that.



"Rohit and I are selecting playing 11. Sometimes even I don't know who is contracted and who is not. So, no one is out of the mix as far as we are concerned," Dravid later said in the post-match press conference.

Kuldeep Yadav twinkled radiantly with his left-arm wrist spin besides chipping in with some handy runs lower down the order.

Dravid was chuffed to see the wholesome improvement in Kuldeep.

"It's been tough on Kuldeep Yadav. He's been bowling at a time when two legends (Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja) are playing for the team. He brings the X-Factor to the team. He has also worked hard on his batting which has been a bonus," said the former Indian captain.

India all-rounder Shardul Thakur recently urged the bigwigs to look into the hectic Ranji Trophy schedule, which he said has been putting a lot of pressure on the players.

Taking a serious note of the call, Dravid the players' views should be considered sooner than later.

"We need to hear the players. They are the ones putting bodies on the line. If they are saying (about a busy schedule), we need to see how to manage the domestic schedule better," he added. (PTI)

I was just thinking of taking the bowlers down: Yashasvi Jaiswal

DHARAMSALA, March 9: The Player-of-the-Series award winner Yashasvi Jaiswal on Saturday attributed his overwhelming success in the five-Test rubber against England to his uninhibited approach while opening the innings.

Jaiswal ended the series with 712 runs with two hundreds and three fifties, averaging 89 and striking at 80. "I was just thinking if I can take a bowler down, I will take him down. That's the plan and there was no backing out," said Jaiswal during the post-series presentation.

However, the left-hander, who became only the second Indian to score over 700 runs in a series after Sunil Gavaskar, said he wanted to keep his feet planted on the ground.

"I really enjoyed the series. I am trying to take it one game at a time and always thinking of how I can contribute to my team so that I can keep the team in a winning position," he added.

Skipper Rohit Sharma too reminded Jaiswal of the need to remain humble and focussed.

"He's got a long way to go, but it's amazing to be in this position. When a guy's got talent like that who can put pressure on the bowlers from the word go, there will be lots of challenges going forward. He is a tough guy and loves the challenges," said Rohit.



Kuldeep Yadav was adjudged player of the match for his seven-wicket haul and a feisty 30 down the order that helped India stretch the lead.

The left-arm wrist spinner said he was just trying to keep the ball on a good length throughout his spells.

"I just focus on keeping it on a good length and that is very important for a spinner in this format. I was not thinking too much about what the batter was trying

to do," he said.

Kuldeep picked the wickets of Ben Stokes at Ranchi and Zak Crawley here as his favourite dismissals from the series.

"I really bowled well in Ranchi. The wicket was slow and the way I used the drift over there was fantastic. I liked the Stokes wicket in Ranchi."

"I also liked the Crawley wicket here (Dharamsala), that was a beautiful ball. I really liked my rhythm," he said.