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THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXVI | Issue No. 021 | RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862 | DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2025 | PAGES 12 | PRICE ₹ 8

Sonia Gandhi's remarks on Prez 'deeply disrespectful': BJP

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: The BJP on Friday launched an all-out attack on the Congress over its former chief Sonia Gandhi's remarks on President Droupadi Murmu's Parliament address, saying they were "deeply disrespectful" and underscored the opposition's "continued disregard" for the dignity of the highest constitutional office.

The Congress hit back and said every person in India has respect and empathy for President Murmu but BJP leaders cannot digest Sonia Gandhi's "empathy" for her health.

Will the BJP answer for the disrespect shown to President Murmu when she was not invited to the inauguration of Parliament or Ram temple in Ayodhya, the Congress asked.

Soon after the President delivered her address to a joint sitting of Parliament, Sonia Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were seen discussing the speech in the Parliament complex.

"The poor lady, the President, was getting very tired by the end... she could hardly speak, poor thing," Sonia Gandhi was heard saying in a video doing the rounds on social media. During the discussion, Rahul Gandhi was heard asking Sonia Gandhi if the President's speech was "boring".

Reacting sharply, BJP national president J P Nadda said in a post on X, "Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi's use of the phrase 'poor thing' to refer to the President is deeply disrespectful and underscores the opposition's continued disregard for the dignity of the *(CONTD. ON PAGE- 2)*

Jorhat nude procession

Govt talks tough against public protest

Any attempt to obstruct Jain community's devout practices will be dealt with firmly: CM

JORHAT, Jan 31: Amid protest against a religious procession led by nude Jain monks in Jorhat, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said any attempt to obstruct the community's devout practices will be dealt with firmly.

Sarma's comments came on the backdrop of protests by a group of people in Jorhat town following the religious procession by the Jain community on Wednesday.

The procession through the arterial roads in the headquarters of Jorhat district was led by two Jain monks, who were nude as per their religious practice, eliciting sharp reactions from a section of residents of the Upper Assam town.

"The Jain religion, with its revered Param Pujaniya Munis, embodies ahimsa, sacrifice, and selfless devotion. Any attempt to disrupt their sacred practices will

be met with firm and decisive action," the chief minister said in a post on X. Assam stands resolute in upholding religious tolerance, and will continue to carry forward the message of compassion and humanity with unwavering determination, he added. On Wednesday, the two nude Jain monks came from Dimapur in Nagaland in a religious procession to the Marwari Thakurbari campus in Jorhat town.

Protesting this on Thursday, a group of people representing various organisations took out a protest march to the district commissioner's office shouting slogans against the procession.

Eight people, including Jorhat Bar Association president Hemen Bora and some members of Bir Lachit Sena, were arrested in front of the DC's office. They were released on bail on Friday afternoon.

"The presence of such naked monks will definitely create an imbalance in the society and culture. So, we from Bir Lachit Sena will never tolerate such kind of activities and will not allow such persons to move in public areas in the name of religious practices," Bir Lachit Sena state general secretary Ranju Paniphukan told PTI.

Along with Bir Lachit Sena, members of other organisations also submitted memorandums seeking the intervention of the district commissioner about the practice of the two nude Jain monks. (PTI)

Modi govt conscious of aspirations of people of northeast: Prez

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: The Narendra Modi government is conscious of the aspirations of the people of the northeast and has worked to eliminate their sense of alienation, President Droupadi Murmu said on Friday.

Addressing a joint sitting of Parliament at the beginning of the Budget session, Murmu also said that through more than 10 peace agreements, several factions of different insurgent groups have been brought onto the path of peace.

"A significant measure of "Viksit Bharat" is balanced development of the country. No region should feel left behind in the journey of progress. My government is conscious of the aspirations of the people of the northeast and has worked to eliminate their sense of alienation," she said.

Murmu said to showcase the potential of the eight northeastern states before the entire country, the first-ever "Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav" was organised in Delhi.

She said along with the development of the northeast, the BJP-led government has initiated a comprehensive development plan for the "Purvodaya" or the eastern states, which will also create new employment opportunities.

"In the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, several developmental projects have been launched, according these regions a crucial role in the nation's progress," the president said. (PTI)

School dropout rates declined, challenges persist with retention rates

'The results highlight the need for focused efforts to close the digital gap'

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Though school dropout rates have steadily declined in recent years, challenges persist with retention rates in school education for all classes, according to the Economic Survey 2024-25 tabled in Parliament on Friday.

Economic Survey

"School dropout rates have steadily declined in recent years, standing at 1.9 per cent for primary, 5.2 per cent for upper primary and 14.1 per cent for secondary levels. However, challenges persist, with retention rates at 85.4 per cent for primary (class 1 to 5), 78 per cent for elementary (classes 1 to 8), 63.8 per cent for secondary (classes 1 to 10) *(CONTD. ON PAGE- 2)*

Prescribe medicines available in hospitals, Govt to docs

GUWAHATI, Jan 31: Assam Health Minister Ashok Singhal on Friday urged government doctors to prescribe only those medicines which are available at hospital pharmacy units and promote generic alternatives to reduce cost.

After reviewing healthcare projects in Cachar district, Singhal, in a press conference, said that hospitals across the state maintain a 99 per cent availability of essential medicines, ensuring uninterrupted treatment for patients.

To enhance transparency and efficiency, he launched a dedicated WhatsApp helpline (9864541430), allowing the public to report medicine shortages and enabling swift government intervention.

Stressing affordability in medical care, Singhal urged government doctors to prescribe hospital pharmacy medicines and promote the use of generic alternatives to reduce expenses, according to an official release.

Earlier, during the review meeting, the health and family welfare minister assessed the progress of ongoing healthcare projects and directed officials to focus on infrastructure *(CONTD. ON PAGE- 2)*

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Eco Survey forecasts sluggish 6.3-6.8 pc growth for FY26, calls for more reforms

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: India's economy is likely to expand by 6.3-6.8 per cent in the coming fiscal, much lower than what is needed to become a developed country, and requires deregulation and reforms in areas like land and labour to stimulate growth, according to the government's pre-Budget Economic Survey.

The state of the economy document, tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday, indicated that India's world-beating growth is moderating and more needs to be done to achieve the near 8 per cent annual rate needed to achieve the Viksit Bharat target by 2047.

The 6.3 per cent to 6.8 per cent growth rate in 2025-26 (April 2025 to March 2026 fiscal year) compares to an estimated 6.4 per cent growth in the current year ending March 31 - the weakest since the pandemic - and 8.2 per cent in the past 2023-24 financial year.

"Rural demand backed by a rebound in agricultural production, an anticipated easing of food inflation and a stable macro-economic environment provide an upside to near-term growth," said Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, who along with his team in the finance ministry, authored the report.

The risks to India's economic prospects next year are balanced, he added. Geopolitical and trade uncertainties, along with possible commodity price shocks, pose headwinds to the economy, said Nageswaran, who had last year predicted a 6.5-7 per cent GDP growth in the 2024-25 fiscal.

The survey said India needs to grow at nearly 8 per cent over the next decade or two, and the investment rate must rise to 35 per cent

of GDP from the current 31 per cent to meet the longer-term economic goal of a developed nation by 2047.

The IMF projects India to be a USD 5 trillion economy by FY28 and USD 6.3 trillion by FY30, with an annual nominal growth rate of 10.2 per cent in USD terms.

Calling for reinvigorating the internal engines of growth by enhancing economic freedom through deregulation, the report called for states to reduce the cost of compliance by liberalising standards and controls on businesses as well as cutting tariffs and feeds.

"Systematic deregulation is as critical, if not more, as investments in infrastructure and incentives to encourage innovation and create a viable Mittelstand i.e. India's SME sector," it added.

The focus on Mittelstand has played a pivotal role in the economic success of countries like Germany, Switzerland, Japan, and Singapore.

"Over-regulation stifles innovation and economic dynamism," it said.

"In many instances, regulations, while intended to protect consumers, workers, and the environment, can unintentionally create barriers to entry, reduce competition, and slow the pace of innovation."

Laws that affect the use of land, labour and building, are the right place to begin since these regulations affect decision-making in all enterprises, the survey said.

The pre-budget document predicted that food inflation is likely to soften in the January to March quarter as some vegetable prices will ease seasonally, along with the arrivals of new crops.

Retail inflation, it said, will "progressively" align with the Reserve Bank of India's largest of 4 per cent rate.

This could, however, be derailed by any bad weather events and a rise in international commodity prices.

India's retail inflation eased to a four-month low of 5.2 per cent in December 2024 but food inflation, which accounts for nearly half of the consumption basket, continued to remain high at 8.39 per cent, with vegetable prices rising at 26.56 per cent.

The survey said the global growth is expected to be slightly below trend, with the services sector performing well while manufacturing struggles in some regions.

Inflationary pressures are easing globally, but geopolitical risks remain a concern.

India's financial sector has remained resilient despite global uncertainties. Banking profitability has improved, with a narrowing gap between credit and deposit growth.

Capital markets have played a key role in capital formation, financialisation of savings, and wealth creation, it said, adding that IPO listings have surged sixfold between FY13 and FY24, with young investors driving equity market participation.

On the external front, it said, merchandise exports have grown moderately amid external demand slowdown, while imports have been strong due to domestic demand.

A strategic trade roadmap is essential for India to navigate shifting global trade dynamics marked by rising protectionism.

Commenting on the Survey, Rumki Majumdar, Economist, Deloitte India said, "Deloitte is slightly bullish on growth and predicts 6.5-6.8 per cent growth, backed by strong domestic demand and pick up in investments".

Strong farm output and a resilient services sector are key drivers of India's growth, but global shifts demand careful navigation, she said, adding that geo-economic fragmentation is reshaping supply chains as trade policies evolve in the West. *(PTI)*

Rupee settles flat at 86.62 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Jan 31: The rupee pared initial losses and settled flat at 86.62 against the US dollar on Friday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by unabated foreign fund outflows and month-end dollar demand.

Forex traders said the rupee continued to face pressure due to sustained foreign fund outflows and the broad strength of the American currency in the overseas markets due to unabated dollar demand from oil importers and weak risk appetite.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.63 and touched a high of 86.59 and a low of 86.65 against the American currency during the session.

The local unit moved in a narrow range and finally settled flat at 86.62. On Thursday, the rupee had depreciated 7 paise to close at 86.62 against the US dollar.

"Indian rupee declined today on month-end dollar demand from importers and FII outflows. A positive tone in the US dollar also pressurised the rupee. However, positive domestic markets cushioned the downside," Anuj Choudhary -- Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan -- said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.46 per cent higher at 108.29.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was quoted 0.44 per cent lower at USD 76.53 per barrel in futures trade.

"We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias on strength in the US dollar and persistent FII outflows. Month-end dollar demand from importers may also weigh on the rupee.

"Uncertainty over tariffs by the US administration, may also pressure the rupee. However, any central bank intervention may support the rupee," Choudhary said.

The Economic Survey 2024-25, tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in both houses of Parliament, said navigating global headwinds will require strategic and prudent policy management and reinforcing the domestic fundamentals.

India is expected to record GDP growth of 6.3-6.8 per cent in the financial year 2025-26 on the back of strong fundamentals, calibrated fiscal consolidation and stable private consumption, said the Economic Survey 2024-25 tabled in Parliament on Friday.

The economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in the current financial year.

Traders said investors remained cautious ahead of the Union Budget of February 1.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 740.76 points, or 0.97 per cent, higher at 77,500.57, while the Nifty rose 258.90 points, or 1.11 per cent, to close at 23,508.40.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,188.99 crore in the capital markets on a net basis on Friday, according to exchange data. *(PTI)*

Bandhan Bank Q3 net profit dips 42 pc to ₹ 426 cr

KOLKATA, Jan 31: Private lender Bandhan Bank on Friday reported a 42 per cent decline in its net profit for the third quarter of the current financial year at ₹ 426 crore as compared to ₹ 733 crore in the year-ago period.

Lender's MD and CEO Partha Pratim Sengupta said that the drop in net profit was primarily due to a change in accounting procedure and an additional provision of ₹ 336 crore for loans, which turned bad, during the October-December quarter. He said accounting for the Employee Stock Option Scheme (ESOP) also impacted the net profit to the tune of ₹ 166 crore.

Sengupta told reporters that the bank has drawn up a strategy for its next phase of growth.

He said the strategy is "to be more secular in its approach as a large contribution is coming from the microfinance sector which is facing challenges. More stress will be given on liability products and digital banking". The bank's net revenue during the third quarter of the current fiscal stood at ₹ 3,926 crore as compared to ₹ 3,071 crore in the corresponding quarter last year.

The operating profit of the bank stood at ₹ 2,021 crore during the quarter under review as against ₹ 1,655 crore in the year-ago period.

The collection efficiency ratio for microfinance loans was marginally lower at 97.4 per cent during the October-December quarter. *(PTI)*

Contd. from Page 1...

School dropout rates declined,

and 45.6 per cent for higher secondary (classes 1 to 12)," the survey said.

Retention rate is the percentage of a cohort of pupils enrolled in the first grade of a given level of education in a given school year and who are expected to reach the last grade of the level.

The Survey highlighted that India's school education system serves 24.8 crore students across 14.72 lakh schools with 98 lakh teachers. Government schools comprise 69 per cent of the total, enrolling 50 per cent of students and employing 51 per cent of teachers, while private schools account for 22.5 per cent, enrolling 32.6 per cent of students and employing 38 per cent of teachers.

"The importance of skill education in schools has grown significantly with the advent of Industry 4.0, a highly dynamic and skill-intensive era defined by automation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), big data and robotics. This industrial revolution has reshaped production and distribution across sectors like manufacturing and agriculture, significantly increasing the demand for a skilled workforce.

"Alongside technical proficiency, soft skills such as adaptability, problem-solving and collaboration have become critical for navigating this evolving landscape," it said.

The survey noted a rural-urban digital divide in India with lower internet-searching capabilities in the rural areas, especially among females.

"Data from the Comprehensive Annual Modular Survey 2022-23 reveals a rural-urban digital divide in India with lower internet-searching capabilities in rural areas, especially among females. 63 per cent of males and 55 per cent of females in rural areas can search the internet for information compared to 74 per cent males and 69 per cent of females in urban areas.

"The results highlight the need for focused efforts to close the digital gap," it said.

The survey highlighted that India's higher education system ranks among the largest globally, with 4.33 crore students enrolled in 2021-22, a 26.5 per cent increase from 3.42 crore in 2014-15.

"The GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) for the 18–23 age group also increased from 23.7 per cent to 28.4 per cent during this same period (2014-15 to 2021-22). To achieve the government's goal of increasing GER to 50 per cent by 2035 in higher education, there is a need to double the educational network and infrastructure," it said.

The survey noted that effective implementation of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 requires collaboration across the centre, states, Union Territories (UTs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and regulatory bodies.

"The regulatory framework [University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)] currently includes over 50 regulations addressing different aspects of education and research. However, this approach does not fully align with the 'light but tight' regulatory model envisioned by the NEP. "For example, the UGC specifies minimum credits for various course categories and prescribes the sequencing of courses over four years, aspects that could be entrusted to the institutions themselves," it said. (PTI)

Prescribe medicines available

upgradation for enhanced medical accessibility, particularly for underprivileged communities. The key discussions in the meeting included the wage compensation scheme for pregnant women labourers in tea garden area, MMR and IMR review, and strategies to combat non-communicable diseases (NCDs), the statement said.

He reiterated the government's commitment to providing the necessary resources to strengthen healthcare facilities in the district. (PTI)

Sonia Gandhi's remarks on Prez

highest constitutional office." Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident, he said.

While the President was highlighting the government's achievements, the opposition, driven by its "feudal mindset", chose to mock the empowerment of backward classes and women, a "transformation" brought about under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, he charged.

"The focus today should have been on celebrating India's remarkable progress, as outlined in the President's address," he said.

The BJP chief alleged that time and again, the opposition has shown "blatant disregard" for constitutional norms, carrying forward its "legacy of disrespect" for B R Ambedkar with "undignified ease, all for petty political gains".

"Perhaps it is time for the opposition to focus on meaningful discussions in the temple of democracy instead of repeatedly insulting the highest office in the country," Nadda said, adding, "They must stop parroting the language of foreign puppet masters while enriching themselves at the nation's expense." Hitting back, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi said in a post X, "Sonia Gandhi's empathy for Hon'ble President Droupadi Murmu ji's health cannot be digested by the men in BJP." Every person in India has respect and empathy for the President, he said.

"Will the BJP answer for the disrespect shown to President Murmu when she was not invited to the inauguration of the Parliament or the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya," the deputy leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha asked.

"I challenge them to answer this question," he said. Union Parliamentary Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju vehemently condemned Sonia Gandhi's remarks and said the BJP will not "tolerate" the effort being made by the opposition to show Murmu as weak. "Since a tribal woman has become the President of the country for the first time, they are unable to digest it and are trying to project her as weak," he said. "The President is a woman and a tribal. She is not weak," he told reporters in the Parliament complex.

Slamming Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, Rijiju said the Congress leaders calling President Murmu a "tired woman" and describing her speech as "boring" does not suit them. "It's highly condemnable," he said, adding they should apologise for their remarks. Taking on Rahul Gandhi, Rijiju said, "The leader of opposition does not pay attention to any speech. Look at his body language. He doesn't care." Rahul Gandhi lacks the required attention span and the capacity to absorb the points made by others, he charged.

Union minister and senior BJP leader Dharmendra Pradhan also slammed Sonia Gandhi's remarks, calling them an "insult" to the country's women and tribals. Both Rahul Gandhi and his mother Sonia Gandhi have displayed "incivility" in the way they reacted to the President's address, he charged. "I strongly condemn this," he said, adding that such a tendency is "very dangerous" in democracy.

Several other BJP leaders condemned the former Congress president's comments and demanded an apology from her.

"If at all there is anyone poor in Indian politics, it's Rahul Gandhi who is yet to be launched despite repeated attempts by the Congress," BJP MP and national spokesperson Sambit Patra told reporters in the Parliament complex. "Sonia Gandhi should apologise to the President," he added. BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said on X, "Sonia Gandhi referring to the President as a 'poor thing' demeans the high office and reflects her feudal mindset."

This is not the first time that the Congress has "ridiculed" the first tribal woman to hold the highest constitutional office in the country, he charged.

"Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition (in Lok Sabha), who frequently flaunts a copy of the Constitution, has not even considered making a courtesy visit to the President," he said. He alleged that the Congress has no regard for Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution, constitutional values, or those from socially marginalised backgrounds -- Dalits, OBCs and tribals. (PTI)

India's forex reserves rise USD 5.57 bn to USD 629.55 bn

MUMBAI, Jan 31: India's forex reserves increased USD 5.574 billion to USD 629.557 billion in the week ended January 24, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had dropped USD 1.888 billion to USD 623.983 billion.

The reserves have been on a declining trend for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation, along with forex market interventions by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to help reduce volatilities in the rupee.

The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September.

For the week ended January 24, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased USD 4.758 billion to USD 537.891 billion, as per the RBI data.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased USD 704 million to USD 69.651 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up USD 79 million to USD 17.861 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was up USD 33 million to USD 4.154 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. *(PTI)*

Sensex rallies 741 pts, Nifty settles above 23,500 as Eco Survey ignites hopes of pro-growth budget

MUMBAI, Jan 31: Benchmark Sensex jumped 741 points while Nifty rallied to close above 23,500 on Friday on heavy buying in Larsen & Toubro post its Q3 results and the Economic Survey predicting a pro-growth budget.

Rallying for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 740.76 points or 0.97 per cent higher at 77,500.57. During the day, it jumped 846.15 points or 1.10 per cent to 77,605.96.

The NSE Nifty rallied 258.90 points or 1.11 per cent to 23,508.40. During the day, it climbed 297.3 points or 1.27 per cent to 23,546.80.

India is expected to record GDP growth of 6.3-6.8 per cent in 2025-26 on the back of strong fundamentals, calibrated fiscal consolidation and stable private consumption, said the Economic Survey tabled in Parliament on Friday.

"The indices are fueled with expectations of a pro-growth budget and prudent fiscal as indicated in the economic survey. Positive global cues and better-than-expected results from major companies also contributed to the upward trend.

"Market expects reductions in individual tax and job generation to boost consumption. By cutting fiscal deficit but continuing to boost infrastructure spending, the government may set the tone for a potential recovery in the consolidating market," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Larsen & Toubro climbed 4.31 per cent after the infrastructure and engineering major reported 14 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax to ₹ 3,359 crore for the December quarter on the back of higher revenue from operations.

Nestle surged 4.25 per cent after the FMCG major reported 4.94 per cent increase in net profit at ₹ 688.01 crore for the quarter ended December 31, 2024.

IndusInd Bank, Titan, Tata Motors, Tata Steel, ITC and Maruti were the other major gainers.

ITC Hotels, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance and ICICI Bank were among the laggards.

In the month of January, the BSE benchmark declined 638.44 points or 0.81 per cent, while the Nifty lost 136.4 points or 0.57 per cent.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.83 per cent and midcap index surged 1.76 per cent.

All BSE sectoral indices ended higher. Capital Goods surged the most by 3.89 per cent, followed by industrials (3.61 per cent), power (2.56 per cent), realty (2.24 per cent), utilities (2.05 per cent), energy (1.92 per cent) and FMCG (1.90 per cent).

As many as 2,719 stocks advanced while 1,203 declined and 125 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"As the Union Budget approaches, the critical expectation is to revive market sentiment. Recent budgets have seen increased taxation on the capital market—higher STT, capital gains taxes, taxation of dividend income in shareholders' hands, and the removal of tax benefits on buybacks.

"This year, it's imperative for the Finance Minister to avoid introducing new taxes on investors. Instead, providing meaningful tax rebates to enhance consumer spending power could help revive the consumption cycle," Sunil Damania, Chief Investment Officer, Mojopms, said.

The Economic Survey noted that on a longer-term basis, Indian markets have been among the best-performing markets in the world. *(PTI)*

India needs to take advantage of conducive global situations to be developed nation by 2047: CEA

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: India has to be prepared to take advantage of the conducive global situations to grow at a faster pace to achieve the goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047, Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran said on Friday.

Nageswaran attributed the slowdown in India's economic growth to global factors.

According to the Economic Survey, India needs to grow at 8 per cent for up to two decades to become a developed nation by 2047.

Addressing a press conference after tabling of the Economic Survey 2024-25, he said the current relative slowdown in the Indian economy should be seen in context and 'India still remains the fastest growing large economy in the world'.

According to the NSO estimates, India's economic growth is expected to slip to 6.4 per cent in 2024-25. The Survey has projected a growth of 6.3 to 6.8 per cent for 2025-26.

Whenever the global exports growth picks up, in those years, it contributes another 0.5 to 1 per cent additional growth, which will take it (India's economic growth) to 7.5-8 per cent, and

the agriculture sector itself can contribute one per cent of additional GDP growth, he said.

Nageswaran was responding to a question about whether it is feasible for India to become a developed nation by 2047, as the country's economy is likely to expand by 6.3-6.8 per cent in the coming fiscal, much lower than what is needed to become a developed country.

According to him, Viksit Bharat's growth rate with respect to the nominal GDP growth rate in dollar terms required is around 10 per cent.

"And I think, it (10 per cent growth) is not something that will be achieved on an average year after year...there will years when we will achieve more than that, there will be years, when we will achieve lower than that, depending on the global scenarios," the CEA said.

Nageswaran noted that it is not something that is a mechanical number that is applied exactly year after year as the global conditions will influence it in some years positively and negatively in some.

"We have to be prepared to take advantage of it in those conductive years while maintaining a certain minimum level of growth in those years when conditions are not favourable," he said.

The IMF projects India to be a USD 5 trillion economy by FY28 and USD 6.3 trillion by FY30, with an annual nominal growth rate of 10.2 per cent in USD terms.

Responding to a question on steps taken by the RBI to deal with the sliding Indian rupee, Nageswaran said the reasoned action taken by the Indian central bank with respect to the rupee or domestic liquidity are steps in the right direction.

Asked why India's net foreign direct investment slowing down, the CEA said, "We are no longer competing only with emerging market nations, we are now also competing with industrialised nations".

He also noted that one of the biggest magnets of FDI is actually prospects of profitable returns, which is what India has been providing to portfolio investors and direct investors.

"The government has been responding to the emerging situations, and therefore, FDI numbers should be looked at what is happening elsewhere in the world as well in terms of overall FDI inflows," he added.

Nageswaran also said that he is not expecting any upside risk to crude oil prices. *(PTI)*

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BJP state president condemns Sonia Gandhi's 'poor thing' remark

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 31: State BJP president Dilip Saikia, on Fridaystrongly condemned Sonia Gandhi's remark on president Murmu and demanded an apology on the matter.

On Friday following her address in Parliament at the start of the Budget session Sonia Gandhi referred to President Droupadi Murmu as a "poor thing".

"The disillusioned Congress has this time not spared even the President of the country from humiliation. Congress has shown a lack of respect for the highest constitutional post in the country, which is evident from Sonia Gandhi's statement today. During the joint session of Parliament today, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi insulted President Draupadi Murmu by calling her a 'weak woman' which is unfortunate," Saikia said.

Saikia said that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi calling President Draupadi Murmu's speech 'boring' showed that he used Parliament as a source of entertainment.

"Moreover, IND Alliance MP Pappu Yadav also called the President's speech a "love letter," exposing his corrupt mindset," he said.

Saikia further stated that Congress's mistreatment of Murmu was not the first instance.

Saikia added by saying that during the Constitution Day joint session of Parliament in 2024, Rahul Gandhi did not offer greetings to the President.

"She may belong to a tribal community but Rahul Gandhi had previously accused Draupadi Murmu of being barred from entering the Ram Mandir. Later, in the subsequent year, she participated in the grand Aarti at Ram Mandir. In 2022, Congress leader Ajay Kumar had also insulted Murmu by calling her the representative of an "evil philosophy." Congress leader Dr. Choudhury had even mocked her by calling her "Rashtrapati-ni." Additionally, one of the key partners in the IND Alliance, Trinamool Congress Minister Akhil Giri, had made derogatory remarks about Murmu's physical appearance. In this way, Congress has repeatedly mocked the highest constitutional office in the country, which reflects a dangerous threat to the democratic system.

Minister Pijush Hazarika raises concern on challenges faced by media

Media Conclave of Sixth Schedule Councils

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 31: The information and public relations department of the Government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) hosted Confluence 2025: The Media Conclave of Sixth Schedule Councils at the Kokrajhar Planetarium Auditorium on Thursday.

This historic event brought together media professionals from the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Dima Hasao, and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, marking the first-ever media conclave to unite journalists from the three Sixth Schedule Councils in the state of Assam. The event was inaugurated by Pijush Hazarika, minister for information and public relations, printing & stationery.

In his address, he highlighted the crucial role of media in strengthening democracy and discussed the challenges currently faced by the industry, including the decline in circulation of print media and television TRP ratings. He also expressed concerns about the changing landscape of news coverage, particularly with the rise of digital platforms.

The day began with a meeting between journalists from BTR, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCAC), where issues like salaries of journalists, insurance, social media, and transportation were discussed.

BTC principal secretary Akashdeep welcomed the attendees, while a written message from

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sharma underscored the importance of media in democratic governance. The executive member of BTR, Nilut Swargiary urged the journalists to focus on developmental reporting to bring attention to the challenges and opportunities in BTR.

Three key sessions followed, focusing on media ethics, government-media relations, and responsible reporting. Prasanta Rajguru, editor-in-chief of Prag News, spoke on balancing freedom and responsibility in the age of development journalism.

Ravi Shankar Ravi, editor of Dainik Purvoday, discussed strengthening media-government relations for more transparent communication. Chandan Kumar Goswami, head of communication and journalism at Gauhati University, addressed the importance of adhering to media laws and guidelines for responsible reporting.

" Confluence 2025" – the Media Conclave of Sixth Schedule Councils – was organised yesterday at the Kokrajhar Planetarium, bringing together policymakers, media professionals, and academicians to deliberate on media ethics, strengthen media-government relations, and enhance understanding of laws governing ethical and responsible journalism. The BTR Government extends its gratitude to all esteemed guests and members of the press & media fraternity for their valuable participation in fostering meaningful discussions on ethical journalism and responsible media practices", Pramod Boro,the CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region said.

The conclave was attended by over 200 journalists and dignitaries, including minister Pijush Hazarika; MLA Jiron Basumatary; BTR executive members, Nilut Swargiary, Arup Kumar Dey and Ukil Mushahary; BTC joint secretary, IPRD, Jyotirmay Daimari; and BTC CHD, IPRD, Zahid Ahmed Tapadar.

Ajanta Neog reviews women & child development schemes in Baksa

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 31: Assam minister for finance and women & child development (WCD), Ajanta Neog, on Thursday chaired a review meeting to assess the progress of various schemes under the WCD Department at the DC Conference Hall, Mushalpur in Baksa

During the meeting, the minister conducted a detailed evaluation of several flagship programs, including Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0 – Strengthening early childhood nutrition and development, Model Anganwadi Centres – improving infrastructure and facilities at Anganwadi Centres, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao – encouraging education and empowerment of the girl child, Poshan Abhiyaan – addressing malnutrition among children and mothers.

The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) – Providing maternity benefits to pregnant and lactating mothers and Mission Vatsalaya – Focusing on child protection and welfare was also discussed.

As part of her visit, minister Neog inspected the Bunbari Adarsha Anganwadi Centre. She also reviewed the ongoing construction progress of the 1 No Kataligaon Adarsha Anganwadi Centre, ensuring timely completion and quality standards.

She stated that the meeting has emphasized welfare and development of the women and child development across the region.

The meeting was attended by Barama MLA Bhupen Boro, Bhabanipur MLA Phanidhar Talukdar, Baksa deputy commissioner Gautam Das, and officials from the WCD Department, among other stakeholders.

Me-Dam-Me –Phi in state witnessing vibrant cultural milieu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 31: Diphu in Karbi Anglong, observed the festival of the Ahom people, Me-Dam-Me-Phi, with a day-long programme from 11 am on Friday. The event was hosted by the general secretary of the Tai Ahom Cultural Society, Karbi District Committee, Chao Bikram Handique.

After the flag hoisting, the devotees offered prayers. Afterwards, the Malungs invited by the organisers from Patsakor performed the Wan-Phi Puja. Wan-Phi Puja has been performed to appease Khao Kham, Aileng Din, Jan Sai Hung, Landon Mut Kum, Taikum, Chitlam Cham, Jachingpha, Dam (god of death) and Ra Khin Bakhin (evil god).

The old and young of the Ahom community attended the event wearing traditional dresses in silk.

Our Margherita Correspondent adds: The 43rd Me-Dam-Me –Phi festival was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Margherita by the Ahom community on Friday.

On the first day of the festival, various competitions were held with traditional games such as egg fights, painting, essay writing, tug-of-war for women, musical chairs, pot breaking, spoon-and-marble race, and thread-beading race.

Additionally, a state-level quiz competition, Ai Ching Lao performance, Tai script writing competition, contemporary speech competition, Lai Lung Kham, and Rak Chang Mai competitions were held.

A representative meeting took place, followed by the traditional Banfi Puja. On the second day, friday the programme began with the Fhuralung Puja, where attendees paid homage to their ancestors.

Then a flag-hoisting ceremony of 43 Bin-Khring-Fa flags were unfurled, Mintu Deodhai Phukan as the chief flag hoister.

This was followed by the Me-Dam Tarpan ceremony, led by chief tarpan performer Utpal Konwar, along with 38 distinguished personalities.

A national integrity oath-taking ceremony was also conducted, led by Gun Duori.

After that a colorful cultural procession featuring traditional Tai ethnic groups and other communities was took out from Chao Cheng Ron Samannay Khetra to Margherita chariali where more than 10,000 people irrespective of caste, creed, race, language and religion attended. The cultural procession was inaugurated by popular actor of Assam Nayan Nilim.

The community feast was inaugurated by young entrepreneur of Margherita Pranjit Chetia.

Subsequently, an open session, felicitation ceremony and prize distribution programme were held which was presided by Mintu Deodhai Phukan where as part of the celebration, a souvenir book titled "Ngi Ring Kham", edited by Pabitra Borgohain, was released by renowned litterateur of Margherita Ranjit Dutta, many distinguished and resource persons such as veteran journalist of Margherita Jagat Changmai, Bir Raghav, Moran Government college principal Amarjit Saikia, popular actor of Assam Nayan Nilim, All Assam Sema Naga Council president Kahoto Sema, Tirap Autonomous District Council Demand Committee general secretary Pallab Shyam Wailung, Tai Ahom Development Council member Nabojit Baruah, All Assam Bhoomi Lakhya Karmachari Sanmeloni president Nitul Gogoi, among others were present.

Jibeshwar Mohan, former president of Purvanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha Tai and retired principal of Tingkhong College attended as a keynote speaker at the open session.

During the event, Pranob Gogoi, former president of the Purvanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha was honored with the "Gnyati Mohiyan Award 2025" for his lifelong contributions to the development of the Tai Ahom community.

Apart from his career as a teacher, retired principal of Margherita college he has held significant roles such as president of the Purvanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha, president of the Margherita Sub division Me-Dam-Me-Phi Celebration Committee and president of the Margherita Chao Cheng Ren Construction Committee as his exceptional leadership has greatly contributed to the preservation and advancement of Tai Ahom heritage and Assamese culture.

Additionally, 50 distinguished individuals and Mulungs who contributed to the development of Tai Ahom religion, culture, and language were also felicitated.

During the evening hours a cultural programme was conducted, with prominent folk artist of Assam Lohit Gogoi as the chief guest where a lamp-lighting ceremony took place led by veteran Malung Konak Hatibaruah. The event concluded with a traditional Tai ethnic attire competition.

NESAC MoU with MSSV to boost space science research and education in NE

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 31: The North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) and Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya (MSSV), Nagaon, inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on January 28 to foster collaboration in space science and technology research and education.

The agreement was signed by Dr S P Aggarwal; director of NESAC and Sarat Hazarika; registrar of MSSV in presence of Prof Mridul Hazarika; vice chancellor of MSSV along with K K Sarmah; group head of RSAG, BK Handique; head PPEG, Bichitra Bikash; deputy registrar, Kamal K Tanti, head department of Physics of MSSV and all the head of the divisions of NESAC, Meghalaya.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof Mridul Hazarika, vice chancellor of MSSV stressed upon joint academic and research initiatives to benefit the academicians and researchers of both institutions and he announced that reputed scientists from NESAC will be honored as honorary professors of the University. S P Aggrawal, in his valuable speech, mentioned about the upcoming largest Drone Facility and Drone Pilot training centre at NESAC, which will benefit the youths of NE region. He also pointed out that joint capacity building courses will benefit the students and researchers of the region.

Further, as part of the MoU, MSSV will recognise NESAC as a Center of Excellence, solidifying the collaboration between the two institutions. The agreement also paves the way for joint research projects, leveraging the expertise of both NESAC and MSSV faculty and researchers.

This partnership also marks the beginning of two new joint programmes: M Sc. in Physics and Post Graduate Diploma in Remote Sensing and GIS, to be taught by the scientists of NESAC along with faculty members of MSSV.

These programs aim to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to contribute to the growing field of space science and technology, scientific exploration in space & allied science will be integrated with various local aspects to leverage values in scientific pursuits.

Several state-of-the-art pieces of equipment will be installed at MSSV Nagaon as a result of this collaboration. A lightning detector has already been installed, enhancing the university's capabilities in atmospheric studies. The installation of further advanced equipment will provide students and researchers with access to cutting-edge technology, facilitating high-quality research and education.

KAAC CEM continues to interact with people

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 31: In continuing the effort to get close to the people, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) held another public interaction programme at Jonghar Timung village, Deopani Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency in Karbi Anglong.

The interaction was attended by the chief executive member (CEM) of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang who assured that he will try to mend the needs of the people.

CEM said, "For knowing the needs and grievances of the public we have taken applications from them and held discussions. Officers of all departments are here with me along with the DC and SP. All applications are accepted. The secretaries have noted down the grievances and recorded them so that action can be taken."

He further said, "A booklet will be made on the grievances and needs of each MAC constituency based on the applications. People have given us memorandums and spoken their minds. The work needed will be passed in the District Planning Board and tender will be called."

CEM said KAAC would try to complete the work within one year adding that indigenous would get facilities. MLAs Rup Sing Teron and Darsing Ronghang; executive member of KAAC, Mangal Sing Timung; MAC, Johny Timung and others were present at the public interaction programme.

Google Boy amazes students at Siksha Valley School in Dibrugarh

Answered every question posed by the students and teachers

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Jan 31: Child prodigy "Google Boy," Kautilya visited Siksha Valley School in Dibrugarh on the occasion of its Annual Day Celebration on Thursday.

As part of the celebrations, he engaged in an interactive session with the students.

Siksha Valley School, located in Khanikar, Dibrugarh, is renowned for its international standards in education.

The school marked its Annual Day with a special event titled Tejomay-3, where Kautilya Pandit, known for his extraordinary memory and vast knowledge, participated in a lively discussion with students.

Kautilya's presence at the Tejomay-3 event delighted the students, as he spent considerable time interacting with them. He answered every question posed by the students and teachers, covering topics ranging from socio-economic to global political affairs.

During the session, he also spoke about Dibrugarh's environment, expressing admiration for its climate and the lush green tea gardens that captivated him.

Addressing the students, Kautilya Pandit made a thought-provoking remark, emphasising that exam marks do not define a student's future.

Instead, he encouraged them to focus on gaining knowledge saying true success lies in learning rather than mere academic scores. He further advised that achieving any goal in life required hard work, concentration, and perseverance. He highlighted that deep interest and immersion in a subject were keys to master it.

Throughout the session, Kautilya shared insights on a variety of topics, from politics and sports to science and history, providing informative responses to students' questions.

Notably, Kautilya Pandit, the son of Satish Sharma from Haryana, gained national recognition at the age of five for his exceptional grasp of subjects like politics and geography. His extraordinary intelligence made him a sensation across the country, with his talents being widely featured on national television.

The event also featured cultural performances by the students of Siksha Valley School. Established seven years ago by noted social worker and entrepreneur Pulin Chandra Gogoi and renowned Chartered Accountant Basant Kr Agarwalla, the school has recently achieved remarkable academic results in CBSE Secondary School and Senior Secondary examinations. Additionally, it has excelled in sports, earning accolades at both state and national levels.

The event was attended by the school's managing director, Pulin Chandra Gogoi, co-Chairman Hemanta Kumar Gogoi, director SP Suresh, along with teachers, parents, well-wishers, and students.

French Embassy Delegation explores solutions to mitigate flood in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Jan 31: A delegation from the French Embassy arrived in Dibrugarh on Wednesday to assess and explore solutions for the city's persistent urban flooding and waterlogging issues.

The visit, which includes meetings with key stakeholders, site inspections, and discussions on innovative flood management strategies, aims to enhance Dibrugarh's resilience against flooding.

The delegation's program began this afternoon with a welcome briefing by local authorities, where officials introduced the objectives of the field visit and provided an overview of ongoing flood management efforts in the city.

This was followed by stakeholder meetings attended by representatives from the district administration, water resources department, town and country planning, and PWD roads.

During these discussions, officials presented Dibrugarh's flood history, current mitigation measures, and ongoing projects. The French delegation also explored potential areas of collaboration and discussed challenges related to flood preparedness and urban planning.

The delegation will examine existing flood management infrastructure and engage with local communities to better understand the impact of waterlogging on daily life.

A visit to a tea plantation site is also planned as part of their assessment.

On Thursday afternoon, they went to the DTP Dyke and Brahmaputra riverfront to explore possibilities for urban development.

Discussions will focus on creating vibrant public spaces such as promenades, cycling tracks, and floating decks while incorporating flood mitigation strategies like rainwater storage systems.

Proposals will also include strengthening the dyke's protective role and introducing eco-tourism opportunities along the waterfront.

On January 31, the delegation will participate in a briefing led by Atelier LD, where they will review key findings and discuss further action plans with local authorities.

The visit is expected to pave the way for future collaboration between Dibrugarh and French urban planning experts, offering sustainable solutions for the city's flood management challenges.

'Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma' biography hailed

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Jan 31: Sahitya Academy awardee, Dr Ajit Brahma was offered gratitude and congratulated by Niranjan Brahma, the grandson of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma on the release of the biography 'Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma' by Assam Cabinet Minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma. The biography was written by Ajit Brahma in English.

The book is considered to be a great work about Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. He also believed that everyone would embrace the work.

For widespread dissipation about Gurudev, the biography was written by Ajit Boro in English. The grandson of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma hailed the biography in Hindi as well.

Dima Hasao Health Society combats Leprosy with SPARSH campaign

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Jan 31: The District Health Society, in collaboration with the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP), has launched the SPARSH Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC) to mark "Anti-Leprosy Day."

This two-week initiative aimed to raise awareness on leprosy, address misconceptions, and encourage early diagnosis and treatment.

Leprosy, though entirely curable, remains surrounded by stigma and misinformation, often discouraging people from seeking treatment. "Early diagnosis and timely treatment are vital to preventing disabilities caused by leprosy," stated NK Bailung. joint director of health services. He noted that while only three patients in the district are currently undergoing treatment, there could be numerous unreported cases. Bailung emphasised the importance of community engagement and mobilizing resources to encourage early detection.

The campaign's core objective is to educate communities about the disease and promote the availability of free Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT).

Partha Jahari, secretary of health at the NCHAC, highlighted the critical need to eliminate social taboos surrounding leprosy: "Stigma associated with leprosy is a major barrier. We must leverage social media and work with civil society organisations and NGOs to reshape public perception and spread accurate information."

Assam currently reports around 1,040 leprosy cases, and the campaign aimed to ensure that affected individuals seek prompt treatment. The district health authorities are dedicated to providing comprehensive care and support to those affected.

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic infectious condition caused by Mycobacterium leprae or Mycobacterium lepromatosis. It primarily impacts the skin, peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract, and eyes.

The awareness campaign launch event was attended by Dr M Changsan, additional CMO & HO (FW), along with medical officers and other healthcare staff, who reiterated the significance of this initiative in achieving a leprosy-free Dima Hasao.

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THE HILLS TIMES
VOL.XXVI, ISSUE 021, DIPHU, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2025

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The sweetest of all sounds is praise
-Xenophon

Signals from economic survey

The key narrative of the Economic Survey 2024-25is that India's real GDP growth in the financial year 2025-26 is expected to be between 6.3 to 6.8 per cent, suggesting a sluggish economic condition for the country in the next financial year. Since India's GDP growth rate has already likely to slip down from 8.2 per cent in 2023-24to four years low in the current financial year2024-25 to 6.4 per cent, the country has very hard times ahead. The Economic Survey 2024-25 is prepared this year also by the team led by Dr. V. Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Adviser, Government of India, one can expect even worse performance of the economy of the country, given the track record of his teams earlier projections. All these indicate a bitter economic ground reality, and we may well conclude that the Economic Survey 2024-25 tries its best to generate hope that economic slowdown may not be much worse, but could grow by between 6.3 to 6.8 per cent, in the given national and internationals upside and downside risks.

Looking ahead, the Economic Survey 2024-25 asserts that India's economic prospects for FY26 are balanced. Headwinds to growth include elevated geopolitical and trade uncertainties and possible commodity price shocks. Domestically, the translation of order books of private capital goods sector into sustained investment pick-up, improvements in consumer confidence, and corporate wage pick-up will be key to promoting growth. Rural demand backed by a rebound in agricultural production, an anticipated easing of food inflation and a stable macro-economic environment provide an upside to near-term growth. Though real GDP is likely to slip to 6.4 per cent in the FY25, Economic Survey 2024-25 also asserts that domestic economy remains steady amidst global uncertainties. From the angle of aggregate demand, it says, private final consumption expenditure at constant prices is estimated to grow by 7.3 per cent, driven by a rebound in rural demand. (Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) as a share of GDP (at current prices) is estimated to increase from60.3 per cent in FY24 to 61.8 per cent in FY25. This share is the highest since FY03.Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) (at constant prices) is estimated to grow by6.4 per cent.

The slowdown in investment activity is likely temporary, it says. Green shoots in capital formation are visible. Union government capex is up 8.2 per cent in July – November 2024and is expected to pick up further pace. Early results of the RBI's Order Books, Inventory, and Capacity Utilisation Survey (OBICUS) show that the seasonally adjusted capacity utilisation (CU) in manufacturing firms was 74.7 per cent in Q2 FY25, above the long-term average of 73.8 per cent. On the external front, exports of goods and non-factor services at constant prices increased by 5.6 per cent in H1 FY25, while imports increased by 0.7 per cent. In Q2FY25, imports of goods and services at constant prices contracted by 2.9 per cent, primarily driven by a decline in commodity prices. As a result, net exports contributed positively to real GDP growth in this period. We expect that the growth in FY26 would be between6.3 and 6.8 per cent, Economic Survey 2024-25 asserted.

Campaign for Delhi assembly election gets bizzare with poison in Yamuna, toxins in air

"I've been looking for answers/I've been looking for clues/I couldn't find it in the paper/Couldn't find it in the news/Oh there's poison in the water/Oh there are toxins in the air/Oh it's got us fighting over nothing/Whoever's up there doesn't care…." These are lyrics of a song sung blue by a singer called Aaron Stephens and it fits Arvind Kejriwal's charge of the Haryana government poisoning the Yamuna water like a glove.

The Pied Piper of the Aam Aadmi Party has been vociferous after talking of "genocide" being planned on the people of Delhi. From toxins in the air to poison in the Yamuna and it's not the BJP alone, Kejriwal's 'Poison in the Yamuna' barb brought both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and LoP Rahul Gandhi on to the same page, a rare alignment of jilted stars in the Milky Way!

Rahul Gandhi emerged from the shadows of self-imposed isolation to flay Kejriwal for failing to cleanse the Yamuna of deadly toxins. Kejriwal, however, had bigger fish to skewer. Like replying to the Election Commission's notice on his charge that the Haryana government was "mixing poison" in the Yamuna to murder, commit genocide on Delhi's millions.

"We got to know the sinister plan and diverted the poisonous water and saved Delhi," the ousted Delhi Chief Minister reasoned, his face a study in concern. Bigger crooks have tried to put on a deadpan face, but for honest-Joe Kejriwal it was a piece of cake. Making allegations come natural and easy to Arvind Kejriwal, and accusations against him is like water off a duck's back. Arvind Kejriwal told the election panel it was his "public duty to highlight toxicity."

Who can argue with that? The man is so full of believable homilies, and in an exclusive class of 'One'. A Sonipat court has ordered Kejriwal to present himself at the CJM court on February 17 for alleging that Haryana "mixed poison in the Yamuna." Sonipat CJM Neha Goyal couldn't have been more outraged. In fact, for hundreds of thousands of Haryanvis, the AAP convener is beyond insufferable.

And this when Arvind Kejriwal is himself a Haryanvi Baniya! To the Election Commission, Kejriwal replied his remarks were made in the context of an "urgent public health crisis" staring election-bound

Delhi in the face! The reply ran into 14 pages and Kejriwal said it was his duty to speak against the "severe toxicity and contamination" of the raw water flowing out of BJP-ruled Haryana.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Sushil Kutty

The Delhi Chief Minister forgot to mention his own failure to rid the Yamuna of the severely toxic "floating foam". Instead, he blamed Delhi's water woes on ammonia and other deadly chemicals. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, whose calm disposition is the stuff legend, took a trip to the Wazirabad Canal, which is fed by the Yamuna, and took a sip of the "contaminated water" to prove Kejriwal's allegation was a yarn, but Kejriwal couldn't have cared less at "such antics."

People forget that Arvind Kejriwal is fighting with his back to the wall and is hanging exhausted against the ropes. Ten years is a long time and Kejriwal's sagging image rests on lies, lies and more lies, on apologies, apologies and more apologies. The only thing saving Kejriwal's hide are his glib statements. In the "States", Las Vegas specifically, Kejriwal would have hit the jackpot at every casino.

Will Kejriwal make a podium finish on February 8? "Stinking water" has been an allegation on every Delhi tongue from long before Kejriwal woke up to "Ammonia in the Yamuna." Kejriwal's vote-banks in the Delhi slums are largely intact, where voters are happy getting any water, even ammonia-laden poisonous Yamuna water. But even slum-dwellers do not drink "Yamuna water". They, too, invest a daily 100 bucks on "bottled mineral water."

In fact, all of Delhi lives and breathes on bottled mineral water. It has become a habit and drinking "mineral" is no longer VVIP! Bottlers have been making a killing all these 11 Kejriwal years. Kejriwal says ammonia in raw water from Haryana is so "extreme" that Delhi's water treatment plants can't bring the toxicity down to safe permissible limits. Kejriwal didn't reveal where the poisoned Haryana water was diverted to and whether people there died of ammonia overdose.

But the BJP should stop playing victim even if Prime Minister Narendra Modi is disgusted with the "disgusting AAP-da". Modi says Arvind Kejriwal will go to despicable depths to prevent defeat in the Delhi elections. But does Prime Minister Modi actually drink the same Yamuna water? "Can anyone imagine that the BJP government in Haryana was trying to poison me?" Modi asked. "It is an insult to Indian culture, an insult to our character. The 'AAP-da' will drown in the same river."

The honest to God truth is both Prime Minister and Chief Minister can't escape blame for Delhi's denizens not getting clean drinking water. In fact, Prime Minister Modi hasn't done anything to ensure Indian citizens have access to potable water, whether it is in Delhi, in Mumbai, in Chennai or in Bengaluru. Modi will let the worst things go on and on till it becomes an election issue so that the Bharatiya Janata Party can make a huge hue and cry about it.

Modi says that for 11 years he, too, has been drinking the same ammonia-laced Yamuna water. The question is, which prime minister of which country will tolerate such an abomination and not do anything about it? If "Chief Minister Delhi" did not do his job, "Prime Minister India" also did not. Neither the Chief Minister nor the Prime Minister covered themselves with glory.

The Prime Minister cannot make a clean getaway. "AAP-da people have become desperate due to the fear of defeat. Is Haryana different from Delhi? Don't they have children and relatives in Delhi? Will they mix poison for their own people?" Modi asked, adding that everybody in Delhi, including "himself and the diplomats and judges", were drinking the same Haryana water. Did Kejriwal save the lives of Modi, diplomats and judges by diverting the poisonous Haryana water to some hellhole far away from Delhi?

"Can anyone think that to kill Modi, the Haryana BJP has mixed poison in water? Was there a conspiracy to kill judges in Delhi? What are you talking about? It is in the character of Indians to forgive mistakes but neither Delhi nor India forgives sins committed with ill intention," Modi said. "This is fraud and shamelessness. They want to make people struggle for water and want Purvanchalis to do Chhathi Maiyya's puja surrounded by garbage."

The truth and the blot is, both "Prime Minister Narendra Modi" and the "Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal" are to blame for the toxins in the air, and for the poison in the Yamuna. This has got both of them fighting. Should the electorate care? February 8 should deliver the answer. ***(IPA Service)***

India's Budget dilemma: Balancing aspirations with reality

By: Dipak Kurmi

India's fiscal landscape resembles that of a middle-class household striving to reconcile lofty aspirations with constrained means. The nation's ambitions—spurred by the political vision of becoming a "developed" country by 2047 and bolstered by its standing as the world's fourth-largest economy—clash with the realities of limited resources and systemic inefficiencies. India's budgeting challenge is emblematic of a larger economic paradox: while it dreams big, structural and policy shortcomings threaten to tether its growth to unsustainable practices.

At the heart of this predicament lies the country's reliance on public investment to shoulder the burden of economic development. With private corporates largely risk-averse and the financial sector dominated by public sector banks, the government has taken on the role of an investor of last resort. Compounding the issue, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), along with agriculture, are locked in low-productivity cycles, offering limited value addition and low-wage employment. Meanwhile, import tariffs protect inefficiencies, disincentivizing private sector innovation and competition. These dynamics not only exacerbate fiscal stress but also amplify project delays, which inflate costs and undermine returns. Astonishingly, India incurs an estimated annual cost of Rs 4.8 trillion due to project overruns—equivalent to nearly 20% of original project budgets.

Borrowing to Bridge the Gap

To plug its resource gap, India relies heavily on borrowing. Remarkably, the nation has maintained a strong creditworthiness record, never defaulting on debt repayments. Fiscal rules ostensibly limit borrowing at both Union and state levels. However, the long-term sustainability of these restraints remains uncertain, especially in a global environment marked by burgeoning debt levels.

Emerging markets (EMs) have seen their government debt rise significantly from 44% to 69% of GDP between 2010 and 2023, outpacing the increase in advanced economies (AEs), where debt grew from 105% to 112% of GDP. India's public debt, already above the EM average at 65.6% of GDP in 2010, surged to 81.6% in 2023. This puts India in a precarious position: while its debt levels are closer to those of advanced economies, its per capita income remains far lower, trailing behind even high-income EMs like China.

The path to reducing public debt is fraught with challenges. It requires restraining new borrowing, boosting GDP growth above the current average of 6.5%, and fostering private investment to complement public spending. These steps, while necessary, are easier said than done.

Structural Imperatives for Growth

Achieving sustained economic growth necessitates structural changes. One crucial strategy is to attract foreign and domestic private investment by reducing risks and ensuring predictable returns. India must reposition itself as a reliable destination for foreign capital, leveraging the global realignment of supply chains with policies that welcome diverse investments. To do so, it should offer binding advance-tax guidance and contracts aligned with international best practices.

Reforming the financial sector is equally critical. Budget 2025 could address the imbalance in savings by eliminating the tax preference for equity investments over debt, thereby promoting diversified savings among the middle class. Strengthening regulatory oversight to curb reckless lending practices by banks and financial institutions is also essential.

Maintaining fiscal discipline is another cornerstone of fostering investor confidence. While fiscal deficit (FD) norms ostensibly limit government spending, adherence to these rules has been inconsistent. In 2017, the upper limit for the Centre's fiscal deficit was raised from 3% to 4% of GDP, pushing the combined FD (Union and states) to 7%. This was a clear shift in goalposts, given that the earlier norm of 6% of GDP was met only sporadically between 1983 and 2018. The fiscal fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation, with the general FD peaking at 13.1% in 2020-21. While it has since moderated, it remains elevated at around 7.9%, leaving little room for monetary flexibility.

The Inflation Puzzle

Inflation management presents another conundrum. Since 2016, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been tasked with maintaining inflation within a 2-6% band, with a target of 4%. Although inflation declined from 6.21% in October 2024 to 5.22% in December 2024, it remains above the ideal target. Upside risks continue to loom, fueled by structural inefficiencies and fiscal pressures.

Efforts to statistically reduce inflation, such as the NCAER's recommendation to lower the weight of food in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from 48.5% to 40%, highlight the importance of optics in a globally competitive environment. However, such adjustments do little to address the underlying economic realities.

Rethinking Priorities

India's approach to budgeting requires a paradigm shift. Prestige projects and populist spending—ranging from grandiose infrastructure like the new Parliament building to freebies aimed at bolstering vote shares—divert resources from high-value investments. Instead, spending should be directed toward projects with the greatest potential for economic returns, supported by accurate and current data to ensure targeted allocation.

Centralized spending further exacerbates inefficiencies. The Union government's bloated administrative machinery manages an ever-expanding number of schemes, with major programs doubling from 73 in 2017-18 to 170 in 2024-25. Each scheme adds administrative costs and dilutes the impact of funding. A more efficient approach would involve devolving financial and administrative responsibilities to state governments, allowing them to tailor solutions to local needs while adhering to national priorities.

The Road Ahead

India's fiscal challenges are symptomatic of deeper structural issues that cannot be addressed by short-term fixes. To achieve its aspirations of becoming a developed nation by 2047, India must embrace fiscal prudence, empower private investment, and prioritize targeted, high-impact spending. The Union government must shed its role as a fiscal supermarket and focus on strategic investments in national infrastructure, digital networks, and industrial innovation.

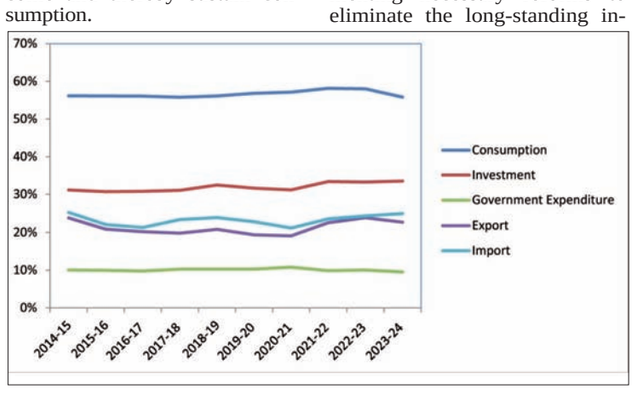
By tackling these challenges head-on, India can align its aspirations with its means, paving the way for sustainable growth and economic resilience in the decades to come. ***(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)***

Budget 2025-26: The 'what', 'why' and 'how' of boosting consumption for growth

By Dr. Nilanjan Banik

The Budget deals with allocating money towards areas where the government thinks it is essential to spend, and finding out ways such as taxes, to finance it. The government primarily requires money to spend on social infrastructure (such as schools, hospitals, water, sanitation, etc.), physical infrastructure (such as railways, roads, airports, etc.) and transferring funds to the poor and the deprived, so that distribution of income becomes more equal. But, how does one say whether a budget is good or bad? The general assumptions underlying a good budget are: it contains the fiscal deficit, carries on with the necessary reforms, and give incentives to consumers and business.

For the benefit of the reader, there are five components of demand, namely, consumption expenditure, investment expenditure, government expenditure, exports, and imports. The most important component of demand is consumption expenditure, explaining around 57 % of the national income. Generating and sustaining income would therefore call for strategies that would generate income and thereby sustain consumption.



Source: Indian Economic Survey, 2024

Until the middle of 2024, the Indian economic outlook looks quite optimistic, with predictions of continued growth at a rate of over 7%. However, when India posted a lower growth rate of GDP -5.4% in the second quarter of 2024, the economic outlook quickly turned pessimistic. According to the government's own estimate, GDP growth is expected to hit a 4-year low at 6.4%. Other metrics of economic growth are also disappointing, with declining urban and rural consumption, single-digit growth in GST collections (7.3% y-o-y in December 2024), and core infrastructure growth (4.3% y-o-y increase during November 2024).

There has been a fall in car, two-wheeler, and cement production. In fact, the PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index), which tracks sales, employment, inventories, and price data of manufacturing sector companies, has shown a sharp decline to 56.4 — the lowest in 12 months.

Therefore, the Finance Minister is expected to introduce policy measures aimed at boosting consumption, such as increasing tax exemptions. Additionally, efforts should be made to create a more favourable business environment by reducing the cost of doing business, for instance, through increased fund allocation for physical infrastructure and implementing necessary reforms to eliminate the long-standing inverted duty structure (IDS).

This will help to alleviate the consumption distress among the middle class (with an annual income between Rs 5 and 30 lakhs) and lower income households (with an annual income between Rs2 and 5 lakhs) which form the backbone of India's growth story. The majority of these groups are employed in the agricultural sector, self-owned businesses, and the MSME sector. Together, they make up 70% of India's working population with 400 million stuck in low productive agriculture sector and around 250 million in the MSME sector.

The agriculture sector has struggled to flourish, with 82% of farmers classified as smallholders, owning less than 1.15 hectares of land. Moreover, these land parcels are often not contiguous, making the mechanization of agriculture difficult and contributing to low agricultural income. India's labour productivity – economic output per hour of work – is just 12% of the US levels. In purchasing parity terms, GDP per hour worked is $81800 for the US, in comparison to India's $10400. This also explains lower per-capita income in India, which can only grow with more incentive for agriculture and MSME sectors.

The MSME sector which for long has suffered from the inverted duty structure (IDS). A recent study by CUTS International of 1,464 tariff lines across textiles, electronics, chemicals, and metals reveals how the IDS is hurting competitiveness, with 136 items from textiles, 179 from electronics, 64 from chemicals, and 191 from metals most affected. IDS implied the MSMEs are not competitive as their input cost is higher and therefore has difficulties in scaling up. MSMEs produce goods typically consumed by low and middle-income households, which have a higher marginal propensity to consume. These businesses are integral to daily life, offering products and services ranging from baby food and biscuits to medicines, education, healthcare, hotels, and travel.

Over the last few years, tax reforms have only benefitted the big corporate sectors. India's success story in manufacturing has traditionally been driven by a capital-intensive mode of production, with major corporates like Reliance, TATA, Birla, and others dominating the sector. However, these corporate houses are not able to create enough employment opportunities which is needed for sustaining consumption.

Between 2016 and 2023, people in the bottom 20 category has seen their income growth decline by 20% whereas those in the top 20 quintiles has seen their income grow by 20%. The growth in income for this top 20 quintiles is because of highly skilled new-age workforce (often foreign returned) like doctors, legal experts, engineers and MBAs working for the global consultancy firms and global capability centres of multinational based in India. On the other hand, a growing economy is also witnessing creation of low-paid and low-productive jobs such as housekeeping, security services, and other gig type jobs such as Zomato delivery boys, which in a way is contributing to widening income inequality.

Due to lack of adequate skills and inability to absorb labourers in capital intensive manufacturing, migration is happening from agriculture to low-skilled services sectors. Even for the middle-class population they are facing problem with higher cost of healthcare and education. At a time when public spending (Central and State governments taken together) is only 4.5% of GDP, it is not surprising that for a majority of the population, education is delivered by the private sector.

A higher allocation of funds towards education and healthcare is essential, alongside a focused intervention in agriculture and MSME sectors. As long-term data suggests, countries like China, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand were able to grow their per-capita income by investing in quality primary education and healthcare systems—an approach that can be replicated through sustained, increased budgetary allocation. ***(IPA Service)***

POST BAG

Open letter to the 77th Biennial Conference of Asam Sahitya Sabha, Pathsala

Sir/Ma'am

The launch of the website (https://asamsahityasabhapathsalaadhibeshan.com) by the Reception Committee for the 77th Biennial Conference of the Asam Sahitya Sabha, Pathsala is a commendable step in the digital era. This website can serve as a platform to directly broadcast the programs and events of the conference, enabling Assamese people residing both within the country and abroad to participate easily. This initiative will not only play a significant role in promoting and propagating Assamese language, literature, and culture but also helps unite Assamese communities worldwide. It is crucial to adopt a hybrid model (offline and online modes) for the conference to ensure broader participation. This will allow individuals who cannot attend in person due to special circumstances to participate online. By incorporating hybrid arrangements, the Asam Sahitya Sabha can embrace a digital era, ensuring the global dissemination of Assamese literature and culture.

The effective use of digital technology can transform the Asam Sahitya Sabha into a modern and dynamic platform, fostering greater engagement and connectivity among Assamese communities across the globe. This step will not only enhance the reach of the Sabha but also strengthen its mission to preserve and promote Assamese heritage on an international scale.

Dr. Buljit Buragohain,
Azara, Guwahati
buljit@gmail.com

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Embark a career in clean energy for sustainability

By: Ranjan K Baruah

Energy is the foundation of life, and its impact is two-fold: ensuring inclusive access for all while protecting the planet. This dual challenge underscores the urgent need for clean energy solutions. Without energy life is not possible and energy lies at the core of a double challenge which means leaving no one behind and protecting the Planet. Like energy we talk much about clean energy or renewable energy.

Clean energy or renewable energy encompasses sources that generate minimal to no pollution or greenhouse gas emissions, thereby minimizing harm to the environment. Examples include solar energy, wind energy, hydro energy, geothermal energy, biomass energy, etc.

The positive thing is that transitioning to clean energy is crucial for mitigating climate change, improving air and water quality, enhancing energy security, supporting sustainable development, etc. We should learn that in a world grappling with climate change, clean energy plays a vital role in reducing emissions, and can also benefit communities lacking access to reliable power sources. Still today, 685 million people live in the dark - more than 80 per cent of them in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The current time tells us that we have to combat climate change which also means we need to end our reliance on fossil fuels and invest in alternative sources of energy that are clean, accessible, affordable, sustainable, and reliable. Renewable energy sources which are available in abundance all around us, provided by the sun, wind, water, waste, and heat from the Earth are replenished by nature and emit little to no greenhouse gases or pollutants into the air.

The International Day of Clean Energy on 26 January was declared by the General Assembly (resolution A/77/327) as a call to raise awareness and mobilize action for a just and inclusive transition to clean energy for the benefit of people and the planet.

26th January is also the founding date of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), a global intergovernmental agency established in 2009 to support countries in their energy transitions, serve as a platform for international cooperation, and provide data and analyses on clean energy technology, innovation, policy, finance and investment. The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) is the nodal Ministry of the Government of India for all matters relating to new and renewable energy. The broad aim of the Ministry is to develop and deploy new and renewable energy to supplement the energy requirements of the country.

There are many career options in this field like wind turbine service, technicians, data scientist, solar installers, greenhouse worker , recycling worker, environmental scientist , environmental technician , urban planner , air quality engineer , energy manager , energy engineer , solar consultant etc . Renewable energy careers are roles in which you provide services, research or analysis for anything related to natural and renewable energy sources.

We are aware that renewable energy is energy that comes from nature or the planet's natural sources that replenish themselves. Careers in this field are endless and choosing a career in clean energy is also our commitment towards sustainability. Let's embark on a fulfilling career in renewable energy and contribute to a cleaner, greener future! ***(With direct inputs from UN publication and readers may communicate with the author at 8473943734 or bkranjan@gmail.com for any career related queries)***

Dr. Radhakrishnan School Dibrugarh Recruitment – 10 Posts

Last Date: 04/02/2025

Dr. Radhakrishnan School of Arts, Commerce and Science, Dibrugarh has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 10 Faculty & other posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

1. PGT Mathematics
No of posts: 02
Pay: ₹ 12,000/- to ₹ 35,000/-(Salary will be commensurate with MERIT and EXPERIENCE)

Educational Qualification: B.Sc in Mathematics or M.Sc in Mathematics
Experience: 2-3 years in IX, X, XI & XII

2. Science Coordinator
No of posts: 03
Buy-Books-Online

Pay: ₹ 12,000/- to ₹ 35,000/-(Salary will be commensurate with MERIT and EXPERIENCE)
Educational Qualification: B.Tech/B.Sc/M.Sc
Experience: Preference will be given to 1-2 years of experience in the same field.

3. Accounts Officer
No of posts: 02

Pay: ₹ 12,000/- to ₹ 35,000/-(Salary will be commensurate with MERIT and EXPERIENCE)
Educational Qualification: Graduate in any discipline but B.Com / M.Com / MBA will be given preference.
Experience: Preference will be given to 1-2 years of experience in the same field.
Gender: Male
4. Public Relation Officer
No of posts: 01

Pay: ₹ 10,000/- to ₹ 20,000/-(Salary will be commensurate with MERIT and EXPERIENCE)
Educational Qualification: B.Tech/B.Sc/M.Sc
Experience: Preference will be given to 1-2 years of experience in the same field.

Gender: Female
5. Driver
No of posts: 02
Pay: ₹ 10,000/- to ₹ 18,000/-(Salary will be commensurate with MERIT and EXPERIENCE)
Experience: Experience in driving Fortuner, Bus, Traveller etc. Must have Driving License.

Gender: Male
Application Fee: Nil.
How to Apply for Dr. Radhakrishnan School Dibrugarh Recruitment ?
Potential candidates having the requisite qualification & experience can send their (CVs) at hrrkschool@gmail.com or submit the same at the front office of Dr. Radhakrishnan School of Arts, Commerce & Science, Amolapatty Dibrugarh Assam – 786001 on or before 4th February 2025. For any query please contact H.R Department @ 8822400362 from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm.

SDS India Guwahati Recruitment 2025 – Research Associate Post

Last Date: 05/02/2025

SDS India, Guwahati, a consulting firm based in Guwahati has released an employment notification for the recruitment of Research Associate Post. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here.

Name of post: Research Associate (Statistics and Data Analysis)
No of posts: 1
Job Location: Guwahati

Educational Qualification: Masters in Statistics or economics

Other requirement: Fluent in SPSS, Python and Stata software.

Job Description:
Data cleansing: Clean data to uncover trends, patterns, and business insights
Statistical analysis: Use statistical tools or software to analyze complex data and interpret patterns
Data visualization: Design charts, graphs, and dashboards to communicate data insights
Report generation: Write reports summarizing findings, interpretations, and recommendations
Problem solving: Identify concerns related to solution validation, user testing, technical documentation, and reporting
Communication: Share information about business data from both technical and non-technical backgrounds
Exploratory data analysis: Scrutinize data to recognize and identify patterns
Data mining: Use data mining techniques to summarize analysis features

Role and Responsibilities:

Technical writing skills
Coding skills in languages such as Python
Analytical and problem-solving skills
Ability to set and meet deadlines
Ability to work in high-pressure situations
Experience with statistical software like Stata and SPSS
Data visualization and reporting skills
Attention to detail
Application fee if any: NIL .

How to Apply for SDS India Guwahati Recruitment ?
Post 1: Apply Here: https://www.sdsindia.in/career .
Post 2: Send your CV to hr@sdsindia.in .
Last Date for submission of application is 5th February 2025 .

About SDS India Guwahati
SDS India, Guwahati is a consulting firm based in Guwahati. SDS operates in 11 states of India which includes all Northeast India states, Bihar, Odisha and Karnataka serving the needs of Central & State government, Doner, CSR agency, not-for-profits, FPOs, individual entrepreneurs and other development organisations.
SDS is committed to provide enabling services to organisations or individuals to unlock potentials to impact the life of the poor and disadvantage section of the society. This is possible with a team of highly professional & technically qualified personnel, who have a vast and practical experience of working at grass roots with undeserved segments of the society.

Anganwadi Recruitment 2025 – 16 Anganwadi Worker & Helper Posts @ Majuli

Last Date: 07/02/2025

Office of the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), Majuli ICDS, Kamalabari, Majuli has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 16 Anganwadi Worker and Anganwadi Helper (Sahayika) vacancy in various Anganwadi centres. Interested and eligible candidates may apply here .

1. Anganwadi Worker
No of posts: 6 posts

Educational Qualification: Candidates must have passed Higher Secondary (Class 12th). If HS passed candidates not available in a particular area, then HSLC/AHM passed candidates will also be considered as eligible.
Remuneration: ₹ 6,500 per month

2. Anganwadi Helper
No of posts: 10 posts
Educational Qualification: Candidates must have passed HSLC/ AHM. If HSLC/AHM passed candidates not available in a particular area, then Class IX passed candidates will also be considered as eligible.

Remuneration: ₹ 3,250 per month

Other Criteria of Anganwadi Recruitment

Age Limit: Candidates age should be between 18 years to 44 years as on 1st January 2025.
Resident-ship: The candidate who apply for the post of Anganwadi Worker/ Anganwadi Helper shall be a permanent resident residing in the concerned Anganwadi Centre survey area where Anganwadi Centre is located.
The residential proof of the candidate for the post of Anganwadi Worker/ Anganwadi Helper must be issued by the Gaon Pradhan/ Ward Member/ President .
How to Apply for Anganwadi Recruitment ?
The prescribed application form will be available in the office of the Child Development Project Officer, Majuli ICDS,Kamalabari, Majuli.
The filled up application will be received in the office of the Child Development Project Officer, Majuli ICDS, Kamalabari, Majuli till 7th February 2025.

Documents to be Submitted With Application Form
Candidates have to submit the self attested copies of the following mentioned documents along with the filled application form as required.
Recent Passport Size Photograph.
Aadhar Card Photocopy.
Age Proof.
Educational Qualification Certificates and Marksheets.
Address Proof.
Medical certificate by Govt. Medical Practitioner.
Caste Certificate (If Applicable).
Disability Certificate (If Applicable).
Experience Certificate (If Applicable).
Residency Certificate, etc.
Important Dates of Anganwadi Worker Recruitment 2025
Starting date of submission of application: 30th January 2025
Last date of submission of application: 7th February 2025

Central Bank of India Recruitment – 266 Zone Based Officer Posts

Last Date: 09/02/2025.

Central Bank of India has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 266 Zone Based Officer Posts in Junior Management Grade Scale I (Mainstream) to be engaged in Central Bank of India . Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Zone Based Officer
No of posts: 266 posts
Category-wise vacancy:
SC: 39
ST: 19
OBC: 71
EWS: 26
UR: 111

Zone-wise vacancy:
Ahmedabad: 123
Chennai: 58
Guwahati: 43
Hyderabad: 42

Scale of pay: Basic: ₹ 48480-2000/7-62480-2340/2-67160-2680/7-85920
Eligibility Criteria of Central Bank of India Recruitment

Age Limit: Not below 21 years and Not above 32 years as on 30.11.2024 i.e. candidates must have been born not later than 30.11.2003 and not earlier than 01.12.1992 (both days inclusive).
Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.
Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe: 5 years
Other Backward Classes: 3 years
PWD: 10 Years

Educational Qualification: Graduation in any discipline from a recognised University or any equivalent qualification recognised as such by the Central Government including Integrated Dual Degree (IDD). Candidates possessing qualifications such as Medical, Engineering, Chartered Accountant, Cost Accountant would also be eligible.

Experience: Candidates working/worked in Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs)/ Scheduled Cooperative Banks (Urban & State)/ *Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) having minimum assets size of at least Rs.500.00 crores operating in India.
a) In Officer/Supervisory cadre: 1 years
b) b) In Clerical Cadre: 3 years

* Candidates having experience in NBFC only in officer/ Supervisory cadre are eligible. Clerical experience of NBFC will not be considered.
Application Fee:

Category	Fee
SC/ ST/ PWBD/ Women	₹ 175 +GST
General/EWS/OBC	₹ 850 +GST

Important Dates of Central Bank of India Vacancy 2025
Starting date for submission of application: 21st January 2025
Last date for submission of application: 9th February 2025

UPSC Civil Services (Pre) Examination 2025 – 979 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 11/02/2025

Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has released the official notification for the recruitment of 979 vacancy through Civil Service (Prelims) Examination 2025 .Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of examination: Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination 2025

No of vacancy: 979 posts

Name of services:

(i) Indian Administrative Service
(ii) Indian Foreign Service
(iii) Indian Police Service
(iv) Indian Audit and Accounts Service, Group 'A'
(v) Indian Civil Accounts Service, Group 'A'
(vi) Indian Corporate Law Service, Group 'A'
(vii) Indian Defence Accounts Service, Group 'A'
(viii) Indian Defence Estates Service, Group 'A'
(ix) Indian Information Service, Group 'A'
(x) Indian Postal Service, Group 'A'
(xi) Indian Post & Telecommunication Accounts and Finance Service, Group 'A'
(xii) Indian Railway Management Service (Traffic), Group 'A'
(xiii) Indian Railway Management Service (Personnel), Group 'A'
(xiv) Indian Railway Management Service (Accounts), Group 'A'
(xv) Indian Railway Protection Force Service, Group 'A'
(xvi) Indian Revenue Service (Customs & Indirect Taxes) Group 'A'
(xvii) Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax) Group 'A'
(xviii) Indian Trade Service, Group 'A' (Grade III)
(xix) Armed Forces Headquarters Civil Service, Group 'B' (Section Officer's Grade)
(xx) Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli Civil Service (DANICS), Group 'B'
(xxi) Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli Police Service (DANIPS), Group 'B'
(xxii) Pondicherry Civil Service (PONDICS), Group 'B'
(xxiii) Pondicherry Police Service (PONDIPS), Group 'B'

Exam Notice No: 05/2025-CSP Dated 22.01.2025

Helpline No: 011-23385271/011-23381125/011-23098543

Related Article: APSC CCE Recruitment 2024

Eligibility Criteria of UPSC Civil Services (Pre) Examination

Age Limit: A candidate must have attained the age of 21 years and must not have attained the age of 32 years on the 1st of August, 2025 i.e., the candidate must have been born not earlier than 2nd August, 1993 and not later than 1st August, 2004.

Age Relaxation: Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

SC/ ST: 5 years
OBC: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years

Educational Qualification: A candidate must hold a degree of any of the Universities incorporated by an Act of the central or State Legislature in India or other educational institutions established by an Act of Parliament or declared to be deemed as a University under Section 3 of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956 or possess an equivalent qualification.

Appearing Candidates: Candidates who have appeared at a qualifying examination the passing of which would render them educationally qualified for the Commission's Examination but have not been informed of the result as also the candidates who intend to appear at such a qualifying examination will also be eligible for admission to the written part of Civil Services Examination, 2025. However, all such candidates, who are declared qualified by the Commission for Interview/Personality Test, will be required to produce proof of passing of the requisite qualifying examination within the time limit prescribed in Rule 13 of CSE, 2025.

UPSC Civil Services (Pre) Examination Scheme

The Civil Services Examination will consist of two successive stages :

(i) Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination (Objective type) for the selection of candidates for the Main Examination; and
(ii) Civil Services (Main) Examination (Written and Interview) for the selection of candidates for the various Services and posts noted above.

Examination Centres @ Assam: Jorhat and Dispur .
Application Fee: Category-wise application fee is as under.

Category	Fee
SC/ST/Women/PwBD category	Nil
Other category	₹ 100

Important Dates of UPSC Civil Services (Pre) Examination 2025

Starting date of submission of online application: 22nd January 2025
Last date of submission of online application: 11th February 2025, 6 PM
Date of Preliminary Exam: 25th May 2025

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'NATO and the EU should take more responsibility in surveying the Baltic Sea'

Lithuanian President backs Trump's NATO defence spending goal amid ongoing Russian threat

VILNIUS (LITHUANIA), Jan 31: Securing an end to the fighting in Ukraine must take place with Kyiv's full involvement and come with more defense spending by regional countries to avoid any future Russian aggression, according to Lithuania's president.

Gitanas Nauseda, the president of the Baltic coastal nation, told The Associated Press in an interview Thursday that a settlement negotiated without proper deterrent measures would allow Russia to consolidate its forces and prepare for further aggression in the region.

Nauseda said that even when a ceasefire is reached in Ukraine, "you cannot believe that the intentions of Russia will be just to stop and do nothing".

"They will use this break in order to consolidate, to strengthen the military capabilities and to strike again in the future," he told the AP in Vilnius. "And then the main question is, what will be the next target of Russia? Ukraine, maybe. Baltic countries, maybe."

Lithuania, which was occupied by the Soviet Union until 1990, is increasingly worried about the ongoing brutal war in Ukraine and the aggression of its neighbour Russia. Its geographical position — bordering Russia's Kaliningrad exclave to the west and Moscow's proxy Belarus to the east — make it vulnerable to a potential broader

conflict launched from the Kremlin even after an eventual end to the war, Nauseda said.

"You can never feel safe living in this part of the world, because we have this neighbor, and we will still have it after one hundred or two hundred years," Nauseda said of Russia. "You always have the threat from the East, and you must be aware and take all the necessary precautionary measures in order not to be attacked."

"This is not individual country-by-country conflict," he added. "This is a challenge of Putin towards NATO."

Unacceptable' if ceasefire plans exclude Kyiv

The country recently became the first member of the NATO military alliance to commit to raising its defence spending to at least 5 per cent of its overall national economic output, as called for by US President Donald Trump.

A longtime critic of NATO countries that do not spend more on defence, Trump has threatened he would not defend alliance members that fail to meet defense spending goals. While some European countries have signalled upping their spending to Trump's desired 5 per cent of GDP would be an economic burden, other nations on the alliance's eastern flank, including Lithuania, have greeted the proposal as a necessity.

Before Trump took office earlier this month, questions over how he would engage with the war in Ukraine loomed over European countries as some speculated he would roll back the crucial military aid provided by the administration of President Joe Biden.

But after his inauguration, Trump threatened to impose sanctions and tariffs on Moscow, and urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to "settle now and stop this ridiculous war".

Nauseda said the new US administration must ensure that Kyiv is fully involved in negotiations to end the fighting, and that a resolution to the conflict should not be drawn up bilaterally between Moscow and Washington.

"It would be unacceptable if the peace would be set behind the doors and without the involvement of Ukraine," he said. "Ukraine paid a very high price in this war. Ukraine lost many human lives. Infrastructure, facilities and houses are destroyed. The Ukrainian people deserve the right to set the conditions of this peace." "I think that President Donald Trump understands that: no peace negotiations without Ukraine," he added.

Suspicions over damaged undersea cables

Another security concern facing Lithuania and the region is a series of events that have damaged undersea cables and gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea. At least 11 Baltic cables have been damaged since October 2023. Most recently, a fibre optic cable connecting Latvia and the Swedish island of Gotland reportedly ruptured on Sunday.

NATO launched a new mission dubbed "Baltic Sentry" earlier this month to protect the underwater infrastructure vital to the economic well-being of the region. Although cable operators note that sub-sea cable damage is commonplace, the frequency and concentration of incidents in the Baltic have heightened suspicions that damage might have been deliberate.

To address those concerns, Nauseda said, "It is time for us to show some muscle."

"NATO and the EU should take more responsibility in surveying the Baltic Sea, bringing additional maritime capabilities to prevent such incidents in the future," he said. Some politicians in Lithuania have objected to the country raising its military expenditures, already among the highest relative to GDP in the 32-member NATO alliance. But Nauseda said Lithuania must show that it can be responsible for its own defence.

"This is an absolutely clear priority for this country, as a frontline country, that we have to spend more," he said. "Of course, we can rely on the support of our allies in NATO. But it would be naive to expect that somebody will care about our security if there will be clear indications that we are not able to defend ourselves." (AP)

Myanmar's military government extends state of emergency by 6 months

BANGKOK, Jan 31: Myanmar's military government on Friday announced another six-month extension of its mandate to rule in preparation for elections it has said will be held this year, as the country enters its fifth year of crisis. However, it did not announce an exact date for the polls.

The military declared a state of emergency on February 1, 2021, when it arrested the country's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and top officials from her government in an army takeover which reversed years of progress toward democracy after five decades of earlier military rule.

The takeover sparked an armed resistance movement, with powerful ethnic minority militias and people's defense forces that support Myanmar's main opposition now controlling large parts of the country.

The military government is currently facing its greatest challenge since taking power and is on the defensive in much of the country. However, it is still able to hold onto much of central Myanmar and big cities including the capital, Naypyidaw.

State-run MRTV television reported on Friday that the National Defence and Security Council decided unanimously to grant an extension of emergency rule after Senior Gen. Ming Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government, argued that more time was needed to restore stability to the country to hold national elections.

The council is nominally a constitutional administrative government body, but in practice is controlled by the military.

Under the army-drafted 2008 Constitution, the military was able to rule the country under a state of emergency for one year, followed by two possible six-month extensions before holding elections. However, the extension on Friday is the seventh.

Tom Andrews, a special rapporteur with the UN Human Rights Office, said in a statement on Thursday that four years of military oppression, violence and incompetence have cast Myanmar into an abyss. The United Nations has estimated that more than 3.5 million people have been displaced by the conflict.

Junta forces have slaughtered thousands of civilians, bombed and burned villages, and displaced millions of people. More than 20,000 political prisoners remain behind bars. The economy and public services have collapsed. Famine and starvation loom over large parts of the population, he said.

The state of emergency allows the military to assume all government functions, giving Min Aung Hlaing legislative, judicial and executive powers.

The military originally announced elections would be held in August 2023, but has regularly pushed back the date and has recently said they would take place sometime in 2025.

Under the Constitution, the military must transfer government functions to the president at least six months before elections are held.

The plan for a general election is widely seen as an attempt to legitimise the military's rule by delivering a result that ensures the generals retain in control.

Critics say the elections will neither be free nor fair because there is no free media and most of the leaders of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party have been arrested.

Moe Zaw Oo, a member of the opposition's shadow National Unity Government, said Wednesday that opposition groups are preparing to prevent the military-held election through nonviolent means. The NUG, which calls itself the country's legitimate government, serves as an opposition umbrella group.

No one from any organization on our revolutionary forces side will accept the illegal election that the military is planning to hold. We may have differences of opinion on other issues, but the position among the revolutionary forces regarding this election issue is unified and clear. We do not accept this at all, Moe Zaw Oo said in an online news conference. (AP)

FBI Director nominee Kash Patel says he was subject to racism while growing up

WASHINGTON, Jan 31: Kash Patel, US President Donald Trump's pick to lead the FBI, has told lawmakers that he has been subjected to racism while growing up.

"Unfortunately, Senator, yes. I don't want to get into those details with my family here," Patel, 44, told members of the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday during his confirmation hearing to be the FBI Director.

Patel was responding to a question from Senator Lindsey Graham if he has ever been subject to racism as an individual.

If confirmed, Patel would be the first Hindu and Indian-American to be FBI Director.

"If you look at the record from January 6th, where I testified before that committee, because of my personal information being released by the Congress, I was subjected to a direct and significant threat on my life. And I put that information in the record. I had to move," he said.

"I was called a detestable -- and I'll apologise if I don't get it all right, but it's in the record -- a detestable sand nigger who had no right being in this country. You should go back to where you came from. You belong with your terrorist home friends. That's what was sent to me. That's just the piece of it, but that's nothing compared to what the men and women in law enforcement face every day," Patel said.

His family members, including his father and mother, were present at Capitol Hill during the hearing.

"I wouldn't be here today without their guidance, their unwavering support, and their relentless love. When President Trump informed me of his intention to nominate me as the director of the FBI, I was deeply honoured.

"Sitting here today, I carry not only the dreams of my parents but also the hopes of millions of Americans who stand for justice, fairness, and the rule of law," he said.

Patel said his father fled Idi Amin's genocidal dictatorship in Uganda, where 300,000 men, women and children were killed based on their ethnicity just because "they happened to look like me".

"My mother is originally from Tanzania. She studied in India, as did my dad, and they were married there. They would later emigrate to New York, as the senator pointed out, where I was born, and we were raised in a household of my father's seven siblings, their spouses, and at least half a dozen children.

"That's the only way we knew how to do things at the time, in the '70s and '80s, the Indian way, but we would soon learn the American way," he said.

Senator Thom Tillis said he is convinced that Patel possesses significant expertise and ironclad commitment to justice and he's an outstanding choice to lead the FBI.

"Kash's parents are Indian immigrants of Gujarati ancestry. They're up here in the front row. Gujarat is a melting pot of religions, including Hinduism, Islam, and Jainism, with temples, mosques and other religious sites scattered across the state. His father was raised in Uganda, but his family had to flee the country to escape repression under Idi Amin. His mother was born in Tanzania," he said.

"They met and married in India, and ultimately, made their way to New York City by way of Canada, where his parents along with seven brothers and sisters and their spouses and at least a half a dozen kids lived under the same roof. His parents raised Kash in the Hindu faith and they instilled in him the values of hard work and education," Tellis said.

"Kash is a devout Hindu, and consistent with his faith, he's shown respect to people of all faiths," he added. (PTI)

Jailed former PM Imran Khan's PTI rejects government's offer to resume talks

ISLAMABAD, Jan 31: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership rejected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's offer to resume stalled talks with the government through a parliamentary panel to lower the country's political temperature.

Shehbaz addressed a cabinet meeting on Thursday and said the government was ready to form a parliamentary committee to advance talks with PTI after the Imran Khan-founded party quit negotiations over the non-formation of a judicial commission to probe the events of May 9, 2023, and November 26, 2024, according to Geo News.

The offer came after the PTI abruptly quit the talks after holding three meetings with the ruling parties' negotiation committee, maintaining the government failed to constitute judicial commissions within the seven-day deadline in line with its "charter of demands".

Speaking on the Geo News programme Capital Talk, PTI top leader and Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub Khan said: "We reject Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's offer [to resume dialogue]".

Reiterating the party's demands, Ayub said the PTI formed a negotiation committee with sincerity to hold dialogue with the government. "Our demands were clear," he said, calling for the release of PTI's all "political prisoners".

In a statement, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, the government's negotiation committee spokesperson, said the PTI exhibited a non-democratic and non-political mentality by unilaterally withdrawing from the talks.

"PTI lost a good opportunity towards [fulfilment] of their demands," he added.

Although the opposition party "missed this train", they should benefit from the PM's latest offer, Siddiqui said.

Slamming the PTI for its agitational politics, the PML-N senator said that neither the opposition party achieved its objective via sit-ins and long marches in the past nor will it this time.

Stressing the need for dialogue to defuse political tensions in the country, Siddiqui said the solution to every problem was serious and meaningful negotiations. "The sooner PTI understands this, the better it will be for them," he added.

The much-hyped negotiations between the government and Imran Khan's PTI hit a snag last week after the opposition walked out of negotiations following instructions from the jailed party founder.

The opposition also skipped the fourth round of meetings planned on Tuesday, saying the decision to quit talks could only be reviewed following the formation of judicial commissions, seeking probes into May 9, 2023, and November 26, 2024, events as well as the release of "political prisoners". (PTI)

Tens of thousands of Muslims attend annual Biswa Ijtema event in Bangladesh

DHAKA, Jan 31: Tens of thousands of people gathered on a riverbank near Bangladesh's capital on Friday to listen to sermons by Islamic scholars at the Biswa Ijtema, or global congregation of Muslim devotees.

The three-day annual event will end on Sunday when hundreds of thousands of Muslims are expected to join final prayers like every year. This is the first phase of Biswa Ijtema, while the second phase will be held February 3-5. The third phase will be held February 14-16.

Biswa Ijtema is one of the largest gatherings of Muslim devotees, held on the sandy banks of the Turag River in Tongi, just north of Dhaka, the capital. The event dates back to the 1950s when the Tablighi Jamaat movement started hosting the event.

On Friday, Muslims joined the weekly afternoon prayers as many more continued to stream toward the venue from across Bangladesh.

About 2,150 foreign Muslims from 72 countries were among the tens of thousands of Bangladeshis who joined the first phase of the congregation, said Habibullah Raihan, a spokesman of the organizing committee.

He said that scholars and clerics from India, Pakistan and other countries delivered their sermons on the tenants of Islam as the devotees slept in tents erected on the riverbank.

Security checkpoints and camaras have been installed, while plainclothes security officials joined uniformed officers in the area. (AP)

Tariffs on Canada, Mexico coming today, says Trump

WASHINGTON, Jan 31: US President Donald Trump has announced plans to impose on Saturday a 25 per cent tariff on Canada and Mexico, its two neighbouring countries, and is also in the process of considering a similar measure against China.

Trump said he would make a decision on Thursday night about whether to include oil in the list of tariffed items. "We will be announcing the tariffs on Canada and Mexico for a number of reasons," the president told reporters in the Oval Office of the White House on Thursday.

He cited illegal immigration, smuggling of drugs and the massive subsidies that the US gives to Canada and Mexico in the form of deficits as the reasons for the tariffs.

"I will be putting the tariff of 25 per cent on Canada and, separately, 25 per cent on Mexico. We will really have to do that because we have very big deficits with those countries. Those tariffs may or may not rise with time," said the president.

Responding to a question, Trump said he would decide Thursday night whether to include oil among the items subject to tariffs.

"We're going to make that determination probably tonight on oil. Because they send us oil...It depends on what the price is. If the oil is properly priced, if they treat us properly, which they don't," he said.

"Mexico and Canada have never been good to us on trade," Trump said, adding that the two countries have treated the US "very unfairly" on trade.

He asserted that the US will be able to make it up "very quickly" as it "does not need" the products that they have.

"We have all the oil you need. We have all the trees you need, meaning the lumber. We have more than almost anybody in those two categories. In oil, we have more than anybody," he said.

"We don't need anybody's trees, we have great lumber in this country. We have to free them up environmentally, which I can do very quickly," he said. (PTI)

Daughter of Indian immigrants among victims of US air crash

WASHINGTON, Jan 31: Asra Hussain Raza, the daughter of Indian immigrants, was among 67 people killed in a tragic midair collision between an Army helicopter and a jetliner at Ronald Reagan National Airport in the US, according to a media report.

The collision, deadliest aviation disaster in the US since 2001, happened when American Airlines Flight 5342 collided with the Army helicopter as it approached the airport on Wednesday night.

Raza, 26, was one of several victims killed, her father-in-law, Dr. Hashim Raza, told CNN.

A daughter of Indian immigrants, Raza graduated with honours in 2020 from Indiana University and married her college sweetheart in August 2023, Hashim said.

Raza was a Washington, DC-based consultant who travelled to Wichita twice a month to work on a turnaround project for a hospital there, her father-in-law said.(PTI)

US aid agency is in upheaval during foreign assistance freeze and staff departures

WASHINGTON, Jan 31: Trump administration changes have upended the US agency charged with providing humanitarian aid to countries overseas, with dozens of senior officials put on leave, thousands of contractors laid off, and a sweeping freeze imposed on billions of dollars in foreign assistance.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio defended the pause on foreign assistance Thursday, saying "the US government is not a charity."

Aid organisations say the funding freeze — and deep confusion over what US-funded programmes must stop work as a result — has left them agonizing over whether they could continue operating programmes such as those providing round-the-clock nutritional support to extremely malnourished infants and children, knowing that closing the doors means that many of those children would die.

Current and former officials at the State Department and the US Agency for International Development say staffers were invited to submit requests to exempt certain programs from the foreign aid freeze, which President Donald Trump imposed Jan 20 and the State Department detailed how to execute on Jan 24.

Three days later, at least 56 senior career USAID staffers were abruptly placed on administrative leave. Three officials said many of those put on leave were lawyers involved in determining what programmes might qualify for waivers, helping write proposals and submitting those waiver requests as they believed they had been invited to do.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. A Trump administration directive that aid organizations interpret as a gag order has left them unwilling to speak publicly for fear of permanently losing US funding.

In an internal memo Monday about the staffing changes, new acting USAID administrator Jason Gray said the agency had identified "several actions within USAID that appear to be designed to circumvent the President's Executive Orders and the mandate from the American people."

"As a result, we have placed a number of USAID employees on administrative leave with full pay and benefits until further notice while we complete our analysis of these actions," Gray wrote.

A former senior USAID official said those put on leave had been helping aid organizations navigate the "confusing process" to seek waivers from the aid pause for specific life-saving projects, such as continuing clean water supplies for displaced people in war zones.

Others were identified as having been involved in diversity, equity and inclusion programming, which the administration has banned. On Thursday, a USAID human resources official who tried to reverse the action, saying there was no justification for it, was himself placed on leave, according to two of the officials who had viewed internal emails and verified them as authentic. Reporters from ProPublica and Vox first reported the emails on X.

The State Department and White House didn't respond to messages seeking comment about the staffing changes.

The new leaders at USAID also abruptly laid off contractors who made up about half the workforce in the agency's humanitarian bureau Tuesday, knocking them out of systems so that some vanished in the middle of videoconferences, the former senior official said. The targeted institutional service contractors do everything from administrative and travel support to grant processing and data analytics.

The staffing changes came three days after the State Department issued guidelines last Friday for implementing Trump's executive order freezing foreign assistance for 90 days. The department says it's reviewing the money the United States is spending to ensure it adheres to administration policy. The guidelines initially exempted only military aid to Israel and Egypt and emergency food programs but also said programme administrators and implementors could apply for waivers for programs that they believe would meet administration standards.

On Tuesday, Rubio issued a broader waiver for programs that provide other "life-saving" assistance, including medicine, medical services, food and shelter, and again pointed to the possibility of waivers. Rubio pointed to the broadened exemptions in an interview Thursday with SiriusXM host Megyn Kelly.

"We don't want to see people die and the like," he said. Rubio said there would be a programme-by-programme review of which projects make "America safer, stronger or more prosperous."

The step of shutting down US-funded programmes during the 90-day review meant the US was "getting a lot more cooperation" from recipients of humanitarian, development and security assistance, Rubio said. "Because otherwise you don't get your money."

The State Department said that since the aid freeze went into effect, it has approved dozens of waivers, although many were returned because they did not include enough detail. It said waiver requests for programmes costing "billions of dollars" have been received and are being reviewed.

The department did not specify how many waiver requests had been denied but said thus far its actions had stopped more than $1 billion from being spent on programs and projects that are "not aligned with an America First agenda."

Even with the broadening of exemptions for life-saving care, uncertainty surrounds what US-funded programmes legally can continue. Hundreds of thousands of people globally are going without access to medicine and humanitarian supplies and clinics are not getting medicine in time because of the funding freeze, aid organisations warn. (AP)

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God will not approve us if gratitude isn't shown to Centre: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, Jan 31: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Friday said that his government has been working hard to restore peace in the state and protect its present and future generations.

The Centre's initiative to fence the border with Myanmar and regulate the entry of foreigners have started yielding results, the chief minister said while speaking at a programme at Sekmai in Imphal West district.

The CM said that in the midst of all problems in the state, developmental works have to be taken up along with the continuation of education and business activities.

Manipur has been in the grip of ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities, which left over 250 people dead and thousands homeless since May 2023. While Meiteis mostly live in the Imphal valley region, Kukis are in the majority in the hill areas of the northeastern state.

"We are passing through a difficult phase. Many in both hills and valleys have lost their lives while many have been displaced from their homes. Even then, the government is working for the restoration of peace," Singh said.

The government's objective is to ensure peaceful coexistence among all old settlers as well as to protect them from outsiders with the assistance of the Centre, he said.

Singh said, "The displaced persons staying in relief camps are facing hardships. The crisis is not letting us sleep at night… we are trying to save the present and future generations."

The BJP-led central government has introduced the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Manipur to restrict the entry of outsiders, he said.

"If the people (of the state) do not show gratitude to the central government along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for giving us ILP, God will not approve us," he said.

The CM said that his Cabinet has decided to make 1961 the base year for ILP and thus "those who had lived before 1961 will become permanent residents of the state."

"We have always embraced peaceful co-existence with old settlers. However, our appeal is not to bring new immigrants leading to a demographic change in the state," Singh said.

He listed some of the schemes that his government with support from the Centre implemented in Manipur. (PTI)

Manik Saha urges 16th FC to increase fund allocation for Tripura

'Also apprised FC about infra development in the state'

AGARTALA, Jan 31: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday said that the state government has urged the 16th Finance Commission to increase the allocation of funds for the northeastern state.

In the recent devastating floods, the state has suffered a loss of ₹ 15,000 crore, the chief minister said here.

"We have discussed various issues with the 16th Finance Commission. Besides, we have also explained why the state government has failed to provide DA to its employees on par with the central government employees. This was because of deprivation by the 14th Finance Commission," he told the reporters here.

Saha said, "We have also apprised the FC about the infrastructure development carried out in the state. The 16th Finance Commission has appreciated the state's fiscal discipline. It would have gone bankrupt had we not maintained discipline in fiscal management," he said.

He said the government has also highlighted the state's dense forest coverage (73 per cent) and shortage of plain land, which is required for setting up big industries.

"Since the state absorbs more carbon dioxide because of dense forest coverage, we sought an increase in the special award from 10 per cent to 20 per cent. The 15th Finance Commission had introduced a 10 per cent special award to those states which have dense forest coverage," the CM said.

The Finance Commission is just like an advisory body, the chief minister said, adding, "The state has urged the Commission to increase the award substantially to realise the goal of developed Tripura (Viksit Tripura) by 2047."

When asked if the state supports direct funding to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), Saha refused to elaborate on the matter.

Tipra Motha, an ally of the BJP-led coalition government and two major opposition parties- CPI(M) and Congress met the 16th Finance Commission on Thursday and sought direct funding to the autonomous tribal council.

On the implementation of the 8th Pay Commission, the chief minister said the government presented the matter before the Commission during the meeting.

The Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission, Arvind Pangariya, is on a three-day visit to the state to hold meetings with the state government and other stakeholders, including political parties to hear their views. (PTI)

Jitendra Chaudhury re-elected as CPI(M) Tripura unit secretary

AGARTALA, Jan 31: The CPI(M) on Friday said its MLA Jitendra Chaudhury has been re-elected as the party's Tripura unit secretary and a state committee comprising 61 members has been constituted for the next three years.

Six women have been included in the state committee, a party leader said.

"Jitendra Chaudhury, the leader of opposition in the Tripura Assembly, has been re-elected as the CPI(M) state secretary unanimously at the party's 24th state conference that ended here today. A 61-member state committee has also been constituted," senior party leader Pabitra Kar told PTI.

These decisions were taken during the three-day CPI(M) state conference that commenced on January 29.

The party organised a massive rally where its veteran leader Prakash Karat and former chief minister Manik Sarkar addressed the gathering.

"I am grateful to the party for re-establishing faith in me. This is an added responsibility for me. Strengthening the party and serving the people in restoring democracy and order of the Constitution will be my priority," Chaudhury told PTI.

Earlier, the party had completed its internal conferences at the branch, local, divisional and district levels in preparation for the state conference.

The Left party has more than 4,000 branch committees, over 300 local panels, 24 divisional and eight district panels in the northeastern state. (PTI)

TB screening camp for vulnerable populace in Wokha

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 31: As part of the Government of India's 100-day intensified campaign to eliminate TB from the country, the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP), Wokha district and the Community Health Centre, Bhandari, conducted Jan-Jan Ka Rakhe Dhyaan TB-Mukt Bharat campaign (NI-Kshay Shivir) at Bhandari in Wokha district on Friday.

Speaking in the programme, Wokha senior treatment supervisor Renben Tsanglao said the health screening camp for the community was conducted to assess the disease amongst the vulnerable population.

He said the Government of India launched the campaign to accelerate TB case detection, reduce mortality and prevent new cases through focused intervention to achieve total elimination of the disease.

Speaking on the importance of early screening, detection, signs, and symptoms of TB, he emphasised the importance of coming forward without fear or reluctance.

Tsanglao also highlighted the assistance and measures implemented by the government towards the total elimination of the disease.

Free health screening for non-communicable diseases, X-rays and blood and sputum tests were also conducted during the camp.

NSF condoles filmmaker Tapan Bose's death

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 31: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Friday mourned the death of filmmaker and social activist Tapan Kumar Bose.

In a condolence message to his wife Rita Manchanda, NSF president Medovi Rhi described Bose as a visionary documentary filmmaker, human rights defender, and relentless advocate for justice and peace. "We extend our heartfelt condolences to you and your family during this time of profound grief," the NSF said.

It said the Naga people will remember Bose for his unwavering support for "our right to self-determination".

The NSF also said for communities that bore the brunt of jingoistic nationalism and militarisation, he was more than an ally — he was a friend, a guide, and a source of immense support.

"In a world where many turned a blind eye, he chose to listen, amplify our voices, and fight for our cause. His courage and commitment to justice left an indelible mark on our journey, and his legacy will continue to inspire generations to come," the message read.

It said Bose dedicated his life to standing against injustice, violence, and inequality and that his unwavering commitment to the cause of human rights and his fearless voice against oppression resonated across South Asia and beyond.

The NSF added that as a filmmaker, activist, and intellectual, he was part of a collective of scientists, journalists, and artists who sought to uphold the rationalist ideals of the governing principles and challenge the historical and contemporary forms of subjugation.

It prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and to give strength to his loved ones in this hour of grief.

Tripura to recruit 201 assistant professor: CM

AGARTALA, Jan 31: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday said the state public service commission has announced a recruitment drive for filling up 201 posts of assistant professor for general degree colleges.

"The Tripura Public Service Commission has issued a notification seeking applications for filling up 201 posts of assistant professor for general degree colleges. Interested candidates can apply for the recruitment", the CM wrote on Facebook sharing the notification.

Based on the requirement, the TPSC has initiated a process for filling up 201 posts of assistant professor for the state's general degree colleges. The higher education department has already initiated a process to fill up the posts in the general degree colleges, said an official of the higher education department.

At present, around 700 guest lecturers are engaged in 22 general degree colleges.

"Once the ongoing recruitment process is completed, the shortage of qualified faculty members in the general degree colleges will be addressed," the official said.

Earlier, a total of 72 assistant professors were recruited for general degree colleges in 2022. (PTI)

Ed Sheeran to rock Shillong on Feb 12

SHILLONG, Jan 31: Global music sensation Ed Sheeran is all set to make his debut performance in Shillong on February 12, as a part of his highly anticipated + - = ÷ x Tour.

The concert will take place at JN Stadium and is expected to be one of the most memorable musical events in the city.

The show is being produced and promoted by AEG Presents Asia and BookMyShow Live, offering fans an immersive live entertainment experience.

Known for his dynamic performances, Ed Sheeran is famous for his ability to create unique live shows using his signature loop station. This technique allows him to layer beats, melodies, and harmonies in real time, crafting a completely live performance that makes every concert different from the last. Fans can expect a truly one-of-a-kind experience, as Ed builds his music on the spot, making each song an exciting, spontaneous creation.

In a special addition to the + - = ÷ x Tour, Ed will revisit one of his early hits, "You Need Me, I Don't Need You." The performance will feature Ed rapping at high speed, showcasing his exceptional lyrical skills and his ability to blend rap, beatboxing, and folk-inspired melodies seamlessly. The track, a fan favourite, offers a glimpse into Ed's musical versatility and will surely be one of the highlights of the concert.

Opening the event is rising Indian artist Kayan, known for her powerful voice and ability to blend genres. Kayan's performance will mix R&B, electronica, and infectious beats, energising the crowd before Ed Sheeran's performance. Her dynamic stage presence and unique sound are expected to set the perfect tone for the evening.

Ed's performance in Shillong is anticipated to be an unforgettable evening of music, storytelling, and excitement.

Fans are eagerly awaiting the chance to see the multi-talented artist perform live, and the event promises to deliver a memorable experience from start to finish. (NNN)

Lalduhoma will present budget in Assembly on March 4

AIZAWL, Jan 31: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma will present the state's annual budget for the 2025-2026 financial year in the assembly on March 4, a senior official said on Friday.

The budget session of the Mizoram Assembly will commence on February 19.

Mizoram Assembly commissioner and secretary Vanlalthantlingi told PTI that the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) chaired by Speaker Lalbiakzama on Wednesday chalked a detailed programme and decided that the session will continue till March 20.

Governor Gen Vijay Kumar Singh (retd) will deliver his maiden gubernatorial address in the assembly on the first day of the session, Lalduhoma, who also holds the Finance portfolio, will present the state annual budget for the 2025-26 fiscal on March 4, she said.

This will be the second budget that Lalduhoma will present after the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) came to power in December 2023. (PTI)

MoU signed to enhance milk production: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, Jan 31: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Friday said an MoU has been signed to formalise the transfer of the Manipur Milk Producers' Co-operative Union Ltd to the National Dairy Development Board.

Singh said it marks a significant step toward strengthening the dairy industry and enhancing milk production in the state.

"Delighted to sign a Tripartite MoU at my Secretariat, formalising the transfer of Manipur Milk Producers' Co-operative Union Ltd to the National Dairy Development Board, Government of India," the CM said in a post on X.

"This MoU paves the way for a systematic reorganisation of dairy co-operative societies, enabling professional management and structural reforms in the Manipur Milk Union. It marks a significant step toward strengthening the dairy industry and enhancing milk production in the state," he added. (PTI)

Arms, ammunition seized in Manipur's Kakching

IMPHAL, Jan 31: Security forces seized a cache of arms and ammunition from Manipur's Kakching district during a search operation, police said on Friday.

One assault rifle, one 9 mm pistol, one IED, two grenades, one smoke shell, one tear smoke grenade, and one detonator were seized from the foothills of Chairel Khunou hill of the district on Thursday, they said.

Meanwhile, Manipur Police arrested two persons involved in extortion in the Imphal area on Thursday, an officer said.

The two arrested persons were members of an organisation named Volunteers Welfare Fund and were arrested from the Sagolband Tera area of Imphal West district on Thursday, he said. (PTI)

Women-led financial cooperative society approved for establishment

SHILLONG, Jan 31: The Meghalaya Cabinet on Thursday approved the establishment of the Pla Tangka Cooperative Society (PTCS)—a pioneering women-led apex financial cooperative society aimed at strengthening the financial ecosystem for Self-Help Groups (SHGs) across Meghalaya.

This initiative, led by the department of Community & Rural Development (C&RD) in partnership with the Centre for Research in Schemes & Policies (CRISP), has the potential to revolutionise rural financial inclusion and build economic resilience in Meghalaya.

Addressing media persons after the meeting, chief minister Conrad K Sangma said, "Since 2018, the financial ecosystem surrounding Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Meghalaya has seen a remarkable transformation. The capital available through the SHG network has grown from ₹ 40 crores in 2018 to over ₹ 1,000 crores today. Given that the ₹ 1,000 crores are already contributing significantly to Meghalaya's GDP, PTCS will be a game-changer for rural economic development".

He added, "One of the biggest advantages of PTCS is that it will ensure easy and direct access to funds, eliminating the need for SHGs to go through the lengthy and complex processes of applying for loans from commercial or co-operative banks. This model will act as a financial intermediary, specifically designed for SHGs, making credit readily

available and fostering entrepreneurship at the grassroots level".

With this, Meghalaya has become the 4th state in India, after Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to institutionalise this model.

It may be mentioned that this decision is a follow-up to the recent Cabinet Retreat held in Sohra wherein a decision was taken to strengthen the SHG women members and ensure they become financially independent.

The vision and idea of the PTCS were presented before the Cabinet on Thursday by principal secretary and development commissioner, Community & Rural Development Department, Sampath Kumar, IAS who outlined the vision, structure and impact of the initiative.

The Pla Tangka Cooperative Society (PTCS) will be an apex financial cooperative society that will provide structured financial support to SHGs, ensuring savings-led rural economic growth. Named after local linguistic and cultural roots—"Pla" (Khasi for bag) and "Tangka" (Garo for funds/money) and translating to "bag full of money"—PTCS has been registered under the Meghalaya Cooperative Societies Act, 2015 and is inspired by the Stree Nidhi Model of Telangana.

The initiative aligns with Meghalaya's SHG Unicorn ($1 billion) Vision, which aims to eliminate multidimensional poverty by ensuring that every family in the state earns at least ₹ 1 lakh additional income per year through multiple livelihood activities. MSRLS aims to expand the SHG network to 80,000 groups by 2028, unlocking ₹ 8,000 crores in enhanced capital and contributing $1 billion to Meghalaya's economy by 2032.

Sangma also stated, "Through these innovative initiatives, we aim not only to empower women to become 'Lakhpati Didis' (women earning a minimum of ₹1 lakh annually) but also to enable them to scale their income to the level of millionaires through multiple livelihood sources—generating revenues of ₹ 10 lakh and beyond."

Access to capital has always been limited in Meghalaya owing to the rural dispersion and dispersed nature of banks across different regions. PTCS will act as a catalytic instrument for the next phase of SHG-led economic growth in the state by increasing access to bank linkages across the State.

This initiative has been made possible through technical assistance from the Centre for Research in Schemes & Policies (CRISP). CRISP is led by Shri R. Subrahmanyam, former secretary to the Government of India, along with 10 other former secretaries to the Government of India, bringing decades of policy expertise to Meghalaya's SHG movement.

It may be recalled that CRISP signed an MOU with Meghalaya in December 2022. As an organization that works pro bono for the States, its main aim is to give back to society by helping governments design, redesign, and implement better schemes and policies.

PTCS will play a critical role in channelling additional financial resources, thereby enhancing the financial independence and reliability of SHG women. The launch of PTCS is expected to significantly boost rural economic growth and financial inclusion through: Expansion of Business Correspondents to provide mobile credit facilities in rural Meghalaya; Supplementation of existing financial sources to increase cash limits available to SHG members and improved financial management literacy and credit scores for SHG and CLF members, increasing their bank linkages. (NNN)

No.BDB/Tender/46/2023-24/4097 *Date 29/01/2025*

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & twenty five paisa) only with a validity period of 180 days which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors of Class-I (A, B & C), Class-II & Class III category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under 15th FC (Tied Grant) under P&RD Dept. BTR Kokrajhar for the year 2023-24 during 2024-25 as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00PM on 24/2/25 and will be opened on the next date (as on 25/2/25) & place at 2.30 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Activity	A.A. Amount (Rs. in lakh)	Tender Value (in lakh)	EMD/Bid Security (Earnest Money) (in Rs.	Cost of Tender paper (in Rs.)	Pre bid date and time	Last date & time of bid submission	Date & time of bid opening	Time of completion of work
1	Const. of Community Toilet at Ghoriajhar Anchalik Durga Puja compound under Bhergaon Dev. Block	10,47,960	10,47,960	1% for ST, SC & 2% for Gen, Enterprise	320	3/2/25	24/2/25	25/2/25	6 month
2	Const. of Community Toilet at Orongajuli Baptist Church compound	10,47,960	10,47,960	1% for ST, SC & 2% for Gen, Enterprise	320	3/2/25	24/2/25	25/2/25	6 month

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 3/2/25 to 25/2/25 up to 1.30 PM. In the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of demand draft/bankers cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC Kokrajhar payable at Kokrajhar.

Sd/-
Block Development Officer,
Bhergaon Dev. Block, Bhergaon

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1385

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Eco survey calls for Ease of Doing Business 2.0 but silent on GST 2.0: Cong

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: The Congress slammed the BJP-led Centre on Friday after the latest Economic Survey was tabled in Parliament, saying it calls for Ease of Doing Business 2.0 but is silent on a whole new GST 2.0 and an end to the "tax terrorism" unleashed over the last 10 years.

Congress general secretary incharge communications Jairam Ramesh said the Economic Survey has little to say about an Ease of Living 1.0 to ensure that the public-health crisis caused by growing pollution and chemical contamination begins to be dealt with seriously.

"The Economic Survey of the Ministry of Finance is often a wish list of desired policies and a warning about undesirable ones. The latest Economic Survey is no different, and contains much for the government to ponder," Ramesh said on X.

He said the survey points out that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been a lifeline for the rural poor and has evolved into a "durable rural asset creation programme" for sustainable livelihood diversification.

In an era of accelerated climate change, it has helped boost rural ecological health through improvement of soil quality and improved water management, Ramesh noted.

"The Prime Minister must therefore explain why he is throttling MGNREGA by reducing allocations, excluding 27 per cent of workers from getting paid by foisting an Aadhaar-based payment system on them, and keeping wages low," Ramesh said.

The survey also points out that there are 11.5 crore unique investors with demat accounts in Indian financial markets and says that "higher investor participation has engendered a self-reinforcing cycle of strong market returns, bringing in even more investors", he noted.

"Why then is the government overseeing the corruption and weakening of a valuable national asset like SEBI, whose integrity is central to the welfare of these investors? As the Economic Survey itself says 'It is reasonable to expect that financial regulators hold themselves to the same standards that they expect of regulated entities'," the Congress leader said.

Despite thousands of crores spent on schemes like PLI, imports from China continue unabated, with the USD 102 billion record of 2023-24 likely to be broken in 2024-25, he pointed out.

"This is unlikely to change in the near future, as the Economic Survey says: 'the import intensity of E-Vehicle production -- especially from countries with whom India has persistent and large trade deficits -- is very high'," Ramesh said.

But protection cannot be imposed only to help large monopolies evade competition, he added.

"In the most successful export stories, 'industrial policy goals were achieved not by protection alone but by policies which ensured that the protected industries performed in response to the protection afforded'. This means using protection to make companies -- especially MSMEs -- more competitive and not allowing large monopolies to dominate sector after sector for political reasons," Ramesh said.

"Finally, the Economic Survey calls for Ease of Doing Business 2.0. But it is silent on a whole new GST 2.0 and an end to the tax terrorism unleashed in the past decade," he said.

"And while we are on the ease subject, it has little to say about an Ease of Living 1.0 to ensure that the public health crisis caused by growing pollution and chemical contamination begins to be dealt with seriously," he further said. (PTI)

PM Modi slams AAP for 'stalling Delhi's growth', accuses it of using city as 'political ATM'

'They are taking money out of Delhiites' pockets'

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday launched a sharp attack on the Aam Aadmi Party, accusing it of stalling Delhi's development while using the national capital's resources for its political gains.

He urged people to elect a "double-engine government" to ensure the city's progress.

Speaking at a public rally in Dwarka, Modi showcased the recently inaugurated Yashobhoomi convention centre, terming it a glimpse of the BJP's vision for a modern Delhi.

"The BJP wants to make Delhi modern and a glimpse of that can be seen in Dwarka after the Centre constructed the majestic Yashobhoomi here," he said.

Taking a swipe at AAP, the prime minister alleged that the party has turned Delhi into a "political ATM" to fund its ambitions in other states.

"AAP-da (AAP disaster) has looted Delhi's money and is using it to expand its politics elsewhere. They are taking money out of Delhiites' pockets," he said, urging voters to free the city from its rule.

Modi accused AAP of engaging in constant fights instead of focusing on governance.

"Over the past years, they have only been fighting — with Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and with the Centre. If such people continue to rule Delhi, the city will keep lagging behind," he warned.

Modi assured the people that a BJP government in Delhi would take tough action against corruption. "As soon as the BJP forms government here, there will be a stricter crackdown on AAP-da's corruption," he said, adding that the incumbent party had been trying to suppress a damning Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report.

"In the first session of the Vidhan Sabha itself, we will table the CAG report which contains details of AAP-da's scams," Modi promised.

The prime minister reiterated his commitment to the national capital's development, saying, "I guarantee that the BJP government will not leave any stone unturned in Delhi's progress."

He called for a government that focuses on coordination rather than confrontation. "Delhi does not need a government that thrives on conflict, but one that ensures solutions to all problems," Modi asserted. (PTI)

Majority of Mahayuti ministers are 'tainted': Patole

MUMBAI, Jan 31: Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole on Friday alleged that as many as 65 percent of ministers in the Mahayuti government in the state were "tainted".

Most ministers were yet to start working though the cabinet was sworn in last month, he told reporters in Nagpur.

"Sixty-five percent of the ministers are tainted," he said, without elaborating.

Soybean, cotton, onion and dairy farmers were in distress, and unemployment was at its peak, he said, accusing the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP government of being indifferent to their problems.

To a question about speculation that former Congress MLA from Pune, Ravindra Dhangekar, and a few other party leaders were likely to join the Shiv Sena led by deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Patole said, "Politics is business for some people. They go with whoever is in power. But the people are with the Congress."

Notably, Dhangekar, when asked by reporters elsewhere about his meeting with Shinde earlier in the day, denied that he was going to leave the Congress. He met Shinde for some work related to his former assembly constituency, he said.

Patole, reportedly, does not enjoy a good equation with the former MLA.

To another question, Patole said the functioning of the Election Commission was not transparent.

The Congress leader also criticised the implementation of the government's 'Ladki Bahin' scheme under which a financial assistance of ₹ 1,500 per month is provided to eligible women.

Women living outside the state and even some Bangladeshi nationals have got its benefit by providing fake identity documents, he claimed. (PTI)

Referred to high ammonia level in Yamuna water for Delhi; Haryana CM at fault: Kejriwal to EC

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal submitted his reply to the Election Commission (EC) on Friday regarding his allegation that the BJP government in Haryana has mixed "poison" in the Yamuna water supplied to Delhi, saying his remarks were in context of the "unprecedented high levels of ammonia in the raw water".

In his six-page written reply addressed to the chief election commissioner (CEC), Kejriwal also accused Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini of hatching a "conspiracy" to "influence" the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls by sending highly-polluted waters to the national capital.

Accompanied by Delhi and Punjab chief ministers Atishi and Bhagwant Mann, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor submitted his reply to EC officials over the poll panel's notice to him in the matter. The AAP leaders also carried three bottles of ammonia-mixed water for the election commissioners to drive home their point.

In his reply, Kejriwal said the "poison" found mixed with the Yamuna water was "ammonia".

He referred to Delhi Jal Board (DJB) officials for details like evidence of mixing poison and its methodology.

Kejriwal told reporters on January 27 that the "BJP government in Haryana has mixed poison in the water supplied to Delhi through the Yamuna. Thanks to DJB engineers, who caught it and stopped the water, it did not enter Delhi. If that water got mixed with drinking water, a mass genocide would have happened".

He had further accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of mixing "poison" in the water supplied to Delhi to trigger a chaos, so that the AAP could be blamed for people dying.

The AAP supremo was issued a notice by the EC over the matter on a complaint from the BJP. In response to a second notice, Kejriwal submitted his reply, saying "categorically and explicitly" that his alleged statement was made in reference to the "unprecedented and dangerously-high" levels of ammonia in the raw water being supplied to Delhi from Haryana.

"Any other inference of my statement is incorrect," he stated.

Explaining the chronology of events leading to his statement, Kejriwal said the ammonia levels in the water started rising from around 3.2 ppm (parts per million) on January 15 and reached 7 ppm around January 26-27.

The chief ministers of Delhi and Punjab had raised the matter with Saini but he did not do anything, despite promising action to control the ammonia levels or discharge more water to dilute it, he said.

Kejriwal alleged a "deliberate conspiracy" on the part of Saini to "influence" the Delhi election by sending highly-polluted water to the capital.

"It is crystal clear from the sequence of events that it is the Haryana chief minister who is at fault," the AAP supremo charged.

"A criminal case should be registered against him for attempting to cause serious miseries to the people of India's capital. If the CEC does not take action against the Haryana government, who have been perpetrators of this above incident, you will be normalising such ghastly actions in electoral politics," he said.

Kejriwal also questioned the "baffling alacrity" of the CEC to act against him, even though he was "merely" raising an issue of "very high public importance" and had averted a huge public crisis in Delhi.

"Equally baffling is the CEC's refusal to direct Haryana to stop polluting Delhi's waters," he said.

The AAP supremo also accused the CEC of "complete silence and inaction" over "blatant violations" of the Model Code of Conduct allegedly by BJP leaders in Delhi.

"If the CEC continues ignoring the widespread practice of purchase of votes with cash and goods by the BJP, you will end up normalising this corrupt practice as well," he said, while claiming that evidence in the form of videos and people's statements were not acknowledged.

India is known worldwide as the bedrock of democracy, he said, adding, "The CEC, with its clear act of omission and negligence of corrupt practices by the BJP, looks set to tarnish this image of India globally." (PTI)

BJP govt strengthens several infrastructures works in Delhi under

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Friday claimed that several infrastructure projects including roads, expressways, and transit corridors have been strengthened here at a cost of ₹ 68,000 crore under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing an election rally in Moti Nagar vidhan sabha, Dhami said that party candidate Harish Khurana and his family have been serving Delhi for decades, with his father being one of the founders of BJP. "Today our country is progressing rapidly under the leadership of PM Modi. Be it roads, health, train facilities, infrastructure or science and technology, our country is progressing in every area," Dhami said.

"Several big developed countries of the world are also amazed that how India is progressing so rapidly under the leadership of Narendra Modi," Dhami said.

He added that under Modi's leadership, the BJP government has worked on key infrastructure projects in the national capital, including roads, expressways, transit corridors, and railway and airport-related developments, worth ? ₹ 68,000 crore. Referring to local development, he said a flyover has been constructed in Zakhira, improving traffic management in the area. (PTI)

BJP spent ₹ 1,737.68 cr for 2024 Lok Sabha polls, states party's expenditure report to EC

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: The Bharatiya Janata Party spent ₹ 1,737.68 crore for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, according to the expenditure report submitted by the party to the Election Commission of India.

Of the total amount, ₹ 884.45 crore was spent on general party propaganda, while ₹ 853.23 crore was allocated for candidate-related expenses.

Around ₹ 611.50 crore was spent on media advertisements that included advertisements in print and electronic media, bulk SMS campaigns, and promotional content across cable, websites, and TV channels. The party also spent ₹ 55.75 crore on publicity materials such as posters, banners, hoardings, and flags to bolster its election outreach.

Additionally, the BJP's expenditure on public meetings, processions, and rallies — including arrangements for stages, audio setups, barricades, and vehicles — stood at ₹ 19.84 crore.

Campaign-related travel expenses formed another significant portion of the party's budget.

The travel expenditure of star campaigners authorised by the party's central headquarters amounted to ₹ 168.92 crore, while ₹ 2.53 crore was spent on the travel of other party leaders.

The BJP, which secured a third consecutive term in the general elections, heavily relied on mass outreach and publicity campaigns, as evident from its spending patterns.

Additionally, the gross receipts from the date of announcement of state elections to the date of their completion were Arunachal Pradesh ₹ 5,552.57 crore, Sikkim ₹ 5,552.41 crore and Odisha ₹ 5,555.65 crore. (PTI)

Sonia Gandhi has utmost respect for Prez, remarks twisted by media: Priyanka

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Amid a row over former Congress President Sonia Gandhi's reaction on President Droupadi Murmu's address, party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday said her mother has the utmost respect for the President and that it is very unfortunate that her remarks have been "twisted by the media". She also hit out at the BJP's demand for an apology over the issue, saying it should first apologise for "ruining the country".

"My mother is a 78-year-old lady. She simply said that 'the President must have been tired reading such a long speech, poor thing'. She fully respects, in fact she has the utmost respect for her (the President). It is very unfortunate that this kind of a thing is twisted by the media," Priyanka Gandhi told reporters here.

"They are both respected people, they are older than us, they are at a certain age now and it is pretty clear that she (Sonia Gandhi) means no disrespect," the Congress MP said while exiting the Parliament House complex after attending a committee meeting.

Earlier, Congress' deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi also hit out at the BJP over its criticism on the issue. "Smt. Sonia Gandhi's empathy for Hon'ble President Droupadi Murmu ji's health cannot be digested by the men in BJP. Every person in India has respect and empathy for the President," he said on X. "Will the BJP answer for the disrespect shown to President Murmu when she was not invited to the inauguration of the Parliament or the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya? I challenge them to answer this question," Gogoi said.

Earlier, the BJP launched an all-out attack on the Congress over Sonia Gandhi's remarks, saying they were "deeply disrespectful" and also underscored the opposition's "continued disregard" for the dignity of the highest constitutional office.

Soon after the President delivered her address to a joint sitting of Parliament, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were seen discussing the speech in the Parliament complex.

"The poor lady, the President, was getting very tired by the end... she could hardly speak, poor thing," Sonia Gandhi was purportedly heard saying in a video doing the rounds on social media. (PTI)

Pace of work tripled in govt's third term: Prez Murmu

'My government has utilised digital technology as a tool for social justice and equality'

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said the pace of work has tripled in the third term of her government which has worked with strong determination to lift the economy out of the state of "policy paralysis".

Addressing both the Houses of Parliament assembled together in the Lok Sabha chamber, she said the nation was witnessing major decisions and policies being implemented at an extraordinary speed, with the highest priority given to the poor, the middle class, the youth, women, and farmers.

"My government is infusing new energy through unprecedented achievements in this Amrit Kaal of India's development journey. The pace of work has tripled in this third term," she said in her 60-minute speech, peppered with occasional protests from the opposition benches.

In an address to the two Houses at the beginning of the first session of Parliament every year, the president outlines the vision of the government and this is considered a policy statement.

The address also outlines the views of the government on key issues and also gives out a broad roadmap for the future.

At the outset, Murmu condoled the deaths of pilgrims at the Kumbh congregation at Prayagraj on Mauni Amavasya on Wednesday when millions of faithful had gathered from all over the country to bathe at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati.

She also paid tributes to former prime minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away recently.

Murmu listed out the achievements of the government including building houses for three crore additional families, welfare of tribals, issuing property cards for the rural folks, building rural roads and extending the health insurance scheme to six crore citizens above the age of 70 years.

"The government has also made swift progress on critical issues like 'One Nation-One Election' and the 'Waqf Act Amendment'," she said.

She said India was setting an example for the world by emerging as a pillar of economic, social, and political stability in an environment of global instability.

Murmu said the world has placed its "trust" in India's "strength, policy, and intent".

In this context, she especially mentioned key groupings such as Quad, BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and G20.

The President said the government has taken "historic" initiatives to ensure defence of India's borders and internal security and "highly encouraging results" were seen in achieving self-reliance, especially in the defence sector.

She lauded the Indian Space Research Organisation for launching 100 missions from the spaceport at Sriharikota and asserted that the day was not far when an Indian citizen will travel to space aboard the indigenously developed Gaganyaan spacecraft.

"My government has worked with strong determination to lift the economy out of a state of policy paralysis. Despite global concerns such as the COVID-19 pandemic, its aftermath, and war-related uncertainties, the Indian economy has demonstrated remarkable stability and resilience, proving its strength," she said.

The President said the government has also implemented several significant measures to promote Ease of Doing Business and introduced the GST system with the spirit of 'One Nation, One Tax' which has been benefiting all states across the country.

Noting that development is truly meaningful when its benefits reach the person standing at the last rung of society, the President said initiatives like the construction of 12 crore toilets under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, 10 crore free LPG connections under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, ration for 80 crore needy citizens, the Saubhagya Yojana, and the Jal Jeevan Mission have given poor the confidence that they can live with dignity.

"When poor people are provided with a dignified life, it instills a sense of empowerment that helps them fight poverty. Due to such efforts, 25 crore people have overcome poverty and are moving forward in life. They have formed a Neo Middle Class, a group that is infusing new energy into India's growth journey," she said.

Murmu said digital fraud, cybercrime and emerging technologies such as deep fakes pose challenges to India's social, economic, and national security.

She asserted that the government has consistently worked on policies of multi-dimensional and inclusive development.

"Therefore, while emphasising on physical infrastructure, equal efforts have also been made by my government for a social infrastructure revolution," she said.

Noting that the government in the past ten years has written new chapters of progress, one of which is the golden milestone of India's digital revolution, the President said today, India has emerged as a major global player in the field of digital technology.

"The launch of 5G services in India, alongside other leading nations, stands as a significant milestone in this journey. India's UPI technology has also impressed many developed countries. More than 50 per cent of the world's real-time digital transactions now take place in India.

"My government has utilised digital technology as a tool for social justice and equality. Digital payments are no longer confined to select individuals or classes. Today, even the smallest shopkeeper in India benefits from this facility," the President said.

Ahead of her address, Murmu was welcomed in Parliament premises by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and an official carrying the 'Sengol', adopted as a cultural symbol by the government.

The President arrived in a six-horse driven ceremonial buggy and was escorted by the horse-mounted Presidential bodyguard.

She was given a guard of honour in the lawns of the Parliament building and was escorted to the Lok Sabha chamber by Dhankhar, Modi, Birla and Parliamentary Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju. (PTI)

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Gir Somnath demolitions: SC rejects plea for 'Urs' at razed shrine

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: The Supreme Court on Friday rejected a plea seeking to hold "Urs" festival between February 1 and February 3 at a dargah (Muslim shrine) razed in Gujarat's Gir Somnath district during a demolition drive.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih observed the submissions of solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Gujarat authorities that unauthorised constructions, including temples on the land belonging to the government, were demolished.

Mehta said no activities, including Hindu religious rituals, were allowed on the land in question which was encroached upon earlier.

The bench observed Mehta's contention that the land belonged to the government and unauthorised constructions, including the temples, were demolished.

The applicant's counsel said "Urs" festival was held at the site of the razed dargah for many years but authorities on January 30 denied permission.

"If at all they (authorities) are saying they are having an apprehension that there will be some law and order problem, I will suggest one thing... 20 people will go for some time, they will perform the rituals and come out," the applicant's counsel said.

It was a structure made before 1299 AD, added the counsel.

"Is there a structure now?" asked the bench.

The counsel said it was demolished and argued it was a protected monument.

Mehta said the demolition drive applied to all religions.

"Whatever was unauthorised, is demolished. This is undisputedly a government land," he said.

While the bench told the applicant's counsel that authorities had demolished temples too, it told Mehta no religious functions at the site should be allowed by the authorities.

While rejecting the application, the bench said the prayer couldn't be granted without hearing the main matter.

When the bench told Mehta that it had recorded his statement that no religious rituals would be permitted there, the law officer referred to an order passed by the top court in the main matter.

He said his statement was recorded that the land would remain under the control of the government.

On January 27, the top court said it would hear after three weeks the pleas, including a contempt petition against the Gujarat authorities for allegedly demolishing residential and religious structures in Gir Somnath district without its prior nod.

On September 28 last year, a demolition drive was carried out to reportedly clear encroachments on public lands near Gujarat's Somnath temple.

In its affidavit filed in the apex court, the Gujarat government justified its demolition action, saying it was an ongoing drive for removing encroachments on public land.

On September 17 last year, the top court, while hearing separate pleas on the demolition action by some states, stopped the demolition of properties, including those of persons accused of crime, without its permission.

It observed even a single instance of illegal demolition was against the "ethos" of the Constitution.

The top court, however, clarified its order did not apply to unauthorised structures on public roads, footpaths, railway lines or public places like water bodies, among others.

The top court on November 13, 2024, delivered a judgement laying down pan-India guidelines and said no property should be demolished without a prior showcause notice and the affected parties must be given 15 days to respond.

When the apex court was hearing the Gujarat demolition matter on October 25 last year, the state government said it would have custody over the land, where the demolition drive was carried out, and wouldn't be allotted to a third party.

The bench was hearing a plea against a Gujarat High Court order by which a status quo on demolitions of Muslim religious structures was declined.

On October 4 last year, the top court cautioned the authorities, saying it would ask them to restore the structures if they were found acting in contempt of its order against such an action. (PTI)

Mumbai Crime Branch report recommends probe under PCA against Khalid

MUMBAI, Jan 31: The Mumbai Crime Branch has urged the Maharashtra home department to initiate a criminal probe against suspended IPS officer Quaiser Khalid under the Prevention of Corruption Act in connection with the May 13 Ghatkopar hoarding collapse, an official said on Friday.

In its report, which has been submitted to the state home department, the Crime Branch accused Khalid of allowing the hoarding to come up on railway police land by violating regulations as well as tender norms. Khalid was Mumbai railway police commissioner at the time of the collapse, which killed 17 and injured around 80 persons.

"The Crime Branch report has suggested that a probe be conducted under Section 13 of Prevention of Corruption Act since criminal misconduct has been found. This will need the approval of the state home department under Section 17A of the PCA," the official informed.

The Maharashtra Anti Corruption Bureau has also initiated an inquiry after businessman Mohammad Raees Khan alleged he had paid Khalid and the latter's wife's business partner Rs 30 lakh and sponsored their hotel stay in the United States of America to bag a hoarding contract.

Khalid was suspended six weeks after the collapse of the hoarding, which was installed by private firm Ego Media owned by Bhavesh Bhinde.

Khalid is also under scrutiny after a police probe found that an accused in the collapse case Arshad Khan, who is the IPS officer's wife's business partner, allegedly took Rs 84 lakh from Ego Media. Khan was on the run since the hoarding collapse and was arrested from Lucknow in December.

Arshad Khan, however, has claimed he received this money from Ego Media as payment for medicines supplied from his brother-in-law's shop to Bhinde. Arshad Khan has told police the medicines were supplied to people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As per police, Khan had used the bank accounts of his wife, brother-in-law and nephew to deposit the cheques issued by Ego Media. (PTI)

AMU guest teacher booked

ALIGARH, Jan 31: A guest faculty member at Aligarh Muslim University was booked over remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, police on Friday said.

The comments, termed objectionable in a complaint, were allegedly made during a confrontation between the faculty member and AMU security personnel on the night of January 11.

In the wake of the incident, AMU authorities issued a show cause notice to Arimandan Singh Pal, a guest lecturer in the university's Sanskrit department.

Pal was temporarily relieved after a preliminary investigation, AMU spokesperson Professor Vibha Sharma said in a press briefing on Friday.

The matter came to light after a local Congress youth leader, Raja Bhaiya, lodged a complaint with the Civil Lines Police Station, demanding action against Pal.

In an official statement, AMU Proctor Mohammad Waseem Ali said the varisty proctor had initiated an inquiry into the incident the same day it occurred.

According to Ali, a group of students which witnessed the altercation tried to take Pal for a medical examination at the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital to ascertain whether he was drunk. Pal, however, left the scene before being examined.

Circle Officer Abhay Pandey said Pal has been booked for allegedly using abusive language against the prime Minister, chief minister, and university officials. (PTI)

7 Naxalites carrying ₹ 32 lakh bounty surrender in Chhattisgarh

KANKER, Jan 31: Seven Naxalites, including three women, involved in several attacks on security forces and carrying collective cash rewards of ₹ 32 lakh surrendered in Kanker district of Chhattisgarh on Friday, a police official said.

The cadres turned themselves in before senior police and Border Security Force (BSF) officials here citing disappointment with the "hollow" and "inhuman" Maoist ideology and tribals' exploitation by senior Naxalites, Kanker Senior Superintendent of Police Indira Kalyan Elesela said.

Of those surrendered, Mamta alias Shanta alias Vasanna Battulai (60), Dinesh Matttami (20) and Aaytu Ram Potai (27) were carrying a reward of ₹ 8 lakh each for their capture, he said.

Mamta, a resident of Karimnagar district in neighbouring Telangana, was active as a divisional committee member and headed the 'Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangthan' (KAMS), a frontal wing of the outlawed organisation, in the north Bastar division of Maoists, he said.

Between 1996 and 2024, she was involved in 26 Naxal incidents, including the 2015 IED (improvised explosive device) blast in the Koyalibeda area in Kanker district during panchayat polls wherein two jawans were killed and the 2018 Mahla ambush that killed two BSF personnel, he said.

While Mattami was active as a member of the military company no. 10 of Maoists, Potai was a member of military company no. 5, he said.

Another surrendered cadre, Jamuna alias Neera Netam (50), was active as a member of the Partapur area committee.

Jamuna was also involved in many Naxal attacks, including the ambush in Bhuski-Michgaon village in 2007 in which five policemen were killed and 18 others injured, Elesela said, adding that she carried a reward of ₹7 5 lakh.

Three others, Itwarin Padda (25), a member of Partapur LGS (local guerilla squad), Sanjay Nareti (23) of the Panidobir/Rowghat LOS (local organisation squad), and Sagnu Ram Anchla (24) Panidobir LOS member, carried a reward of ₹ 1 lakh each, the SSP added.

All the surrendered Naxalites were provided assistance of ₹ 25,000 each and will be further rehabilitated as per the government's policy, he added.

Last year, 792 Naxalites had surrendered in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts including Kanker. (PTI)

Survey calls for standardisation of sugar, salt content on packaged food

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: The Economic Survey 2024-25 called upon the Union Health Ministry to "urgently" define nutrient thresholds for sugars, salt, and saturated fats to regulate advertising.

It also urged the central ministry to adopt warning front-of-pack labels (FOPL), and impose stricter marketing restrictions on unhealthy foods, especially targeting children under-18.

Dwelling on the impact of ultra-processed food (UPFs) on physical health, the survey tabled in Parliament stressed that making consumers conscious about what they eat, its ingredients and associated side-effects is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Understanding the ingredients of packaged food, the ill-effects of UPF, and healthy food choices should be a part of the school curriculum, it underscored.

The report emphasised that called for setting standards for permissible levels of salt and sugar and ensuring checks for UPF brands to adhere to the regulations.

Schools, hospitals, and public areas should eliminate UPFs, while incentives should promote affordable healthy food production, it said. High goods and service tax rates and amendments to consumer protection laws could deter misleading advertising, the report recommended.

Additionally, a coalition of civil society and government entities, free from conflicts of interest, is vital to educate the public and counter food industry interference, it stressed.

Reducing excess calorie intake and improving dietary quality may help prevent many primary and secondary cardiovascular events, said the economic survey.

"Since UPF brands often target children and adolescents, massive awareness of the potential risk factors of UPF is of utmost necessity. Generating health-conscious consumers can further motivate and incentivise various UPF brands to come up with healthy alternatives or minimise the extent of the negative effects of the UPFs," it said.

The report called for an "enormous" behaviour change campaigns and efforts to promote local and seasonal fruits and vegetables and subsidies for healthy foods such as whole foods, millet, fruits, and vegetables.

The survey said that from sweetened breakfast cereals, soft drinks, and energy drinks to fried chicken and packaged cookies, UPFs have undeniably marked their formidable presence in everyday life.

These foods are generally energy-rich with high levels of sugar, salt and unsaturated fats and are nutrient-deficient as they are made from ingredients derived from a limited variety of crops such as wheat or soy, the report claimed.

The National Dietary Guideline 2024 identifies UPFs as food and beverage products that have undergone extensive industrial processing and contain a high number of additives such as preservatives, sweeteners, emulsifiers, and other substances that are not commonly used in culinary preparations, the survey said.

Convenience, hyper-palatability, affordability, longer shelf life and vigorous advertising and marketing strategies have made a conducive environment for the thriving business of UPFs in India, it argued.

The WHO India reports that between 2011 and 2021, the value of retail sales in the UPF segment grew at a CAGR of 13.7 per cent. Though there was a Year-on-year growth rate decline from 12.7 per cent to 5.5 per cent during 2020, the very next year, it was 11.29 per cent, the report stated. (PTI)

Army foils infiltration bid along LoC in J-K's Poonch

JAMMU, Jan 31: Two heavily armed terrorists affiliated with Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) were killed in a gunfight as Army troops scuttled a major infiltration attempt along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district, officials said on Friday.

The incident took place in the Khari Karmara area of the Poonch district on Thursday and a massive search operation was underway when the last reports were received this afternoon, they said.

"Terrorist movement was detected last night at the Line of Control in the Poonch sector. Alert troops swiftly engaged the infiltrating terrorists, triggering an intense and heavy firefight," the Army's Jammu-based White Knight Corps said in a post on X.

The Army said the operation continued through the night, leading to the neutralization of two terrorists. The search of the area thus far has resulted in the recovery of a number of weapons and war-like stores, it said.

General Officer Commanding-in-chief of Udhampur-based Northern Command Lt Gen M V Sachindra Kumar complimented the White Knight Corps for their swift action and precise execution in neutralising two terrorists and recovery of war-like stores in Poonch.

"The Indian Army stands by its commitment to keep Jammu (and) Kashmir terror-free," the Army commander said on X.

Officials said the bodies of both the terrorists were recovered from the scene of the gunfight and preliminary investigation revealed that they were affiliated with the proscribed LeT outfit.

Three AK assault rifles and a large quantity of ammunition were seized from the slain terrorists, the officials said, adding the identity of the deceased was not known immediately but they are believed to be Pakistani nationals. (PTI)

Tribal woman beaten up, disrobed, paraded in Gujarat village by mob; 12 arrested

DAHOD, Jan 31: A 35-year-old tribal woman was assaulted, disrobed and paraded by a mob led by her father-in-law in Gujarat's Dahod district over a suspected extra-marital affair, following which 12 persons were arrested after a video of her ordeal went viral on social media, a police official said on Friday.

The incident took place on January 28 in a village in Sanjeli taluka, Superintendent of Police Rajdeepsinh Zala said.

"An FIR was registered on January 29 against 15 persons. We have arrested 12 persons, comprising four men, four women and four juveniles. After we were alerted about the incident, we rescued the woman, who was locked inside the house by her father-in-law," he said.

The accused have been booked on charges of abduction, wrongful confinement, outraging modesty and assault with intent to disrobe, while those in the mob who videoed the act and circulated it have been slapped with provisions of Information Technology Act, the SP informed.

As per the FIR, the victim had an affair with a man from the village and had gone to meet him on the day of the incident.

A mob led by her father-in-law Bahadur Damor and her husband's brother Sanjay Damor along with some women stormed into the man's house, assaulted the victim, partially disrobed her and forced her to walk around the village after tying her hands with a chain, police said.

She was then tied to a motorcycle and dragged on the main road before being taken home and locked inside, as per the FIR.

The opposition Congress and Aam Aadmi Party slammed the BJP government over the incident and sought strict action against the culprits. (PTI)

Fishermen unions to hold Hartal on Feb 27

ALAPPUZHA (KERALA), Jan 31: Fishermen unions, under the banner of the Kerala Fisheries Coordination Committee, have called for a hartal on February 27 to protest the central government's decision to conduct offshore mining along the state's coast.

Addressing the media after a meeting on Friday, committee chairperson and Congress leader T N Prathapan said that all fishermen and fish distributors from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram would fully support and participate in the hartal. All fish markets across the state would also remain closed on the day of the hartal, he added. "The central government has invited tenders to conduct offshore sand mining and the mining would severely affect the fisheries sector and the marine ecosystem," former Thrissur MP said.

The coordination committee leaders, including General Convenor and CPI(M) MLA P P Chitharanjan, stated that sea mining would not be allowed under any circumstances. According to the committee leaders, the Centre has decided to auction sand blocks for offshore mining in five sectors—Kollam South, Kollam North, Alappuzha, Ponnani, and Chavakkad.

The meeting demanded that the union government revoke its decision and urged the Kerala Legislative Assembly to pass a resolution opposing offshore sand mining. (PTI)

Economic Survey 2024-25

Rail network expansion comes down; production of wagons, locos up

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: The Economic Survey 2024-25 tabled in Parliament on Thursday suggested that while the expansion of rail network has come down by approximately 10 per cent, the production of rolling stock such as wagons and locomotives has increased as compared to the April-November period of previous financial year 2023-24.

The Survey showed that in FY24 (April-Nov), while 2,282 km of rail network was commissioned, it came down to 2,031 km for a similar period in FY25.

However, production of wagons jumped from 22,042 to 26,148 and locomotives from 968 to 1042 for the said period.

According to the Survey, while in the whole of the financial year of 23-24, 41 Vande Bharat trains were introduced, FY 24-25 witnessed 17 new Vande Bharat trains up to October for various destinations in the country.

At present, a total of 68 Vande Bharat trains are operational in the country.

It further suggested that while in FY 23-24, 456 Vande Bharat coaches were produced, in FY 24-25 the figure stood at 228 up to October.

Highlighting the recent initiatives in the rail system, the survey said by October 31, 2024, 91 Gati Shakti multi-modal Cargo Terminals were commissioned and 375 MW of solar and 103 MW of wind was commissioned.

"Four hundred thirty-four projects valued at ₹ 11.17 lakh crore have been identified under three railway corridors mapped on the PM GatiShakti portal. Seventeen public-private partnership projects have been completed (for ₹ 16,434 crore) and eight (worth ₹ 16,614 crore) are going on," the Survey said.

It provided an update on two major railway projects, Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail Project and Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs).

"Sanctioned in December 2015, this 508-km project supported by Japan has a revised cost of ₹ 1.08 lakh crore. As of October 2024, it has achieved 47.17 per cent physical progress with an expenditure of ₹ 67,486 crore," the Survey said.

It added, "As of November 2024, 2,741 km (96.4 per cent) of the planned 2,843 km DFC network has been commissioned. DFCs have transformed logistics in India by facilitating increased freight volumes without passenger train interference."

The Survey noted that the Indian Railways is undertaking several initiatives to enhance passenger experience and station amenities such as 1,337 stations have been identified for redevelopment in Amrit Bharat Station Scheme and work has started in 1,197 of them.

"In the pursuit of enhancing the wellness and welfare of passengers passing through railway stations, 50 Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras (PMBJKs) were started in railway station premises. In addition, on November 13, 2024, 18 new PMBJKs were inaugurated, providing affordable medications and healthcare services at the railway stations," the Survey said.

It added, "A new policy for managing mobile catering was introduced on November 14, 2023. As of November 23, 2024, this has resulted in the establishment of 557 Base Kitchens servicing 468 pairs of trains."

About other passenger amenities, the Survey stated that Train Indication Boards have been provided at 1,351 stations, Coach Guidance Systems at 866 stations,and Wi-Fi availability at 6,112 stations, thus, enhancing passenger experience.

One Station One Product Scheme is operational at 1,900 stations, featuring 2,163 outlets that benefit 79,380 local artisans by providing sales opportunities for their products, it said.

It also observed Indian Railways' key initiatives to improve signalling systems by replacing mechanical signalling with Electrical/Electronic Interlocking (EI) systems and upgradation to electrical/electronic interlocking systems at 25 out of 62 pending stations in FY25.

It stated that Kavach, the indigenously developed Automated Train Protection system, has seen ₹ 1,547 crore investment till November 2024 and the specification version 4.0 was approved on July 16, 2024.

"EI systems have been installed at 227 stations in FY25, increasing the coverage to 3,576 stations. The first Direct Drive Interlocking system was commissioned in November 2024 at Tajpur station," the Survey said.

"ABS (Automatic Block Signalling) is being installed to enhance capacity on high-density routes. Seven hundred twenty route kilometres have been completed this fiscal year, increasing the coverage to a total of 4,906 kilometres," it added. (PTI)

9 dead in van-truck collision in Punjab's Ferozepur

FEROZEPUR (PUNJAB), Jan 31: Nine people were killed and many injured in a collision between a pick-up van and a canter truck in this Punjab district on Friday, police said.

The van was carrying more than 20 people, mainly those working as waiters, who were going to attend a function in Jalalabad.

The accident took place at around 8 am near a village in the Guruharsahai sub-division, police said.

At least nine people suffered injuries and are undergoing treatment at various hospitals, they added.

Ferozepur's Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Saumya Mishra said soon after the accident, teams from the "Sadak Suraksha Force" (SSF) reached the spot and launched a rescue operation.

Police said while some reports had earlier claimed that the accident could have been caused due to low visibility because of fog, they are still investigating the reason behind it.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Deepshikha Sharma said some of the critically-injured people were referred to the Guru Gobind Singh Medical College in Faridkot, while a few others were admitted at the civil hospital in Jalalabad.

"Five ambulances were sent to the spot immediately after the incident," the DC said, adding that the administration will bear the treatment cost of the injured.

Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and many other leaders from various political parties expressed grief over the accident.

"News of a major accident due to a collision between a canter and a pick-up vehicle came from Ferozepur this morning. The news of the tragic death of waiters going to a wedding ceremony has been received and some people are said to be injured.

"I pray to God for peace to the departed souls and a speedy recovery for the injured. The Punjab government stands with the affected families in this difficult time," Mann said in a post in Hindi on X.

Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal, in a post on X, said, "Deeply saddened to learn about a fatal road accident near Guruharsahai in Ferozepur district this morning. Heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayers for a speedy recovery of the injured. May all those affected by this tragic event find strength during this difficult period."

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and former chief minister Amarinder Singh also expressed grief over the incident. (PTI)

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Sad as a fan but rooting for Vijay's political journey: Pooja Hegde

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Actor Pooja Hegde says as someone who loves watching Vijay on screen, she's sad about the Tamil superstar taking the political plunge but supports his decision.

Hegde is set to reuntie with Vijay in "Jana Nayakan", in what is widely believed to be his last film before he quits cinema to become a full-time time politician. They earlier starred together in Nelson Dilipkumar's "Beast" .

The superstar actor, who formed his party Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam last year, revealed the film's title last week.

Asked how she felt about working with Vijay in his 69th and tentatively last film, Hegde told PTI: "As a person who loves to watch him on screen, I'm very sad. But I also support his journey. I'm rooting for him. So, more power to him."

Hegde's latest release is "Deva", in which she co-stars with Shahid Kapoor.

The actor plays an investigative journalist named Diya in Rosshan Andrrews' film, which released on Friday.

Hegde said Diya is a bold woman who asks tough questions and even unafraid to say anything to the titular character Deva, a brilliant but defiant cop.

"When you sometimes ask questions you're not supposed to, it can be taken in a wrong way. But their job is so crucial. It requires a lot of guts. I took those qualities in an investigative journalist and applied it to my scenes.

"I don't think people have seen me like that in Hindi , especially. So when I heard the script, I felt this is the right film for me... As artists, you're always exploring and you're looking for new characters that you can play," she added.

While she didn't get to interact with real-life investigative journalists as they pretty much work "in the shadows", Hegde said she drew inspiration from the 2016 Oscar-winning film "Spotlight" for her role.

"For me, 'Spotlight' was a film that I really loved on investigative journalists. And, I know 'Erin Brockovich' was not a film where she was a journalist, but I liked how inquisitive she was in uncovering the truth... 'Deva' is not a film like 'Spotlight' but at the same time, I kind of took those qualities and put it into my scenes," she said.

Hegde has a slew of films lined up for release including "Retro" with Suriya and a slapstick comedy directed by David Dhawan and co-starring Varun Dhawan. (PTI)

John Leguizamo, Benny Safdie join cast of Christopher Nolan's 'The Odyssey'

LOS ANGELES, Jan 31: Actors John Leguizamo and Benny Safdie have joined the cast of "The Odyssey", the latest film by Oscar-winning director Christopher Nolan.

Leguizamo and Safdie are part of a star-studded cast that also includes Matt Damon, Tom Holland, Zendaya, Robert Pattinson, Lupita Nyong'o, Anne Hathaway and Charlize Theron.

"The Odyssey" is based on the epic Greek poem by Homer and will be released in theatres on July 17, 2026. Universal Pictures is the studio behind the film.

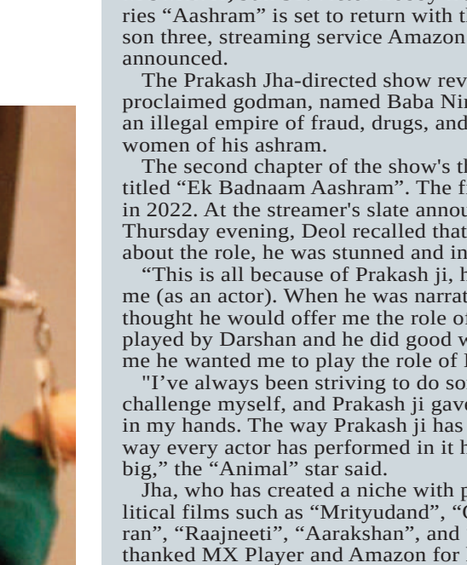
Homer's "Odyssey" follows Odysseus, who spends years travelling back home from the Trojan War while battling mythical creatures and faces the wrath of the gods in his journey.

According to entertainment outlet Deadline, the epic poem explores "themes of heroism, loyalty, cunning, and the struggle against divine will". "The Odyssey" marks Nolan's first project after 2023's "Oppenheimer", which went on to win seven Oscars earlier this year including Best Picture and Best Director.

Nolan is writing and producing the project alongside his wife Emma Thomas, under their Syncopy banner.

Leguizamo is best known for his work in "Carlito's Way" (1993), "Super Mario Bros" (1993) and "Romeo + Juliet" (1996.) Safdie has been a part of projects like "Licorice Pizza" (2021) and his 2019 film "Uncut Gems", which he co-directed alongside Josh Safdie. He also featured in Nolan's "Oppenheimer". (PTI)

It was unfortunate, we are there for each other: Naga Chaitanya on Allu Arjun's arrest



MUMBAI, Jan 31: We are there for each other, says Telugu actor Naga Chaitanya about "Pushpa 2" lead star Allu Arjun's arrest following the death of a woman during a stampede at the film's premiere.

The incident took place on December 4 at Sandhya theatre in Hyderabad where fans had gathered to catch a glimpse of Arjun during the "Pushpa 2" screening. A 35-year-old woman lost her life, and her eight-year-old son sustained injuries in the chaos.

"We are all there for each other in the South, but whatever happened was unfortunate and it shouldn't have gone that way. But we are all there for each other," Chaitanya told PTI. Following the tragedy, a case was registered against Arjun, his security team, and the theatre management at the Chikkadpally police station. The charges were filed under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) based on a complaint by the deceased woman's family.

Arjun was arrested on December 13 in connection with the case. However, the Telangana High Court granted him interim bail on December 14 and a regular bail on January 3.

After Arjun's release from jail, Chaitanya was among the many actors who had visited the "Pushpa 2" star's residence.

Chaitanya is currently in the city to promote his upcoming feature, "Thandel", which will be released theatrically on February 7.

"Thandel", directed by Chandoo Mondeti, also stars Sai Pallavi. It is produced by Bunny Vasu under Geetha Arts and presented by Arjun's father Allu Aravind. (PTI)

Netflix announces 'Frankenstein', 'Knives Out', 'Squid Game 3' as part of 2025 international slate

MUMBAI, Jan 31: Streaming platform Netflix on Friday unveiled its international films and series slate, including Frankensteinby Academy Award-winning filmmaker Guillermo del Toro, crime thriller "Rip" with Ben Affleck and Matt Damon and the much-anticipated third season of "Squid Game".

Some of the other titles are Rian Johnson's next "Knives Out" film "Wake Up Dead Man", which will bring back Daniel Craig as famous sleuth Benoit Blanc, as well as filmmaker Noah Baumbach's "Jay Kelly" with George Clooney.

The event at the Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles included special guests WWE superstars CM Punk and Rhea Ripley as well as prominent Hollywood names like del Toro, Affleck, John Mulaney, Tina Fey and the Duffer Brothers. It was simultaneously live-streamed across 12 countries.

"No matter what you're looking forward to this year, there's no way to be completely ready for what's next on Netflix," Bela Bajaria, Netflix's Chief Content Officer, said at the company's annual showcase of films, series and games in 2025.

"With more than 700 million people watching, we can't just be one thing. We need to be the best version of everything," Bajaria said.

Whats on the menu?

Based on Mary Shelley's 1818 novel of the same title, del Toro's "Frankenstein" features Oscar Isaac, Jacob Elordi and Mia Goth.

"Over the decades, the character has fused with my soul in a way that it has become an autobiography. It doesn't get more personal than this," said Guillermo del Toro, who has been wanting to make this project for 50 years, in a video message.

The streamer has revealed that "The Old Guard 2" is set to premiere on July 2. The film marks the return of Charlize Theron as Andy of Scythia, the immortal mercenary, who confronts a powerful new adversary.

In addition, Oscar-winning director Kathryn Bigelow's untitled Netflix film is scheduled for a release later this year.

While plot details are being kept under wraps, the star-studded cast includes Idris Elba, Rebecca Ferguson, Gabriel Basso, Jared Harris, Tracy Letts, Anthony Ramos, Jonah Hauer-King, Moses Ingram, Greta Lee, and Jason Clarke. New comedies include "The Four Seasons", a fresh adaptation of the 1981 film originally written by Alan Alda, now helmed by Tina Fey.

She said they were able to "assemble a cast of beloved comedy actors that could create the same warm, human vibe of the original". Lena Dunham has inked a creative partnership with Netflix for the upcoming scripted debut with Netflix,with "Too Much".

Netflix and Tyler Perry announced two new projects: a new film, "Madea's Destination Wedding", and a new comedy series, "She The People".

In addition to this, Perry also has part two of the hit drama series "Beauty in Black", which is set to return on March 6, the drama feature "Straw", and the faith-based feature "R&B". The streaming platform also released first-look images from these projects. Netflix is also bringing fan-favourite titles, including "Stranger Things", "Wednesday" and "Squid Game".

Bajaria revealed that season two of Jenna Ortega-led "Wednesday" recently wrapped production and will come out later this year.

She also announced that the final season of "Squid Game" will debut on June 27.

Talking about the final season of "Stranger Things", co-creator Ross Duffer said, "This is our biggest and most ambitious season yet." (PTI)

Amazon MX Player announces part two of 'Aashram' season three

MUMBAI, Jan 31: Actor Bobby Deol-starrer popular series "Aashram" is set to return with the second part of season three, streaming service Amazon MX Player has announced.

The Prakash Jha-directed show revolves around a self-proclaimed godman, named Baba Nirala (Deol), who leads an illegal empire of fraud, drugs, and prey on young women of his ashram.

The second chapter of the show's third season has been titled "Ek Badnaam Aashram". The first part was released in 2022. At the streamer's slate announcement event on Thursday evening, Deol recalled that when Jha told him about the role, he was stunned and in disbelief.

"This is all because of Prakash ji, he saw something in me (as an actor). When he was narrating the story, I thought he would offer me the role of a police officer, played by Darshan and he did good work. but when he told me he wanted me to play the role of Baba.

"I've always been striving to do something different and challenge myself, and Prakash ji gave me the opportunity in my hands. The way Prakash ji has written it, and the way every actor has performed in it has made the show so big," the "Animal" star said.

Jha, who has created a niche with political and socio-political films such as "Mrityudand", "Gangaajal", "Apaharan", "Raajneeti", "Aarakshan", and "Satyagraha", thanked MX Player and Amazon for helping him make the show.

"The story of 'Aashram' resonated with the people of our society. Everyone around us right from the Airport staff to CISF jawan has often said they are waiting to see the show. I'm sure people will like the five episodes that will drop soon," Jha said.

The show also stars Aaditi Pohankar, Chandan Roy Sanyal, Darshan Kumaar, Anupria Goenka, Adhyayan Suman and Tridha Choudhury.

The streamer unveiled an exciting lineup of more than 100 new shows set to launch in 2025, including 40 new Hindi originals and returning seasons of popular shows like Suniel Shetty and Jackie Shroff-led "Hunter", "Jamnapaar" starring Ritvik Sahore and Varun Badola, Remo D'Souza and Malaika Arora's "Hip Hop India", The Viral Fever-backed "Half CA" and "Sixer", and "Who's Your Gynac" featuring Saba Azad. **(PTI)**

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Mumbai pile up misery on Meghalaya

J&K dominate Baroda in Ranji Trophy

MUMBAI, Jan 31: Mumbai piled up a massive 585-run first-innings lead and made early inroads against Meghalaya, while Jammu and Kashmir grabbed a crucial 205-run advantage against Baroda in their Group A Ranji Trophy matches on Friday.

Mumbai skipper Ajinkya Rahane missed a century but maiden First-Class tons from Akash Anand (103) and Shams Mulani (100 not out), Siddhesh Lad's 145 and fifties from Shardul Thakur (84) and Suryansh Shedge (61) powered the hosts to a massive 671 for seven declared in the first innings.

Meghalaya, who were shot out for 86 in the first innings, slipped to 27/2 at stumps on the second day with Thakur striking twice with the new ball, trailing by 558 runs as Mumbai took big strides towards a massive win to ensure qualification for the quarterfinals.

With a quarterfinal berth at stake, the defending champions opted for a no-risk approach by batting through the second day to push for an outright win.

The day, however, began on a disappointing note for the hosts when Rahane fell four runs short of his first century this season.

He edged one behind to Arpit Subhas off MD Nafees after being troubled on a few occasions.

Lad brought up his second century of the season, finishing with 145 off 250 balls with 17 fours and a six. Lad had himself to blame when he hit a innocuous delivery from Anish Charak (2/185) straight into the hands of Kishan Lyndoh at short mid-wicket.

"I never thought that I would be back playing for Mumbai again because we had won the Ranji Trophy last year and boys are doing really well. But I knew somewhere the opportunity will come and I have to be ready for that. Kudos to the support staff, they have really worked hard on me since June (last year)," Lad, who had left Mumbai for Goa earlier, told media after stumps.

"I had a talk with Omkar Salvi sir at the start of the season (as to) what my role will be, when will I get (an) opportunity? He made me ready for for this situation and I'm glad that it came off nice."

Lad said Meghalaya are a new team among the Elites in the Ranji Trophy and they will need time to find their feet.

"Yes, Meghalaya is a new team, they will take some time to get acclimatised to the teams which are playing since (many) years. They have the potential, but our coach and captain won't let you take anyone lightly; you can't take anyone lightly and you can't take your place lightly in the team (as well)," he added.

The 196-run association between Rahane and Lad was followed by an 87-run stand between Lad and Anand for the fourth wicket and another 123 runs were added between Suryansh Shedge and Anand for the fifth wicket.

Thakur then produced a brutal 42-ball 84 with five sixes and nine fours while adding 156 runs for the seventh wicket from only 99 balls with Mulani.

Mumbai declared after Mulani scored his ton, reaching 100 not out from 86 balls.

In another Group A clash at Vadodara, J&K took control against Baroda, whom they had displaced from the top of the points table with a win over Mumbai last week.

J&K came up with a fine bowling display to dismiss Baroda for 166 and take an 80-run first-innings lead.

At stumps, J&K's lead had swelled to 205 with opener Shubham Khajuria, who had earlier taken 3/47, reaching 67 not out off 115 balls.

In Cuttack, Odisha conceded a 19-run first-innings lead but reached 167 for three at stumps to be ahead by 148 runs against Services with Aashirwad Swain batting on 64.In Solapur, Siddhesh Veer's unbeaten 93 and Yash Kshirsagar's 71 took Maharashtra to 235/3 against Tripura who were bowled out for 270 in the first innings.

Brief scores:

At Mumbai: Meghalaya 86 & 27/2 in 6 overs (Kishan Lyndoh 16*; Shardul Thakur 2/10) trail Mumbai 671/7 decl. In 140.5 overs (Siddhesh Lad 145, Ajinkya Rahane 96, Akash Anand 103, Suryansh Shedge 61, Shams Mulani 100*, Shardul Thakur 84; Himan Phukan 3/144) by 558 runs.

At Vadodara: Jammu and Kashmir 246 & 125/1 in 41 overs (Shubham Khajuria 67*) lead Baroda 166 in 62.1 overs (Shivalik Sharma 64; Sahil Lotra 4/26, Abid Mushtaq 3/56, Shubham Khajuria 3/47) by 205 runs.

At Cuttack: Odisha 180 & 167/3 (Aashirwad Swain 64*; Pulkit Narang 1/22) lead Services 199 (Ravi Chauhan 120; Rajesh Mohanty 5/68, Tapas Kumar Das 3/57, Sunil Kumar Roul 2/57) by 148 runs.

At Solapur: Tripura 270 in 101.2 overs (S Sharath 71; Rajneesh Gurbani 4/37, Hitesh Walunj 4/67) lead Maharashtra 235/3 in 72 overs (Siddhesh Veer 93*; Yash Kshirsagar 71; MB Mura Singh 1/12) by 35 runs. *(PTI)*

Mukund returns to Davis Cup action, India favourite against Togo

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Sasikumar Mukund will aim for a winning return to the Davis Cup fold and redeem himself after serving an unannounced suspension as India will start firm favourites against lower-ranked yet gritty Togo in the World Group I Play-off, starting here from Saturday.

Much was expected from Mukund when he broke into the national scene a few years back, drawing praise even from the legendary Leander Paes but his progress was marred by injuries.

If the struggle on the Tour and injuries were not enough, he courted controversy on his Davis Cup debut in September 2023 and then last year for his refusal to play for the country.

However, better sense prevailed and the 28-year-old, who largely trains in Austria, made himself available for the tie against Togo.

It is now a perfect opportunity for Mukund in the absence of Sumit Nagal to win his first Davis Cup match and contribute in India's victory in this tie, the winner of which will compete in World Group I in September this year.

The rival players, except Thomas Setodji, are not even ranked. Rankings do not matter in the Davis Cup, yet they help when the opponents are not formidable. The stage is set for Mukund and he must take advantage.

He will open against Liova Ayite Ajavon while Ramkumar Ramanathan will play the second singles against Setodji, who is ranked as low as 1256 on the ATP ranking chart.

"Morocco was not an easy experience and hopefully tomorrow is the chance to redeem myself, and I can get to the finish line. It has been a while since I played in Morocco and I am much fitter and a better player now. I have put in a lot of hard work, in general," he said. The gulf is wide when one compares the exposure and experience of players on the two sides but India will be wary of a passionate bunch from the tiny African nation that has been on a roll in the World Cup of tennis.

Togo has won 10 of their last 11 ties but they have not competed against the sides of high calibre. They would like to believe that they can shock India but it will be a reality check for the Togolese players as well.

India is going in with the tried and tested Ramkumar for the second singles when Karan Singh was also an option. Considering that Togo is manageable, throwing 21-year-old Karan in the ring was a good opportunity to hand him some good experience of knowing what it feels like to represent India.

Mukund said it does not matter who is playing since every player picked deserves the spot.

"It does not matter if you play or not, if your job is to play or to bring bottles to the court. It does not reflect the inability of the third player, he is also equally important. It's just that we have made a choice and we will back that decision," Mukund said.

While Karan misses out, India have handed a debut to Rithvik Choudary Bollipalli, who has quietly made it to the top 100 in doubles and also competed in his first tennis Major at the Australian Open.

He will pair with N. Sriram Balaji, who has been playing some solid tennis on the Tour, of late. It's about the adjustment they make as a pair on the re-laid, slow Centre Court.

"It's a dream come true for me," said Bollipalli.

Balaji said Bolliaplli, with whom he won a Challenger last year, is a disciplined player.

"Playing with Rithvik suits me. He will play on the deuce side and I on the ad court side. I like his work ethics. He is focussed and disciplined, he works hard. I enjoy playing with him," he said.

There has been a debate if India needed its strong players to tackle Togo, but skipper Rajpal said he did not want to take things lightly.

"It's a format based on merit. India had reached the final without being a seeded team. If they have reached the Playoffs, it means they have played at a good level," he said.

The doubles and reverse singles will be played on Sunday.

India vs Togo:

On Saturday:

Sasikumar Mukund vs Liova Ayite Ajavon

Ramkumar Ramanathan vs Thomas Setodji

On Sunday:

N Sriram Balaji/Rithvik Bollipalli vs Thomas Steodji/ Hod'Abalo Isak Padio

Sasikumar Mukund vs Thomas Setodji

Ramkumar Ramanathan vs Liova Ayite Ajavon. *(PTI)*

Bengaluru FC take on Punjab FC with battle of contrasting styles

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Punjab FC will look to improve their home form when they host Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League here on Saturday.

The Panagiotis Dilmperis-coached team will have their task cut out as it has not won any of the last four matches at this venue.

Bengaluru FC had beaten Punjab FC by a slender margin of 1-0 in the reverse fixture.

However, the latter are one of the four active teams that the Blues are yet to round off a league double over, alongside Hyderabad FC, Mohammedan SC, and Mohun Bagan Super Giant.

Both these teams are struggling for form, with Bengaluru FC having drawn once and losing twice in their last three away games. Their most recent match on the road saw them fall to a 0-1 loss to the Mohun Bagan Super Giant in Kolkata.

They will want to find their groove upfront, as the last time they had not netted in consecutive away clashes was in 2022.

Bengaluru FC have faced losses in four out of their last five encounters. They are placed fifth in the points table with 28 points from 18 matches, on the back of eight wins and four draws.

Punjab FC are in the ninth position with 20 points from 16 games due to six victories and two draws.

Punjab FC trail the sixth-placed Mumbai City FC (27) by seven points, having played a game fewer than the Islanders (17).

They have a reasonable period in hand to reignite their charge for the top-six, whereas the Blues will want to push upwards as the second-placed FC Goa have five more points (33) than them, having played a game less (17).

Punjab FC have conceded the second-most goals this way (7). Coach Dilmperis will have to work to ensure that his side's aerial prowess on both ends is fine-tuned to yield them the required returns.

Bengaluru FC have scored six headed goals this season, with only Mohun Bagan Super Giant (8) bettering them in this manner. The Blues have made good use of their players in the flanks by having them deliver consistent crosses for their target men in the box.

Given Punjab FC's drawback in defending aerial attacks, the Blues might just make the most of their proficiency in this regard. *(PTI)*

Real Madrid to play Manchester City in Champions League

NYON (SWITZERLAND), Jan 31: Real Madrid will play Manchester City in the Champions League knockout playoffs round in a standout clash of the past two title winners after the draw was made Friday.

Man City, the 2023 champion, will host the first leg on Feb. 11 or 12 and the return game in Madrid is on Feb 18 or 19. Madrid won a record-extending 15th European title last season.

The winner over two legs advances to the round of 16 to face either Atletico Madrid or Bayer Leverkusen, who placed in the top eight of the new 36-team league standings that ended Wednesday.

Teams that finished from Nos. 9 to 24 in the standings dropped into the two-leg knockout playoffs. Madrid placed 11th and Man City barely qualified in 22nd, after rallying to beat Club Brugge 3-1 in a must-win game.

By finishing in 22nd Man City knew it would have to face No. 11 Madrid or No. 12 Bayern Munich in the playoffs. Munich was drawn instead to face 21st-place Celtic.

Seedings decided by the 36-team standings means Madrid and Man City already know the winner of their two-leg blockbuster will be drawn then to face No. 5 Atletico or No. 6 Leverkusen. UEFA makes the round of 16 pairings on Feb. 21.

The tennis-style knockout bracket in the fresh competition format also now allows teams from the same country to face each other before the quarterfinals. That was not possible for the past two decades when the round of 16 opened the knockout phase.

That left Paris Saint-German to be drawn Friday to face French rival Brest, which it also plays in a Ligue 1 game Saturday. Monaco was left to face Benfica.

National derby games between Italian and Dutch sides were avoided because AC Milan was paired with Feyenoord, before Juventus was drawn to face PSV Eindhoven.

Concluding the matches, Club Brugge play Atalanta and Sporting Lisbon face Borussia Dortmund.

Teams awaiting them in the round of 16 in March are Liverpool, Barcelona, Arsenal, Inter Milan, Atletico, Leverkusen, Lille and Aston Villa. *(AP)*

Miguel Almiron returns to Atlanta United after transfer from Newcastle

LONDON, Jan 31: Atlanta United on Thursday announced the signing of the Paraguayan midfielder after completing a transfer from Newcastle United for an undisclosed fee.

Almirón left Atlanta in 2019 to join the Premier League side for a reported $26 million fee, the highest in MLS at the time.

His best season with Newcastle came in 2022-23, when he scored 11 goals. Overall, he had 30 goals and 22 assists across 223 appearances in all competitions.

"On behalf of the club, I want to thank Miggy for everything he has given us during our time together," Newcastle coach Eddie Howe said in a statement released by the club on Thursday. "He has been the ultimate professional, and he has been a big part of some of our most memorable moments in recent seasons. He is a great person and we'll miss him greatly, but this is the right move at the right time for him and his family and we wish them well."

Almirón joined Atlanta in 2017 as a designated player, and helped the team win the MLS Cup title in 2018. He was the 2017 MLS Newcomer of the Year, a two time All-Star and a two-time finalist for league MVP. He had 22 goals and 33 assists over two seasons.

His new contract with Atlanta runs through 2027 with an option for 2028. He will occupy a Designated Player and international roster spot.

"He's a dynamic attacking player with proven success in our league, as well as at the highest level in Europe in the English Premier League and UEFA Champions League with Newcastle," Atlanta Sporting Director Chris Henderson said. "We're pleased to add someone with his talent, experience and competitiveness to our group as we continue to build the roster for 2025." *(AP)*

Leverkusen signs defender Mario Hermoso on loan from Roma

BERLIN, Jan 31: Bundesliga defending champion Bayer Leverkusen added defensive depth Friday by signing Mario Hermoso on loan from Roma for the rest of this season. The 29-year-old central defender had joined Roma last September after five seasons at Atletico Madrid. He's a former Spain international.

"Mario Hermoso is an experienced player on the international stage and, in addition to playing as a central defender, he is a very capable and organized left back," Leverkusen sporting managing director Simon Rolfes said in the team's announcement.

Hermoso will provide "additional versatility to our defense and will compensate very well for the absence of Jeanuel Belocian," Rolfes added.

Leverkusen didn't specify if there's an option to make the deal permanent after the season.

Second-place Leverkusen trails Bayern Munich by six points ahead of Sunday's home game against Hoffenheim.

Earlier this week, Xabi Alonso's team added Argentine midfielder Emiliano Buendia on loan from Aston Villa to compensate for the injured Martin Terrier.

Alonso said Wednesday that Nigeria striker Victor Boniface is set to stay at the club following reports of a possible big-money transfer to Saudi Arabia. *(AP)*

Bindyarani Devi wins gold, Manipur lifters bag 2 medals at National Games

DEHRADUN, Jan 31: Manipur's star weightlifter S Bindyarani Devi set a national record in snatch en route to her gold medal-winning effort in the women's 55kg category at the ongoing National Games here on Friday.

Bindyarani, a Commonwealth Games silver medallist, overcame an initial setback in her first attempt at 83kg in the snatch category.

She displayed remarkable resilience, lifting 88kg in her final attempt to break the national record.

She broke the record of 86kg held by Mirabai Chanu.

But Mirabai's pet event is 49kg. She competed in 55kg only for a brief period.

Bindyarani's dominance continued in clean and jerk as well, where she successfully lifted 107kg in her first attempt.

Though she faltered at 112kg in her second attempt, she bounced back with a 113kg lift in her last attempt. Her total lift of 201kg was just one kilogram short of her national record of 202kg.

With this victory, Bindyarani now holds all three national records -- snatch, clean and jerk, and total lift -- in women's 55kg category.

"I was well prepared, and I am happy with my performance. It is always nice to get a record in your name. It's good that now both snatch and clean & jerk records are in my name," Bindyarani said.

Adding to Manipur's joy, L Nilam Devi secured the bronze medal, ensuring two podium finishes for the state.

Nilam, despite early struggles in snatch with two unsuccessful attempts at 80kg and 81kg, successfully lifted 81kg in her final attempt.

She showed strong form in clean and jerk, lifting 98kg and 101kg in her first two attempts before narrowly missing 104kg in her last attempt.

Meanwhile, Sharabani Das of Bengal claimed the silver medal, lifting 78kg and 81kg in snatch while excelling in clean and jerk with successful lifts of 102kg and 106kg before skipping her final attempt. *(PTI)*

BAI-REC to host first-ever BWF Level 1 course in India to standardise coaching ecosystem

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: In a bid to build a strong network of qualified coaches, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) will conduct the first-ever BWF Level 1 Course for coaches along with BAI Level 1 (Advanced) courses at multiple venues in February and March.

The BWF Level 1 courses, which are supported by REC Limited and the Sports Authority of India (SAI), will be held in Goa, Raipur, and Guwahati.

Each state association will be allowed to nominate preferably one male and a female representative between the age of 25-45, who fulfil the basic criteria of having represented the state in National or Zonal championships and have coaching experience of three years with the association.

The first leg of the coaching courses began in Goa on Monday while the second edition will be held in Raipur from February 4-10. Guwahati will host the third edition from February 12-18.

"For the last few years, BAI has been working toward creating a standardised coaching structure to ensure that every player in the country gets the same quality of coaching from the grassroots to elite level," BAI Secretary General Sanjay Mishra said in a release.

"Having successfully conducted the grassroots coaches' courses last year, it was a natural progress to now conduct the BWF Level 1 and BAI Level 1 (Advanced) courses to upskill the coaches further."

Last year, BAI launched its first-ever grassroots coaches training programme through which it

trained around 250 coaches with training imparted to them across 112 days from March to October 2024.

During the grassroots courses, the coaches got an opportunity to interact with qualified trainers, including former internationals, and were also explained the nuances of a holistic training programme, with experts from the field of sports psychology, nutrition and physiotherapy, among others, giving advice.

Only those coaches who bagged Grade A in the BAI Grassroots Coaches Courses will be eligible for the BAI Level 1 (Advanced) Courses which will be held in Guwahati (February 14-23 and February 24-March 5) and Raipur (February 14-23). *(PTI)*

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Kohli's first Ranji Trophy innings in 13 years lasts 15 balls

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Virat Kohli's first Ranji Trophy innings in 13 years lasted all of 15 balls, extending his lean run and fuelling the raging debate over his form.

For the 5000-odd crowd that assembled here to watch Kohli (6 off 15 balls), it was fun while it lasted but when he had his off-stump uprooted by Railways pacer Himanshu Sangwan in the 28th over of Delhi's first innings, a majority of them took no time to exit the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

The frequent chants of 'RCB, RCB' and 'Kohli, Kohli' dried up as the superstar took the long walk back to the dressing room, giving Railway employee Sangwan the most prized scalp of his career.

Ahead of his first domestic red-ball appearance since November 2012, Kohli had trained with former India coach Sanjay Bangar to iron out flaws in his batting that crept up on the tour of Australia.

More specifically, it was the ball outside the off-stump that haunted the former India captain on the two-month long tour Down Under.

Kohli came out to bat to a loud reception following the leg before dismissal of Yash Dhull at about 10.30am local time, which was an hour into day's play.

It was left-arm pacer Rahul Sharma who first got to bowl at the cricketing icon and with a spring in his stride, he bowled a yorker down the leg-side only to realise that he had overstepped.

Considering the batter in front, Rahul went for that little extra in his following ball and it turned out to be another no ball.

In the next over bowled by medium pacer Kunal Yadav, Kohli tried to assert himself and played and missed twice to balls pitched on his vulnerable zone -- wide outside the off-stump.

After collecting two singles, Kohli decided to dominate the opposition -- right-arm pacer Sangwan in this particular over.

Standing way outside the crease, Kohli disdainfully dispatched Sangwan towards the straight boundary.

It was still the first session and the ball was doing a bit but in his attempt to dominate Sangwan, the very next ball, Kohli went for an expansive drive off a good length delivery but missed it completely to see his off-stump shattered.

The ball seamed back in contributing to Kohli's downfall.

He had a quick look at the surface before trudging back to the pavilion and with him his sea of fans headed towards the exit door.

About 500 of them clung precariously to the iron grill next to the dressing room balcony where Kohli sat after his dismissal, a scene that once again highlighted the superstar's popularity.

The ones who exited re expected return for Kohli's second essay which could be on day three.

Sangwan's wild celebration was on expected lines. He had just taken the wicket of his life.

The 29-year-old from Najafgarh is a Delhi regular having played 23 Ranji games since his debut in 2019. He has to his credit 77 wickets at an impressive average of 19.92. *(PTI)*

Bumrah is best men's cricketer, Mandhana bags women's honour

MUMBAI, Jan 31: Talismanic pacer Jasprit Bumrah was chosen for the BCCI's Polly Umrigar Award for Best International Cricketer 2023-24 in men's category while elegant batter Smriti Mandhana was picked for the corresponding women's trophy in the Board's annual honours that will be presented here on Saturday.

Bumrah, who was selected as the ICC Test and overall Cricketer of the Year for delivering a "a master-class in skill, precision, and relentless consistency", was India's standout bowler last year, playing a pivotal role in India's home wins over England and Bangladesh.

The 31-year-old was also the Player of the Series against Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, bagging 32 wickets across five Tests.

Mandhana, who was the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year, made 743 runs in the 2024 calendar year. She scored four ODI centuries, a record in the women's game, and found the boundary more than a hundred times in the year, hitting 95 fours and six maximums. The 28-year-old cricketer's ODI runs came at an average of 57.86 and an impressive strike rate of 95.15.

Spin great Ravichandran Ashwin, who retired from international cricket in December 2024 as India's second highest wicket-taker in Tests with 537 dismissals and overall eighth highest, has been bestowed with a special award at the end of his career.

The 37-year-old Ashwin, who made his Test debut in November 2011, played a defining role in India's 12-year domination in the longest format at home wherein they won 18 series on the trot.

Among newcomers, Mumbai batter Sarfaraz Khan was picked for the Best International Debut among men for his quick-fire fifty against England in the Rajkot Test in February 2024. The middle-order mainstay also hit a counter-attacking 150 against New Zealand in the Bengaluru Test to continue his ascent.

Among women, Asha Sobhana has been chosen for the award for Best International Debut as she picked up 4/21 against South Africa to help India win by 143 runs in their first ODI at Bengaluru in June 2024.

Mandhana will also be honoured with the Highest Run Getter in ODIs medal after she finished as the highest run-scorer in 2024, smacking 747 runs at 57.46 in 13 matches with four tons and one fifty.

Similarly, Deepti Sharma was awarded with the Highest Wickets in ODIs medal for taking 24 wickets in 13 matches. Tanush Kotian continued to make waves with his rise through the ranks in Mumbai in the 2023-24 season, which culminated with his maiden call-ups for the India A side for their tour of Australia and subsequently for the Indian team for the last two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Kotian will be awarded with the Best Performance in BCCI Domestic Tournaments trophy.

The 26-year-old, who rose to limelight with all-round performances in Mumbai's 42nd Ranji Trophy win in 2023-24, scored 502 runs in 10 matches at 41.83 with one century and five fifties and also grabbed 29 wickets. Having won the Ranji Trophy for a record-extending 42nd time in the season, Mumbai also claimed the Irani Cup after a gap of 27 years.

The Mumbai Cricket Association would be given the Best Performance in BCCI Domestic Tournaments Trophy for winning various titles such as Ranji Trophy, U-16 Vijay Merchant Trophy, U-14 West Zone Championship, senior women's T20 Trophy, women's U-19 One Day Trophy, Bapuna Cup T20 Tournament and men's U-19 All India Tournament.

Mumbai teams also finished as runner-up in Cooch Behar U-19 Trophy and Vinoo Mankad U-19 Trophy.

Akshay Totre from Indore was adjudged the Best Umpire in Domestic Cricket for the season.

Legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar has been chosen for Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award. *(PTI)*

Cluster level sports competition concludes successfully

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 31: The cluster-level sports competition for Khagarijan, Pakhimoria and Raha development block, organised by Nehru Yuva Kendra, Nagaon, under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, in collaboration with the Assam Yoga Sanstha and Nagaon District Yoga Sanstha, concluded successfully on Friday at the Palashtol Kashamari High School playground. The competitions, which featured various events like athletics, volleyball, kabaddi, wrestling, and badminton, as well as traditional games, were inaugurated by the headmaster of Palashtol Kashamari High School, Kamal Bora.

Veteran athlete and sports organiser Kanthiram Raja and Dulen Chandra Deuri, along with teachers of Palashtol Kashamari High School, attended the inaugural function. The competitions were organised under the guidance of Prabhat Chandra Bora, secretary of the organising committee and senior physical education instructor. The valedictory function was attended by Kamal Bora, headmaster of Palashtol Kashamari High School, and Samir Hazarika, joint secretary of the Assam Yoga Sanstha, among others.

Ripon Gogoi, Hiranya Gohain, Bichitra Ranjan Bora, Sahil Ahmed, Samir Bordoloi, Jan Doom, Bindu Prasad Thakur, and Jerin Ahmed, among others, awarded the prizes to the winners.

Kashamari won the highest number of medals, followed by Fulaniati, which secured the second position. Barpujia and Bhakatgaon teams jointly secured the third position and will participate in the district-level competitions. According to Prabhat Chandra Bora, secretary of the organising committee, the winners of the boys' volleyball competition were Barpujia (first) and Kashamari (second).

In kabaddi, Bhakatgaon secured the first position, followed by Kashamari. Kashamari won the first position in athletics, followed by Sannidhya.

In the boys' badminton competition, Sannidhya secured the first and second positions.

Don't get friendly with Indians on field, maintain boundaries off it: Moin Khan

KARACHI, Jan 31: Former Pakistan captain Moin Khan has urged the country's cricketers to avoid getting friendly with their Indian counterparts on the field as such "unfathomable" behaviour can be perceived as a "sign of weakness".

His comments come just about three weeks before the two sides clash in a Champions Trophy match in Dubai on February 23. An aggressive and chatty wicketkeeper-batter in his prime, Moin said being friendly with Indian players is something that he finds baffling.

"I just don't get it when I watch Pakistan and India matches these days, as Indian players come into the crease our players check their bats, pat them, have a friendly talk," said the former head coach and chief selector during a podcast hosted by actor Ushna Shah.

"Nowadays, our players' behaviour when playing against India is unfathomable to me. Even off the field as professionals you have to have certain boundaries," he asserted.

Moin, who featured in many battles with India on the field, said he was not against having respect for opposition players but being overly friendly with them can be counter-productive.

"Our seniors always told us that when playing against India give no quarter and no need to even talk to them on the field. When you get friendly, they see it as a sign of weakness," said Moin.

The 53-year-old said he had immense respect for some of the Indian players of his generation but never showed it on the field.

"I think our players don't understand this but being too friendly is seen as a sign of weakness on the field and you automatically come under pressure in your performances," he said.

Moin said not being able to beat India in a World Cup match remained one of the biggest regrets of players of his time. Moin, who played 69 Tests and 219 ODIs, said Pakistan and India are among the favourites to do well in the Champions Trophy. *(PTI)*

Imran Khan's name not being removed from Lahore stadium's enclosure: PCB

KARACHI, Jan 31: The Pakistan Cricket Board has dismissed speculation that legendary cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's name would be removed from an enclosure at the recently-renovated Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore owing to his incarceration on charges of corruption.

Speculation was doing the rounds that PCB had removed the name of the 1992 World Cup-winning former captain from one of the enclosures at the stadium due to the "current political situation".

"No names have been changed or removed on enclosures," an official of the PCB said without taking any names, adding that names of all enclosures will remain as they were earlier.

The Gaddafi stadium has been renovated for the Champions Trophy that starts on February 19.

The Imran Khan enclosure, which is one of the VIP stands in the stadium, has been a permanent fixture at the venue since 1992.

The former Prime Minister is presently in Attock jail of Punjab province and has vehemently denied allegations of corruption, insisting that he is a victim of political vendetta.

However, a court recently convicted him and his wife Bushra Bibi in a corruption case, sentencing them to 14 and seven years respectively in prison.

Imran, who leads the Tehreek-e-Insaaf party, is currently in opposition to the ruling coalition government of Pakistan Muslim League (N) and Pakistan People's Party.

The Punjab province is governed by a PML (N) government led by Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of former premier, Nawaz Sharif. *(PTI)*

Mitchell Marsh out of Champions Trophy, in doubt for IPL due to back trouble

SYDNEY, Jan 31: Australia all-rounder Mitchell Marsh has been ruled of next month's Champions Trophy and is also in doubt for the Indian Premier League after that owing to lower back pain that has "not responded sufficiently to rehabilitation".

Cricket Australia informed about Marsh's injury in a statement ruling him out of the Champions Trophy, which will be held in Pakistan and Dubai from February 19 to March 9. A few other reports suggest Marsh is also doubtful for the IPL.

"Mitchell Marsh has been ruled out of the upcoming ICC men's Champion's Trophy with ongoing lower back pain and dysfunction," CA said in a release.

"The National Selection Panel and Australian men's medical team ruled Marsh out of the tournament with the injury which has not responded sufficiently to rehabilitation."

"His lower back pain flared in recent weeks leading the NSP to make the longer term decision for Marsh to complete a more extended period of rehabilitation," it added.

CA said the national selection panel will be meeting soon to name a replacement of Marsh, who was picked in the 15-member side for the competition alongside other all-rounders Aaron Hardie, Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis.

"Marsh will now undergo a period of further rest and rehabilitation as part of his return to play plan. The NSP will meet to decide on a replacement for Marsh in due course.

"The deadline for the final squads for the ICC men's Champion's Trophy is prior to Wednesday 12 February," CA said.

The 33-year-old Marsh has been roped in by Lucknow Super Giants ahead of the 2025 edition of the IPL, which will start on March 23.

Marsh was dropped in favour of Beau Webster for the final Test of the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy which concluded earlier this month.

He had an ordinary run in the four Tests. The right-arm medium pacer did not share much workload with the front-line bowlers and managed to score in double digits only once in seven innings. *(PTI)*

President Murmu highlights India's progress in sports

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: President Droupadi Murmu on Friday highlighted India's strides in developing a "world-class sports ecosystem" and lauded the country's recent successes in international competitions, including the Olympics, Paralympics, and the World Chess Championship.

The government, she said, has taken "significant steps" to strengthen the sporting infrastructure through initiatives like the Khelo India Scheme and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS).

In her address to the joint sitting of Parliament, she also pointed to the establishment of the National Sports University as a crucial step in this direction.

"A special sports centre for Divyang athletes has been opened in Gwalior," she announced, underscoring the government's commitment to inclusive sports development.

The President praised India's athletes for their consistent excellence on global platforms, saying, "Our teams, whether at the Olympics or the Paralympics, have delivered outstanding performances."

She also noted the country's growing dominance in chess, citing India's remarkable success at the World Chess Championship.

Murmu further emphasised the role of fitness in nation-building, pointing to the Fit India Movement as a key initiative to empower the country's youth.

"Through the Fit India Movement, we are building a strong and empowered youth force," she said. *(PTI)*

Sachin Tendulkar to get BCCI Lifetime Achievement Award

MUMBAI, Jan 31: Legendary former batter Sachin Tendulkar, whose records and impact on international cricket have stood the test of time, will be conferred with the BCCI's Lifetime Achievement Award at the Board's annual gala here on Saturday.

Overall, Tendulkar will be the 31st recipient of the award, which was instituted in 1994 in the honour of India's first captain Col. C K Nayudu.

The 51-year-old Tendulkar, who played 664 international games for India, holds the record for the highest number of Test and ODI runs in the history of the game.

"Yes, he will be the recipient of the C K Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award for the year 2024," a Board source told PTI.

Tendulkar's 200 Test and 463 ODI appearances are also the highest by any player in the history of the game. He amassed 15,921 Test runs besides a whopping 18,426 in ODIs.

However, he played only one T20 International in his stellar career.

In 2023, the lifetime honour was bestowed on former India head coach Ravi Shastri and wicket-keeping great Farokh Engineer.

Considered the greatest batter of his era, Tendulkar was not just a prolific run-scorer but also an icon of the game, who played for more than two

decades after debuting as a 16-year-old in a 1989 Test against Pakistan.

The well-documented and numerous batting records apart, Tendulkar was also a key member of India's 2011 World Cup-winning team, which was his record sixth and last appearance in the showpiece.

At his peak, the diminutive right-hander could bring the nation to a standstill by simply walking out to bat.

His dismissal was the most sought after among opposition teams, who did not hesitate to say that Tendulkar was the only Indian batter who could intimidate them.

Tendulkar's emergence in the Indian cricketing scene happened at the same time when India witnessed economic liberalisation and the curly-haired genius became a favourite of corporate India, thanks to a never-seen-before emotional connect with people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari.

When a 17-year-old Tendulkar scored a hundred at Perth on a treacherously bouncy WACA track, lot of teenagers found a hero.

When he scored the 'Desert Storm hundred' at Sharjah against Australia in 1998, a middle-aged man somewhere wished that he was his son.

When he withstood pain and nearly took India to a victory against Pakistan in Chennai in 1999 and broke down, a billion hearts broke into pieces.

When he shed tears of joy while hugging Mahendra Singh Dhoni on April 2, 2011, a nation shared his happiness.

And in November 2013, when he left the field in front of his adoring fans in Mumbai, thousands lost cried hoping for him to continue.

If Sunil Gavaskar brought respect for Indian cricket with his astute mind and artistic defence, Tendulkar, with his dazzling array of strokes, stood for style and aura.

They were the social symbols of their time.

BCCI didn't become a rich cricket board just overnight.

It's first blue chip share certainly was Tendulkar, which paid them handsome dividends throughout.

Tendulkar was that middle-class success story, which led to a "successful marriage" of India Inc. and Indian cricket.

It wouldn't be an overstatement to say that for cricket historians, there will be distinct eras which need to be chronicled namely - 'BT' which is Before Tendulkar, 'DT' which will be 'During Tendulkar' and 'PT' that is Post Tendulkar.

Tendulkar always united India with his craftsmanship creating organic love in the pre-social media days free of toxicity.

His humility made him ever more endearing.

Tendulkar will be bestowed with the honour but it is the establishment that should feel privileged that they perhaps had the greatest servant of Indian cricket for 24 years.

There could easily be more followed cricketers in India but when it comes to unadulterated love, no one will ever surpass the 'Master'. He owns that love. *(PTI)*

Teenager Parth Mane wins 10m air rifle gold at National Games

DEHRADUN, Jan 31: World junior champion Parth Mane held his nerves to beat teammate Rudranksh Patil en route the men's 10m air rifle gold as Maharashtra registered a 1-2 finish at the 38th National Games here on Friday. Services' Kiran Jadhav won the bronze.

The 17-year-old Mane produced a commanding performance to hold the lead after every series barring one. Remaining unruffled throughout the final despite the presence of more experienced shooters around him, Mane fired consistently and was able to overcome the blip of logging 9.9 and 10.0 with his 12th and 14th shots.

Six of his next 10 shots earned him 10.7 points or more.

Rudranksh breathed down his neck after 20 shots, only 0.6 points behind, but Mane overcame the sustained pressure from his senior.

Rudranksh scored 42.2 points with his last four shots but Mane responded with 42.4 points, including rounds of 10.8 and 10.7.

Mane scored a total of 252.6 points, 0.4 points better than the score that fetched the Paris 2024 Olympics gold medal in this category.

While Mane was consistent throughout the final and rarely let the lead slip from his grasp, Rudranksh's shooting during the elimination round caught the eye.

He had earned India an Olympic quota by winning the World Championships in 2022. Arjun Babuta of Punjab, who was within striking distance of the lead after 16 shots, was let down by a couple of 10.4s to finish fourth.

Jadhav was trailing in the fourth spot but a 10.8 under pressure on the 20th shot saw him edge out Paris 2024 Olympian in the medal race.

Fourth in qualification, Paarth Makhija of Delhi finished fifth spot, while Sandeep Singh of Services, who competed in the 2024 Olympics, finished sixth.

Assam's Hriday Hazarika, a 2018 World Junior Champion, was unable to capitalise on the window of opportunity that opened up when Sandeep shot a 9.8 at the start of the eliminations. *(PTI)*

Printed, published and owned by Rameswar Chauhan & Printed at Echo Printing Press, Printing unit of The Echo of India, AK Deb Road, Katabari, Gorchuk, Guwahati- 781035 and Published at Near office of the DFO (East) Div., Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam.782460, Guwahati Office Phone - 0361 2220018, Diphu Office Phone - 272106, Fax- 272106, e.mail: hillstimes@gmail.com and ads.hillstimes@gmail.com (only for advertisement)

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