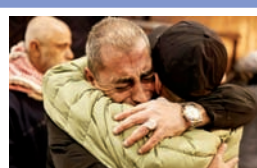


6

WORLD



8

NATION



● Hamas calls for talks on next phase of ceasefire after hostage-prisoner exchange

● Trump administration says it's cutting 90% of USAID foreign aid contracts

● Mamata sets 215 plus seat target for 2026 assembly polls

● Congress MLAs boycott Rajasthan Assembly proceedings

HT BRIEFS

Assam CM
GUWAHATI: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday met Bhutan Agriculture and Livestock Minister Younten Phuntsho and held discussions on strengthening cooperation in several areas. "It was a pleasure to host Hon'ble Agriculture and Livestock Minister of Bhutan, H.E. Mr. Younten Phuntsho. We had insightful discussions on strengthening cooperation between Assam and Bhutan in shared growth areas such as agriculture, trade, tourism, education and power," Sarma said in a post on X.

World Bank
GUWAHATI: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday met World Bank Country Director Auguste Tano Kouame and discussed various areas for receiving financial support from the lender. "Had a very good meeting with Dr. Auguste Tano Kouame, World Bank Country Director, India. We discussed establishing plug-and-play industrial park infrastructure in the state," Sarma said in a post on X. He said they also discussed options to support the development of projects under PPP models in various sectors. The CM also spoke on prioritising agriculture and allied sectors.

Need to intensify efforts to oust BJP underscored

Assam Congress leaders discuss upcoming state poll strategy with Kharage

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Top Congress leaders from Assam met here on Thursday to discuss the party's strategy ahead of next year's state polls with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge asserting that people will discard the BJP's politics of "corruption" and "division in the elections."

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi was among those who attended the meeting at the party's Indira Bhawan headquarters.

AICC general secretary, organisation, K C Venugopal, AICC general secretary in-charge of party affairs in Assam Jitendra Singh, deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi, Assam Congress chief Bhupen Bora and other state unit leaders were also present.

During the deliberations, the senior leaders underscored the need for unity and intensifying efforts to oust the BJP.

"In a year, the people of Assam



shall discard the politics of corruption, division and vendetta. 3.5 crore people of Assam look towards the Congress to usher in this change. No amount of select-media driven propaganda can shake their resolve for transformation," Kharge said in a post on X.

"We chaired an important meeting of @INCAssam leaders at Indira Bhawan, New Delhi, today," he said.

The Congress is looking to wrest

Eminent Muslims write to PM on USTM chief's arrest

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: A civil society group comprising eminent Muslims on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expressing deep concern over the arrest of the chancellor of private educational institution University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya (USTM) and urged him to ensure justice in the matter.

USTM chancellor Mahbabul Hoque was arrested from his Guwahati residence in the early hours of Saturday, police said. He was allegedly involved in a network that lured students with assurance of high marks through "fraud means", Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had claimed.

"This arrest of a respected, non-political citizen and his prolonged incarceration have been aimed at demoralising a section of progressive members of society. It prevents efforts by enlightened citizens to strive towards establishing modern secular institutions of higher learning and medical facilities," the letter signed by former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi, former Delhi Lt Governor Najeeb Jung, former Aligarh Muslim University vice chancellor Zameer Uddin Shah, former MP Shahid Siddiqui and industrialist Saeed Sherwani said.



"This is pure vendetta and we are confident that you will give directions for redressal," the civil society group 'Citizens For Fraternity' said.

In their letter to Modi, the group said Hoque was arrested in the early hours of Saturday "without an initial charge-sheet or arrest warrant and been lodged in a jail, which is about 300 km from Guwahati".

"The charge-sheet made available a day after his arrest accuses him of encouraging mass cheating in Class 12 exam. The timing of arrest, on a Saturday morning when judicial redress is difficult, clearly smacks of vendetta by the Government of Assam against USTM and its founder," the letter said. (PTI)

Assam hit by 5 magnitude earthquake; no casualty reported

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: An earthquake of 5 magnitude jolted the central part of Assam on Thursday morning, an official bulletin said.

There is no immediate report of any injury to anyone or damage to any property, officials said.

A National Center for Seismology report said the quake was recorded at 2:25 am in Morigaon district on the southern bank of Brahmaputra, at a depth of 16 km.

The exact location of the epicentre of the earthquake is around 52 km east from Guwahati in central Assam.

People in the neighbouring Kamrup Metropolitan, Nagaon, East Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, Hojai, Dima Hasao, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi, Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar and Goalpara districts also felt the jolt.

Darrang, Tamulpur, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Biswanath, Udalguri, Nalbari, Bajali, Barpeta, Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Lakhimpur on the northern bank of Brahmaputra too felt the tremor.

The earthquake could be felt in some areas of central-western Arunachal Pradesh, entire Meghalaya, and several areas of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal. Central-eastern Bhutan, parts of China and Bangladesh (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India, China militaries implementing resolutions to end Ladakh conflict: Chinese Defence Ministry



BEIJING, Feb 27: Chinese Defence Ministry on Thursday said the militaries of India and China are implementing the resolutions to end the standoff in eastern Ladakh in a "comprehensive and effective manner."

"At present, the Chinese and Indian

militaries are implementing the resolutions related to the border areas in a compressive and effective manner," Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Sr Col Wu Qian told a media briefing here, replying to a question on the status of the normalisation of the situation in eastern Ladakh sector.

"We are ready to work with the Indian side to jointly preserve the peace and tranquility in the border areas," he said.

India and China completed the disengagement process late last year after firming up a pact for withdrawal of troops from Depsang and Demchok, the last two friction points in eastern Ladakh ending over four years of freeze in ties.

After finalisation of the pact, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks in Kazan in Russia on October 23. In the meeting, the two sides decided to revive the various dialogue mechanisms.

After that, National Security advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign minister Wang Yi held the 23rd (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Hindi is mask, Sanskrit the face, says Stalin

CHENNAI, Feb 27: Upping the ante against alleged Hindi imposition by the Centre, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Thursday said the state will not allow the forcing of the language on it and vowed to protect Tamil and its culture.

"Will oppose Hindi imposition. Hindi is the mask, Sanskrit is the hidden face," he said in a letter to party workers.

The ruling DMK has been alleging Hindi imposition by the Centre through the 3-language formula as part of the National Education Policy (NEP), a charge denied by the union government. The issue has since become a bone of contention between the two, prompting Stalin to declare the state was even ready for "another language war," like the anti-Hindi agitation the DMK spearheaded in 1965.



In the letter, Stalin claimed many north Indian languages spoken in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh such as Mythili, Brajbhasha, Bundelkhandi and Awadhi "have been destroyed by the hegemonic Hindi."

"More than 25 north Indian native languages have been destroyed by the invasion of hegemonic Hindi-Sanskrit languages. The century-old Dravidian movement safeguarded Tamil and its culture because of the awareness it created and the various agitations," the ruling DMK chief said.

Tamil Nadu is opposing NEP because the Centre is trying to impose Hindi and Sanskrit through the education policy, he added.

Countering BJP's contention that the third language according to the NEP could be even a foreign one, Stalin claimed that according to the 3-language policy schedule, "only Sanskrit is being promoted in many states."

BJP-ruled Rajasthan was appointing Sanskrit teachers instead of Urdu instructors, he claimed.

"If Tamil Nadu accepts the trilingual policy, the mother language will be ignored and there will be Sankritisation in the future," he said. He claimed NEP provisions (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Guwahati Police quizzes YouTuber Ashish Chanchlani

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Guwahati Police on Thursday questioned YouTuber Ashish Chanchlani in connection with a case regarding alleged promotion of obscenity on a publicly accessible online show.

Chanchlani, along with his advocate, appeared before the Crime Branch, which recorded his statement and allowed him to leave for the time being.

"We recorded his statement. As he cooperated with our investigation, we let him go. If required, he will be called again," Guwahati Police Joint Commissioner Ankur Jain told reporters here.

When asked about other accused who have not appeared before the police yet, Jain said notices will be sent once again asking them to present themselves before the investigators. On February 18, Gauhati High Court had granted interim bail to Chanchlani in connection with the case.

Chanchlani and four others were named in the FIR registered by Guwahati Police on February 10 vide Cyber Police Station case under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Information Technology Act, Cinematograph Act and Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act. The Supreme Court (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tariff removal on American goods will destroy economy: Cong



NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Flagging US President Donald Trump's push for reciprocal tariffs, the Congress on Thursday said the Modi government must stand up to the "humiliation" and tell its American counterpart that such moves would not be acceptable to India as they would "destroy" the country's economy.

At a press conference here, Congress leader Ajoy Kumar played video snippets from French President Emmanuel Macron's meeting with Trump and also Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with the US president to claim that the Indian PM remained "mum" even when the US president was "speaking ill of India".

"We have seen French President Emmanuel Macron correcting Trump in conversation and telling him he is wrong. On the other hand, in front of Narendra Modi, Trump kept speaking ill of India."

"He keeps calling India a tariff violator, we will impose reciprocal tariffs, but Narendra Modi remained silent," Kumar said at the presser at the AICC office at 24, Akbar Road.

Kumar said Modi calls Trump his best friend but he "constantly tries to humiliate India".

"The BJP people never get tired of calling Narendra Modi a 'Vishwa Guru' but when PM Modi went on a tour to America, Trump did not even come to receive PM Modi," he said.

Flagging Trump's push for reciprocal tariffs, Kumar said if tariffs are removed on items such as apples, the apple traders of Himachal will suffer. If the tariff on grapes is removed, then Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh will suffer, he added.

"At the same time, if tariffs on vehicles are removed, the Indian car market will suffer huge losses. Today, electronic goods are also coming to our country from China. "If other goods also start coming from outside, then what will be manufactured in the country?" he said.

Kumar claimed that Trump tried to "humiliate" India over tariffs.

"But this government is so shameless that before going to America, the government reduced the customs duty on Harley Davidson and Tesla... The economy is in shambles under the Modi government," he said.

Kumar claimed that the condition of the stock market is bad. People are standing at the same place where they started and they are continuously withdrawing their money from the market, he alleged.

"Due to reciprocal tariff, the country's GDP will decline by 0.5 to 0.6 per cent, due to which the condition of the country will deteriorate... Narendra Modi is the enemy of the economy. "First demonetisation, then flawed GST, unplanned (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP slams Rahul Gandhi for skipping Maha Kumbh

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Hitting out at Rahul Gandhi for not visiting the Maha Kumbh, the BJP on Thursday gave a call to reject the Congress' "cheap politics", alleging that the Nehru-Gandhi family members visit temples ahead of elections only to fool the "majority society" of the country.

The organisation of the just-concluded Maha Kumbh in Paryagraj has proved that it's only the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi

who stand for the respect and promotion of Sanatan Dharma in the country, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said.

The 45-day Maha Kumbh, billed as the world's largest human gathering, ended on Wednesday with lakhs of devotees taking a dip in the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers, on the occasion of Mahashivratri.

In a post on X, Malviya said

more than 66 crore people from every corner of the country and the world participated in the great festival of faith but Rahul Gandhi, the "scion of Congress" which ruled the country for many decades, did not visit the Maha Kumbh.

"It is natural for the son of a Christian mother and a Parsi father to not have faith in this ancient festival of the Hindu society. Rahul Gandhi has not even visited the Ram Lalla temple (in Ayodhya)

built after a long struggle of 500 years. It may be his personal decision, and we should respect it," Malviya said.

"But the same Rahul Gandhi, his sister Priyanka Vadra and mother Sonia Gandhi pretend to visit temples before elections, which should be stopped now," he said, adding, "The time has come to completely reject this cheap tendency of the Congress to do politics by fooling the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The younger generation preferring digital media' Ready to help media industry in transition from traditional to digital: Ashwini Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: The government is ready to help the media industry adapt to rapid changes as it passes through a phase of transition from traditional to digital media, Union Information and Broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Thursday.

In a video message to the Storyboard18-DNPA Conclave, Vaishnaw flagged issues such as copyright and fair compensation to traditional media houses for use of their content by digital platforms.

Vaishnaw stressed on the importance of examining the role of traditional media and how it could adapt to new-age transformation.

"The younger generation has shifted completely from traditional media to digital media," he said.

The minister said the transitional phase also brought challenges related to employment, creativity, copyright issues, and ensuring fair compensation for content creators, producers and other stakeholders in the media industry.

"As the government, we are



fully prepared to provide any necessary support required during this transition," Vaishnaw said.

He also expressed hope that the conclave would deliberate on how this transition could be carried out smoothly and without disruption.

Union Information and Broadcasting secretary Sanjay Jaju flagged concerns about the unchecked spread of misinformation and clickbait journalism that, he said, undermined democratic

SC upholds power of arrest of customs, GST authorities

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the constitutional validity of the power of arrest under the amended laws of customs and the central goods and services tax (GST).

A bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices M M Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi said in appropriate cases, application for pre-arrest bail could be allowed and it was not essential for such pleas to be moved only after an FIR when facts were clear and a reasonable basis present to apprehend arrest.

About 280 pleas, including one of lead petitioner Radhika Agarwal in 2018, challenged the provisions of the Customs Act and the GST Act being "non compatible" with the CrPC and the Constitution.

Writing a 63-page judgement for himself and Justice Sundresh, the CJI held, "The challenge to the constitutional validity as also the right of the authorised officers under the Customs Act and the GST Act to arrest are rejected and dismissed with elucidation and clarification on the pre-conditions and when and how the power of arrest is to be exercised."

Justice Bela Trivedi concurred with the CJI and wrote a 13-page verdict.

On the issue of power to grant anticipatory bail, the CJI said it arose when there was an apprehension of arrest.

"This power, vested in the courts under the code, affirms the right to life and liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution to protect persons from being arrested. In appropriate cases, application for anticipatory bail can be allowed, which may also be conditional," the verdict said.

As a result, the challenge to Sections 69 and 70 of the GST Act and Section 104 of the Customs Act were rejected by the court, which ruled in favour of the legislature's competence to enact the provisions that criminalised tax violations and make arrests.

The bench referred to certain judgments and said though customs officers were not police officers, they had the statutory authority to investigate and arrest offenders under the relevant laws. The bench was dealing with the validity (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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India needs to ramp up bilateral relations for trade, investment: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said India needs to ramp up its bilateral relations for trade and investment, as the world is witnessing a churn, and bilateralism seems to be the new catalyst tool.

Speaking at BS Manthan, the Finance Minister said these are very interesting yet challenging times and the government is making all efforts to make India move up the ladder and be an engine of global growth.

"Bilateralism is now taking the top of the agenda... It is for us to ramp up our bilateral relations with many countries, not just for trade, not just for investment, but also for strategic relations. So multilateralism, sort of, out, I'm still saying with a qualifying word 'sort of out', but bilateralism is very much your only catalytic tool that you can use," she said.

Observing that multilateral institutions are increasingly fading away, she said, every attempt to revive them and energize them is not having the desired result.

"So, where you have to address issues which affect more than your own country. You have no more fo-



rum left which can effectively deliver... multilateral institutions and their contributions probably are fading away, at least in the near future, till an attempt is made to revive them with that kind of energy... It's not going to happen in the next few years," she said.

Asserting that global trade is undergoing a complete reset, she said, "the terms and references with which all of us played trade, with some kind of an anchor in the World Trade Organization are no longer available."

There is no Most Favoured Nation (MFN) concept, she said, adding, every country wants to be treated special, and every country wants to be sure that special treatment that they get is not by default.

"So if the WTO is getting weakened or multilateral institutions are not being effective... bilateral arrangements are going to be the order of the day in terms of trade," she said.

Sensing the movement toward a new world, India has initiated bi-

lateral trade talks with many nations including the UK and is planning a bilateral trade agreement with the US.

India is also in discussion with the 27-nation grouping -- the European Union, for a free trade pact.

In the new global order, she said, India needs to ramp up its bilateral relations for trade, investment and boosting strategic relations.

With its technology and talent pool, the country can act as the engine of global growth in a new world order, she said.

"I think these are very interesting yet challenging times... India has to make a meaningful contribution to the global reset, as much as continuously make all the efforts to make India move up the ladder, both in terms of per capita income, and also in terms of a business destination, where talent can move, investors can move for the global good... we can be the engine of the global growth," she said.

Talking about reforms, Sitharaman said, it is something which the government will continue to do in various areas including debt management and maintaining fiscal prudence. (PTI)

Uber to launch Carpooling service Saarthi to boost shared mobility in Assam



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Uber, India's leading ridesharing platform, on Thursday announced the launch of peer-to-peer carpooling service 'UberSaarthi' in Assam to create earning opportunities while serving the urban mobility needs of the state.

As per an official statement from the Uber, on the sidelines of Advantage Assam, the state government's investment summit, Uber announced the new carpooling initiative for women and veterans who will now be able to on-board their private four-wheeler vehicles on the Uber platform to take trips.

"Uber signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Assam, pledging an investment of ₹ 120 crore over the next 3 years. In 2023, Assam became the first Indian state to allow carpooling under its Motor

Vehicle Guidelines," the statement added.

It further said that Uber's new offering 'Saarthi' taps into Assam's existing mobility infrastructure and fuses it with its tech expertise and global experience of providing shared mobility solutions that optimise assets.

Uber has also committed to creating 20,000 livelihood opportunities through its two-wheeler taxi service, Uber Moto, over the next 3 years.

Speaking on the occasion, Assam minister Jogen Mohan, said that the Assam government remains committed to adopting smart mobility solutions that enhance connectivity, reduce road traffic, and generate livelihoods.

"The first of its kind carpooling service, UberSaarthi initiative aligns with our vision of fostering inclusive growth and sustainable development," he added.

On the other hand, Man-

ish Bindrani, head of Regional Driver Growth, Uber India & South Asia, congratulated the progressive vision of the Assam Government to become the first State in India to embrace peer-to-peer carpooling which has the potential to be a game-changer in creating new economic opportunities while supporting mobility goals.

"We deeply appreciate the Assam Government's commitment to fostering innovation and investment in the region. Assam is setting a benchmark for sustainable and inclusive growth, and we look forward to working closely with the state to further transform mobility and drive positive impact for communities," he added.

Veterans and women who drive on the Uber platform under the carpooling initiative will undergo a rigorous background check in line with Uber's safety standards. Both riders and drivers will have access to Uber's suite of technology-enabled safety features including a 24x7 Safety Line, an in-app emergency button, phone number anonymization and more.

Uber became the only ride-hailing company to be present across the 7 North-Eastern Indian States in 2022 and has continued to strengthen its footprint, offering safe, reliable, and affordable mobility options.

PepsiCo India identifies Assam as key focus for long-term expansion



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 27: PepsiCo India on Thursday said that an attractive investment policies and a flourishing business climate make Assam a key focus for their long-term expansion. PepsiCo India participated in recently held Advantage Assam 2.0 - Investment and Infrastructure Summit 2025, reinforcing its commitment to fostering economic growth and sustainable development in the region.

"Attractive investment policies and a flourishing business climate make Assam a key focus for our long-term expansion, which includes an upcoming Greenfield Foods Manufacturing Facility in Nalbari," an official statement quoted Rinkesh Satija, head of Supply Chain, PepsiCo India as saying.

Satija believes that with this new facility, they anticipate a transformative impact on Assam's ecosystem, improving the livelihoods of farmers while reinforcing their 'partnership of progress,' deepening our engagement with the state government, and contributing to job creation, infrastructure development, and sustainable growth in the region."

He further said that PepsiCo India continues strengthening its partnership with Assam, and we are committed to supporting the state's progressive economic development. PepsiCo announced in 2024 that it will invest ₹ 778 crore to set up its food manufacturing plant in Nalbari, Assam. Spread over 44.2 acres, the plant is expected to be operational in 2025, generating direct and indirect employment for 500 people from the state. The Nalbari Greenfield facility will further strengthen PepsiCo's efforts to enhance farmer livelihoods, benefiting over 5,000 farmers in the coming years. Through advanced technology, high-quality seeds, and affordable machinery, the initiative aims to boost potato sourcing to 50,000 tonnes from Assam, supporting the production of the iconic Lay's chips.

among the major laggards.

The BSE smallcap gauge tumbled 2.09 per cent and midcap index declined 0.97 per cent.

"Markets ended flat with a mixed bias as traders preferred to exercise caution on the expiry day after witnessing sell-offs over the past few weeks.

"While India's expensive valuations have been driving foreign fund outflows over the past 3-5 months, the ongoing tariff-related concerns coupled with falling currency have made investors jittery," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Markets traded dull on the monthly expiry day, closing nearly unchanged for the second straight session, Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. "After an initial uptick, Nifty quickly flattened, trading within a narrow range before settling at 22,545.05. The past two sessions reflect indecision, likely due to oversold conditions," Mishra said.

Financial sector shares gained after the RBI's decision to ease lending norms for microfinance institutions and NBFCs, according to Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. (PTI)

Stock markets close unchanged on monthly expiry day

MUMBAI, Feb 27: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed almost unchanged on Thursday in a volatile trade amid unabated foreign fund outflows and monthly derivatives expiry.

The 30-share BSE Sensex eked out gains of 10.31 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 74,612.43. During the day, it hit a high of 74,834.09 and a low of 74,520.78, gyrating 313.31 points.

The NSE Nifty slipped 2.50 points or 0.01 per cent to 22,545.05, registering its seventh day of decline. As many as 31 Nifty components declined while

19 closed higher.

Gains from financials and metal shares were offset by losses in capital goods and auto shares.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Sun Pharma, Zomato, Tata Steel and Nestle were the biggest gainers.

UltraTech Cement was the biggest loser, dropping by 4.99 per cent after it announced entry into cable and wires segment with an investment of ₹ 1,800 crore in a plant in Gujarat. Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tech Mahindra and State Bank of India were



stock exchange filing that actual sales remained unaffected during the month.

Internal sources indicated that the company is on track to sell over 25,000 units this month, maintaining its leadership in the EV two-wheeler segment.

"The front-end network redesign represents a fundamental rethinking of how we manage inventory and serve customers," shared a senior company executive requesting anonymity. "Our

initial distribution model served its purpose during our early growth phase, and now the company's rapid expansion necessitated the front-end redesign."

The restructured network allows Ola to maintain inventory directly at retail locations, eliminating an entire distribution layer while enabling stores to function as delivery points, reducing last-mile expenses and improving customer experience. The inventory pipeline has also been halved to 15 days from 30 days earlier and the delivery timelines have also been brought down to 4-5 days from an earlier timeframe of 10 days, sources added.

The company's focus on profitability comes at a crucial juncture for India's EV market, which has seen a double-digit growth amid rising fuel prices and increasing adoption in Tier 3 & 4 markets.

Industry observers suggest sustainable business models will ultimately determine long-term winners. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Need to intensify efforts to

Sarma has accused Gogoi's wife of having links with Pakistan and the ISI. The Congress has said that Gogoi is being targeted as he has been vocal against the chief minister.

The Congress leadership has also convened another meeting of its leaders from Kerala on Friday to discuss the strategy ahead of next year's assembly elections in the southern state.

This comes days after a newspaper article by Thiruvananthapuram MP and senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor drew criticism from some party leaders in Kerala for his perceived praise of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in the state for boosting the investment climate. (PTI)

Assam hit by 5 magnitude earthquake;

were also shaken, the report showed. The tremor forced people to scamper out of their homes to open areas. The Northeastern region falls in the high seismic zone, making earthquakes frequently hit the region. (PTI)

India, China militaries implementing

Special Representative (SR) dialogue in Beijing on December 18 last year. On January 26, foreign secretary Vikram Misra travelled to the Chinese capital and held talks with his Chinese counterpart Sun Weidong under the framework of 'Foreign Secretary-Vice Minister' mechanism.

After the series of talks both the countries are in the process of normalising bilateral relations. India has been maintaining that ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas. (PTI)

Hindi is mask, Sanskrit the face,

say that other Indian languages will be taught in schools in "addition to Sanskrit" and that others like Tamil could be taught online. "This makes it clear the Centre has planned to do away with languages like Tamil and impose Sanskrit," the CM charged.

Dravidian stalwart and former chief minister CN Annadurai had mandated the two-language policy in the state decades ago to make it clear "there is no place for imposition of Aryan culture through Hindi-Sanskrit and destruction of Tamil culture," Stalin said. (PTI)

Guwahati Police quizzes YouTuber

earlier had granted interim protection from arrest to prime accused podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia over his comments on 'Samay Raina's India's Got Latent'. Apart from Allahbadia and Chanchlani, others named in the case in Assam are comics Samay Raina, Jaspreet Singh and Apoorva Makhija. (PTI)

BJP slams Rahul Gandhi for

majority of the country's society." Malviya also alleged that this is not the first time that someone from the Nehru-Gandhi family has "insulted" the great event of the Hindu society in such a way.

In 1954, the first Kumbh of Independent India was held in Allahabad, now Prayagraj, in which an estimated 40-50 lakh people participated, he said.

Along with then President Rajendra Prasad, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had also visited the Kumbh, Malviya said, adding, "Rajendra Prasad had even performed Kalpavas in the Sangam area for a month."

"In his book 'Mein Nehru ka Saaya Tha', author P V Rajagopal writes -- 'Everyone took a dip in the Sangam but Nehru did not even sprinkle the water of the Ganges on himself, let alone take a bath,'" Malviya pointed out.

Alleging that cheating Hindus has been an "old habit" of the Congress and the Nehru-Gandhi family, the BJP leader said, "It is necessary to expose this poisonous mentality they have." (PTI)

Tariff removal on American

lockdown and now this tariff (issue). Narendra Modi has ensured the destruction of the country," he said. If the economy continues in this manner, India will be weakened internally, he alleged.

Kumar urged the government to stand up to the US government and tell them that reciprocal tariffs are unacceptable.

"You saw the way Canada and Mexico reacted and the tariffs were dropped... India has to make a case, you have to engage with the Trump government, saying we will not accept it," the Congress leader said.

Kumar also slammed the government over Trump reportedly allocating funds for Pakistan's F-16 fleet maintenance.

"As soon as Narendra Modi returned from his US tour, it was announced by the US that around ₹ 3,000 crore was being given to Pakistan for the maintenance of F-16. But our Foreign Ministry did not reply to this.

"The deal between America and Pakistan was that F-16 fighter jets would be used only against terrorism," he said.

Even though it has been stated many times by Indian Army officials that Pakistan has used F-16 fighter jets against India, the Modi government has remained silent, Kumar alleged.

"America had exerted pressure on us many times in the past during the times of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, but India did not bow down," he said.

Kumar posed questions to the government, asking why the Modi government did not protest when Trump gave a grant of over USD 350 million to Pakistan.

"Did the Modi government discuss F-35 with its experts or not? Why did the Modi government weaken the country and put it in danger?" he said.

Kumar said Elon Musk has called the F-35 substandard but PM Modi has not yet ruled out the F-35 deal.

"The Modi government also did not say that it will decide on this after discussing with Defence experts. The F-35 is not in the interest of this country.

"There have been consistent reports that its design and technology are not good. But to please Trump, Modi is not able to refuse this deal," he claimed.

The Congress on Tuesday said reciprocal tariffs are a complete negation of all accepted principles of international trade and asserted that Modi should "summon the courage" to remind his "good friend that the T in WTO stands for Trade, not Trump."

The opposition party's assertion comes after Trump rolled out his plan to increase US tariffs to match the tax rates that other countries charge on imports, possibly triggering a broader economic confrontation with allies and rivals.

The US president has said his administration will "soon" impose reciprocal tariffs on countries such as India and China, reiterating what he had said during Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to the US capital. (PTI)

SC upholds power of arrest of

of the amended provisions of the Customs Act and the GST Act post its 2011 judgement in the case of Om Prakash v. Union of India.

The 2011 verdict held that offences under the Customs Act and the Central Excise Act, 1944 were non-cognisable and, therefore, even if the officers, who had the power to arrest, could do so only after obtaining a warrant from the magistrate under CrPC.

The amendments were later brought in Section 104 of the Customs Act which specified certain offences as cognisable offences and empowered the officers to effect arrest in certain cases.

"The amendments made to the Customs Act in 2012, 2013 and 2019 are substantive and were introduced to effectively modify the application of Om Prakash, which required a customs officer to obtain prior approval from a magistrate before making an arrest," the top court said.

The CJI said the amendments designated specified offences as cognisable and non-bailable, while imposing certain preconditions and stipulations for making arrest.

The petitioners' reliance on Om Prakash was no longer valid and must be rejected, the CJI added.

The verdict, however, said it was important to examine the pre-conditions and safeguards established by the legislature to protect the life and liberty of arrestees.

"If an officer of customs empowered in this behalf by general or special order of the principal commissioner of customs or commissioner of customs has reason to believe that any person has committed an offence punishable under Section 132 or Section 133 or Section 135-A or Section 136, he may arrest such person and shall, as soon as may be, inform him of the grounds for such arrest," it said.

A person arrested by a customs officer, held the court, had the right to meet an advocate of their choice during the interrogation, but not throughout.

"We reject the challenge to the amendments as well as provisions of the Customs Act. Reliance placed by the petitioners on the decision of this court in Om Prakash is misconceived as the statutory provisions have undergone amendments to bring them in consonance with the law of the land. Moreover, the provisions themselves provide enough safeguards against arbitrary and wrongful arrests," it said.

In the GST Act of 2017, the government provided the power of arrest in certain cases.

On the challenge to the GST Act provisions over power to arrest and summon, the bench did not agree to the submissions that the Centre lacked "legislative competence."

It was argued that Article 246A of the Constitution while conferring legislative powers on Parliament and state legislatures to levy and collect GST, did not explicitly authorise the violations to be made criminal offences.

The bench disagreed and said, "Article 246A of the Constitution is a special provision defining the source of power and the field of legislation for Parliament and the state legislature with respect to GST."

The verdict added, "Parliament, under Article 246A of the Constitution, has the power to make laws regarding GST and, as a necessary corollary, enact provisions against tax evasion. Article 246A of the Constitution is a comprehensive provision and the doctrine of pith and substance applies."

A penalty or prosecution mechanism for the levy and collection of GST, and for checking its evasion, was a permissible exercise of legislative power, it added.

The bench said the powers to summon, arrest and prosecute were ancillary and incidental to the power to levy and collect goods and services tax. (PTI)

Ready to help media industry in

he said. Jaju said Indian media houses produced content that drove engagement. Yet there was a feeling that they received very little in return.

"News articles and reports produced by all of you are now being used to train AI models, which then prioritise certain narratives without compensating the original creators. This has ramifications and has issues on ethical concerns. At the same time, it also has issues of repurposing journalistic content for corporate profit," he said.

Jaju said the government was closely monitoring global regulatory developments and there were many countries that had implemented laws requiring digital platforms to share revenues with news publishers.

"At the same time, there is also a need for a transparent revenue-sharing mechanism to ensure that our journalism remains financially sustainable," he added.

The Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA) represents 20 media outlets from both print and electronic media across India. (PTI)

Ola Electric accelerates profitability drive axing regional warehouses, optimizing costs

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Ola Electric has eliminated its regional warehouses across India, and will now leverage its 4,000 retail stores nationwide for maintaining vehicle inventory, spare parts, accessories, and last-mile deliveries.

The strategic move is expected to boost EBITDA margins by almost 10 percentage points, besides improving inventory management and faster customer deliveries, sources directly familiar with the matter said.

Ola Electric is redesigning its distribution network and optimizing vehicle registration process as India's largest electric two-wheeler maker chalks out roughly ₹ 30 crore monthly savings in an accelerated profitability drive.

The company has also renegotiated contracts with vehicle registration agency partners to streamline the process and further reduce costs. While this move temporarily affected the company's registration numbers on the VAHAN portal in February, Ola Electric clarified in a

BU commemorates National Science Day 2025 with innovation & enthusiastic participation

Event would serve as a catalyst for igniting passion in aspiring scientists

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 27: The Bodoland University marked National Science Day (NSD) 2025 with a two-day celebration that began on Thursday being held at the Jhwlaio Nileswar Brahma Auditorium Hall of the university in Kokrajhar.

The event served as a vibrant platform, bringing together students, faculty, and researchers from various institutions to exhibit their groundbreaking innovations and cultivate scientific inquiry.

The event was inaugurated by BL Ahuja, vice-chancellor of Bodoland University, who eloquently underscored the transformative power of science and technology in shaping modern society. He lauded the engaging poster presentations and dynamic exhibits that embodied the immense potential of scientific exploration. Acknowledging the pressing challenges in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), such as a shortage of educators, Ahuja reaffirmed his belief that the event would serve as a catalyst for igniting passion in aspiring scientists and reinvigorating interest in scientific disciplines.

A special tribute was paid to CV Raman, the legendary physicist whose discovery of the Raman Effect earned him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930. The event not only engaged the academic community but also played a pivotal role in enhancing public understanding of science. Subung Basumatary,



registrar of Bodoland University, commended the remarkable contributions of students and researchers, emphasising that the event was designed to spark intellectual curiosity, fuel creativity, and inspire groundbreaking scientific pursuits.

A total of 15 models and 30 posters were showcased, reflecting the ingenuity and dedication of the participants. The event also wit-

nessed a spirited speech competition, where an impressive number of students demonstrated their eloquence and deep understanding of scientific concepts. Furthermore, participants from various colleges enriched the celebration, infusing it with diverse perspectives and expertise. More than 150 participants from various colleges took part in the events. Some colleges and institute in-

cluded: Science College, Bineshwar Brahma Engineering College Central Institute of Technology, Aronai College, Bodofa UN Brahma College and various departments from Bodoland University.

The exhibition was meticulously judged by three esteemed experts: Chinmoy Bhat-tacharjee, associate professor, department of Physics, Kokrajhar Government College; Medalsong Ronghang, associate professor, department of Civil Engineering, BBEC; and Prakash Kumar Nayak, assistant professor, department of Central Institute of Technology, Kokrajhar. Their expert evaluations and insightful feedback added rigor and credibility to the event, further inspiring participants to push the boundaries of innovation.

Sujit Deka, dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology, extended profound gratitude to all contributors, recognizing the event's vital role in fostering scientific progress both regionally and globally. He also highlighted that the celebration coincided with Bodoland University's Foundation Day, making it a momentous dual occasion that reinforced the institution's legacy of academic distinction and scientific excellence.

The event is set to reach its pinnacle on Friday with the esteemed presence of the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of BTR, alongside regional authorities and academic leaders, reinforcing the indispensable role of science in societal progress and development.

Mass transfer of 28 lat mandals in Dhubri, amid corruption allegations

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, Feb 27: In a major shake-up aimed at curbing corruption, the district commissioner Dhubri has transferred 28 Lat Mandals from various revenue circles of the district in a single day, sending shockwaves across the administrative corridors.

The move came through an official order issued by the office of the district commissioner, Dhubri under the Land Settlement Branch vide No DRS-32/2019/46, dated 26/02/2025. According to the order, the transferred officials belong to the Lat Mandals of revenue offices of Dhubri Circle, Gauripur Circle, Atani Circle, Golakganj Circle, Bilasipara Circle, and South Salmara Circle.

Allegations of rampant corruption, illegal land dealings, and irregularities have been hovering over many of these officials for a long time, prompting the administration to take this stern step. The sudden mass transfer is being seen as part of the "Zero Tolerance" policy

adopted by the district commissioner to cleanse the revenue department of corrupt practices.

Several complaints from the public regarding bribery in land mutation cases, delay in land-related services, and illegal land settlement had been piling up against the Lat Mandals, raising serious concerns over the integrity of the administration.

Although the administration has not officially commented on the reason behind the mass transfer, insiders claim that the step was taken after a series of confidential reports highlighted the nexus between revenue officials and land mafias operating in the district.

The transfer order has triggered panic among the remaining revenue staff, while the public has welcomed the move, hoping for transparency and accountability in land-related matters. With this unexpected development, all eyes are now on the Dhubri district administration, as people eagerly await further action against those found guilty of misusing their official positions.

ECI two-day conference with CEOs in Delhi

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 27: The Election Commission of India has scheduled a two-day conference with the Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of all States and Union Territories from March 4-5 at the India International Institute of Democracy & Election Management, New Delhi.

This conference marked the first such event since Gyanesh Kumar assumed charge as Chief Election Commissioner (CEC).

In a significant move, the CEOs have been instructed to nominate a District Election Officer (DEO) and an Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to participate in the conference. As statutory authorities, CEOs, DEOs, and EROs play a crucial role in the electoral process at the State, District, and Assembly Constituency levels.

The two-day conference aimed to provide a platform for election officials from across the country to engage in brainstorming sessions and exchange insights on best practices in election management. The first day will focus on key discussions regarding modern election management, including IT architecture, effective communication strategies, enhancement of social media outreach, and the statutory role of various election functionaries.

On the second day, the CEOs of different states and UTs will present their respective action plans based on thematic discussions from the previous day. In this regard, the State Electoral Office, Dispur, has informed all district administrations and district headquarters to take necessary steps for public awareness regarding the conference and its objectives.

This initiative by the Election Commission of India underscores its commitment to continuous improvement in electoral processes, ensuring efficiency, transparency, and the integration of modern technology in election management.

Online nominations invited for e-governance National Awards

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 27: The department of administrative reforms & public grievances, Government of India, has invited online nominations for the National Awards for e-Governance 2025. The awards aimed to recognise and promote excellence in the implementation of e-Governance initiatives across the country.

The Assam State Government has directed all district commissioners to ensure participation by submitting nominations for innovative e-Governance projects from their respective districts.

The guidelines for the National Awards for e-Governance 2025 have been circulated for ready reference. All concerned officials are requested to review the guidelines and submit their nominations at the earliest. This initiative sought to encourage best practices in digital governance and enhance public service delivery through technology-driven solutions.

Police officer death sends shockwaves in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 27: A devastating road accident in Guwahati on Wednesday night claimed the life of Birinchi Das, the officer-in-charge of Gagarap Police Station in Nalbari. The news of his demise sent shockwaves through his native Dakshinpat in Nagaon, where his family and local villagers gathered to mourn his loss.

Das (47) is survived by his wife, father, and only daughter. His mother had passed away just 18 days ago, on February 8 last. The family performed his last rites beside his mother's grave in their ancestral land after his earthly remains had brought to his native Dakshinpat village this afternoon here.

The locals came together to pay their respects to the departed officer, and his daughter's innocent queries about her father's sudden absence left everyone in tears. Das's wife performed the final rituals, lighting the funeral pyre. The sudden loss of Birinchi Das has left his family, friends, and other locals in a state of shock and grief.

NFR GM reviews progress of new Gati Shakti cargo terminal projects

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: The General Manager of Northeast Frontier Railway Chetan Kumar Shrivastava conducted a review meeting on February 27 with senior railway officials at the N F Railway Headquarters in Maligaon to assess the progress of the new Gati Shakti cargo terminals being developed across the region as a part of NF Railway's commitment to enhancing freight logistics in the region and streamlining cargo handling infrastructure under the PM Gati Shakti framework.

On Feb 25 Ashwini Vaishnav, minister of railways, information & broadcasting and electronics & Information Technology, during his address at the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit at Guwahati, had announced the development of six new Gati Shakti cargo terminals in Assam, in addition to the two already existing terminals at Moiraband near Silchar and Cinnamara near Jorhat.

Gati shakti cargo terminals are state-of-the-art logistics terminals being built with the participation of major industry partners for faster and more efficient handling of cargo. These terminals are



equipped with modern facilities which will improve the efficiency of freight logistics in the region and bring down the logistics costs, thereby enabling India to improve its position in the Logistics Performance Index (LPI).

One of these Gati Shakti cargo terminals is being developed at Baihata in Kamrup Rural District of Assam, constructed by BR Transcon Ltd. The terminal will feature three new goods lines, an Electronic in-motion weighbridge, durable goods circulating area with two goods platforms, high

mass lighting for round the clock operations and special ramp for efficient handling of automobiles, among other facilities. It is expected that more than 25 freight rakes will be handled at this terminal every month.

Shrivastava instructed the concerned officials to ensure completion of this work within the next one month. Similarly, work on the Gati Shakti Cargo terminal at the Jogighopa Multi Modal logistics park is also in advanced stage, and is targeted to be completed by March 2025.

Annual Foundation Day celebration of D-Kandy Academy



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: The Annual Foundation Day of D-Kandy Academy, located in Madhyamikhand, North Guwahati, was celebrated on Thursday in the indoor stadium auditorium of the school. The students of the academy have excelled not only in academics but have also achieved significant recognition in sports and cultural activities at both state and national levels.

The event commenced at 4 pm and was inaugurated by motivational speaker CK Jagadish and the principal of the academy, Dipanjal Pathak. In his speech, the CK Jagadish, spoke on women empowerment and urged parents to guide and inspire their children towards their goals instead of merely protecting them.

The event was graced by several

eminent personalities from North Guwahati, including social worker and sports organizer Mukuteswar Goswami, secretary of the Anundoram Barooah Memorial Preservation Committee Saurav Kumar Borah, cultural personalities Moira Parijat and Hemangini Bordoloi, and Jibeswar Sharma from the Hemangini Bordoloi School of Fine Arts. The president of Nari Mancha, Beauty Bora, also attended and highly praised the school's achievements in academics, sports, and cultural activities.

As part of the celebrations, a colorful cultural programme was organised. Students from playgroup to senior classes showcased their talents through various creative performances, including songs, dances, and traditional presentations representing Assam's diverse communities. The two-hour-long program captivated the audience.

In her concluding speech, Principal Dipanjal Pathak expressed her heartfelt gratitude to parents, well-wishers, and supporters who have been part of the academy's golden journey. She also expressed her hope that the school would continue to excel in academics and sports in the coming years.

CEM Boro inaugurates Tamulpur Senior Secondary school academic block

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 27: Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) on Thursday inaugurated the newly renovated Academic Block of Tamulpur Senior Secondary School amidst presence of students, teachers and local citizens in Tamulpur.

The academic block of the school was constructed by the department of Education, Government of BTR to facilitate improvement in education sector in the region.

The senior secondary school in Tamulpur has been regarded as a premier educational institution in the district.

Boro stated that the newly renovated academic block of the senior secondary school would extend services in the improvement of educational infrastructures.

He said that the government of BTR has initiated various initiatives towards the ushering of sustainable development of educational environment across the region.

"Furthering our efforts to vastly improve educational infrastructure in BTR, today I inaugurated the newly renovated Academic Block of Tamulpur Senior Secondary School", Boro said.

CEM Boro also laid the foundation stone for a new road at Maraigona village, marking a step forward in enhancing connectivity in Goreswar constituency in Tamulpur.

He also visited and offered prayers to Bathou Bwrai at the revered Bathou Mandir, seeking blessings for peace & progress.

He was accompanied by MCLA Pabitra Boro and dignitaries of Goreswar on the occasion.

Police jawan attacked by Irani chain snatcher in Dhubri

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, Feb 27: In a shocking incident, a police jawan was attacked in broad daylight by an Irani chain snatcher in front of the Dhubri Superintendent of Police's office on Thursday afternoon.

The Jawan, Bishnu Rai of the 7th Assam Police Battalion, was on his way home after withdrawing ₹ 4 lakh from the State Bank of India for his ailing mother's treatment when the attack took place.



The accused, identified as Mondri Yadav, a professional pickpocket from Churi Patti, Kishanganj, Bihar, attempted to rob Rai by using a sharp weapon and spraying an itching substance. Yadav tried to snatch the bag of cash from Rai's hand.

However, before Yadav could escape, alert bystanders intervened and managed to overpower him. In the scuffle, the enraged crowd thrashed the accused before handing him over to the police. A team soon arrived at the scene and took Yadav to Dhubri Sadar Police Station for further interrogation.

Authorities are now investigating whether Yadav is linked to other criminal activities in the region. The incident has sparked concerns over the rising number of thefts in Dhubri, especially in high-security areas. The police have urged residents to remain cautious and report any suspicious activity immediately.

Giant 38-kilo pumpkin becomes star attraction at Kisan Mela in Dhubri

Birsing-Jarua Development Block farmers have reported a good return on vegetable production this season

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, Feb 27: A massive 38-kilogram pumpkin grown in the char area of Dimatola has become the highlight of the Kisan Mela, organised by the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) in collaboration with the Dhubri district agriculture department.

The pumpkin, cultivated on a 10-bigha farm, has drawn significant attention from visitors and agricultural experts alike. The agro farm in Dimatola char, owned by Abu Label Baky, spans 200 bighas of river-deposited land, where various vegetables like chilies, eggplants, potatoes, and pumpkins are grown alongside sesame, black gram, and mustard.

These fertile lands, however, are seasonal, appearing and disappearing with the shifting river. Despite their farming success, Baky and other farmers in the region face major transportation challenges. "We are far from the mainland, and the cost of transporting our produce is often higher than the value of the



vegetables themselves. We have to first travel by boat and then use vehicles, making the entire process extremely expensive," he explained. Due to these high costs, farmers are sometimes forced to discard their vegetables, leading to

financial losses. The farmers in these remote char areas sustain their livelihoods and maximize their agricultural potential despite being deprived by the MP's and MLA's in infrastructural development.

Meanwhile, in the Birsing-Jarua

Development Block under Dhubri, farmers have reported a good return on vegetable production this season. The area has witnessed a strong yield of various crops, offering hope for better agricultural prospects in the region.



HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Feb 27: The annual Urs celebration of Maa Bibi Mariam Fatema Mazhar was held on Thursday which is located in Namdang, Margherita and is 5 kilometres away from Margherita headquarter has drawn thousands of devotees from across the state. The Mazhar, a sacred shrine, has become a symbol of communal harmony, attracting people from diverse faiths and backgrounds. The Urs celebration, which commemorates the death anniversary of Bibi Mariam Fatema, began with the traditional religious Chador offering ceremony during morning hours where devotees from various parts of Assam irrespective of caste, creed, race, language and religion gathered at the Mazhar sacred shrine to pay their respects and seek blessings.

Md Toufik Khan general secretary of Bibi Mariam Fatema Mazhar Development Committee said that every year Annual Urs is celebrated on the last Thursday of February. Here, people from all walks of life ir-

respective of caste, creed, race, language and religion come here in large numbers.

Bibi Mariam Fatema belonged to Syed Dynasty whose ancestors in the year 1882 came from North West Frontier Province, Baluchistan, Pakistan then under British India to work at Assam Railway and Trading Company Limited Margherita and later they were settled at Makrani line in Ledo and Pathan line in Bargolai under Margherita, where in the year 1890 Syed Dynasty people built a Masjid and Kabrasthan (Graveyard) at Namdang, Margherita said Md Toufik Khan.

In the year 1902 Bibi Mariam Fatema died at Namdang and she was buried and the place become a sacred shrine, where it is believed if a person pray with full devotion then the person wishes come true said Md Toufik Khan. Bibi Fatema Mariam's descendants are still alive and they lived at Vineer mill Bazaar, Margherita said Md. Toufik Khan.

Bibi Mariam Fatema Mazhar located in Namdang, Margherita, is one of the most revered shrines in Assam, attracting devotees from all over the country as the Mazhar is believed to possess mystical powers and devotees come here to seek solace, peace and prosperity said Khan. "The annual Urs celebration is a testament to the communal harmony and syncretic traditions of Assam as people from different faiths and backgrounds come together to pray, share food and celebrate the occasion and the event promotes unity, peace, love, brotherhood and understanding among people, reinforcing the values of tolerance and coexistence," Md Toufik Khan said.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Time passes irrevocably
— Virgil

Use of USAID funds in India

The decision of US President Donald Trump to close the United States' Agency for International Development (USAID) led to a slugfest between the two main ruling class parties — the BJP and Congress. Announcing the closure, a list of recipients of USAID was published. Quoting from this list, Trump claimed that \$21 million was given for 'voter turnout' in India. Doubling down on this claim, Trump stated that this was intended to get 'somebody else elected'. He followed this up in yet another public interaction stating that this money went to his "friend Prime Minister Modi in India for voter turnout". These statements warrant serious consideration and should be thoroughly investigated. If proven true, they would indicate nothing less than direct interference by external forces in the internal democratic processes of our country. USAID is not an innocent agency that disburses foreign aid to deserving countries and communities without expecting anything in return. It operates as an extension of the US State Department, to carry forward its aggressive foreign policy objectives. Established by President John F. Kennedy during the Cold War to counter the growing influence of the Soviet Union, USAID has since played a key role in fomenting regime change, safeguarding US corporate interests, and crushing socialist movements.

The use of aid as a tool to enforce regime change or dismantle governments perceived as threats to US interests is not a new phenomenon — nor is it something that has bypassed India. Evidence has emerged regarding how the US 'aided' the Congress party in removing Kerala's first elected communist government. The fact that both the Congress and the BJP (or its earlier incarnation, the Jan Sangh) had no objections to such interference speaks volumes about their commitment — or lack thereof — to safeguarding India's sovereignty and democratic institutions. Against this backdrop, the US President's claim that \$21 million was paid to influence 'voter turnout' in India is a serious allegation that cannot be ignored or dismissed. Moreover, it must not be buried under the weight of 'whataboutery' by either the BJP or the Congress.

The Minister of External Affairs stated that the Trump administration's remarks are 'concerning' and that 'the government is looking into it.' Beyond this, however, he has remained completely silent on whether there is any truth to these claims. Certain media outlets have reported that the funds in question were not intended for India but for Bangladesh, suggesting that Trump may have confused 'Dhaka' with 'Delhi.' While this explanation might seem amusing, it is ultimately the government's responsibility to provide a clear and transparent account of USAID's involvement and activities in India. According to government reports, USAID has provided over \$17 billion (Rs 1.5 lakh crore) in funding to India since its establishment, supporting more than 555 projects across various sectors. Successive governments, regardless of which party was in power, have availed themselves of USAID funding. The full details of USAID funding, the nature of its projects, and its involvement in India's internal affairs must be brought to light. The government must come clean to safeguard the integrity and sovereignty of our country.

After Trump's win, democratic party leadership remains paralysed

Four years ago, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) was in Cedar Rapids touting the benefits of Joe Biden's ambitious Build Back Better bill to a healthy but modest crowd of Iowans, whose mostly Republican members of Congress were unlikely to back the legislation. This past weekend, Sanders was back in the Hawkeye State, just twenty-seven miles away in nearby Iowa City, to talk to them about the path forward under a second Trump presidency — and drew an audience so big, he had to do a second speech immediately afterward to an overflow crowd in a separate venue.

"I've done a lot of speeches in my political life," he said as he came to the stage. "This is the first time I've given one right after the other because we couldn't fit into the first venue."

Sanders's appearance is part of what he calls a coast-to-coast tour of the country, "especially in conservative areas," aimed at rallying the public against Donald Trump's agenda. One night earlier, thousands turned out, and hundreds were turned away, in Omaha, Nebraska to see the senator speak. On Saturday morning, hundreds more lined up in the cold Iowa winter to hear from the senator.

"It's just nice to listen to him," said Jai, forty-four, who came from nearby Fairfield. "It's been a tumultuous month, and a Bernie pep talk will be nice."

That's more or less what attendees got. Sanders fused his familiar criticisms of US oligarchy with the Trump administration's unfolding efforts to dismantle the federal government, which have seen the White House work with billionaire Elon Musk, the world's richest man and the 2024 election's single biggest



donor, to push through mass layoffs of federal workers and blanket deregulation of corporations.

"If you want to know who's running the US government, simply look at Trump's inauguration," Sanders said, referring to the presence of the three wealthiest men in America — Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg — directly behind Trump, and what he called the thirteen "junior billionaires" with their net worths only in eleven figures, who he had tasked with running federal agencies.

But Sanders also aimed to galvanize a crowd whose participants had, before the rally, admitted feeling lost, worried, and even taking a break from the news for their own peace of mind. In a speech heavy on historical allusions, Sanders reminded the crowd that "doing something important is never easy," insisted that "now is the time to act" and get politically involved, and that US history is filled with accomplishments that were meant to have been impossible, but that

movements of ordinary people made happen — whether expanding suffrage, abolishing slavery, or winning independence from the king of England ("an autocrat").

"Trumpism is not going to be defeated by inside-the-Beltway politicians," he said.

Together with the overflow crowd, it was physical proof of the dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party seen in polls and angry phone calls to congressional offices, with voters complaining about a dearth of leadership and opposition to Trump from Democratic officials, and yearning for some kind of direction. Almost everyone Jacobin spoke to at Sanders's Iowa event was, to varying degrees, disappointed with the Democratic response to Trump's first month.

"What response?" said Steven, forty-four, from Fairfield.

"It's been weak," said Cole, twenty-four, from Iowa City. "Hakeem Jeffries is use-

less," said Jim, sixty-two, who had made the trip to Iowa from the Chicago suburbs, about the Democrats' leader in the House. "We can't do anything." It's pathetic."

Republicans in Congress, in concert with Trump, are currently planning to pass a reconciliation bill that Sanders called "the Robin Hood principle in reverse," handing the rich \$1 trillion in tax cuts by making "massive cuts to programs working people desperately need." But they only had a three-person majority in the House to do it, which meant just two of them voting "no" would kill the bill. Sanders noted that some of those Republicans were in the very districts he was visiting, and that they could be swayed by hundreds of constituents phoning their office to oppose the legislation.

"I'm in the Senate; it does matter," Sanders stressed. While congresspeople right now only worry about what their donors think, he said, "your job is to make them worry about you."

There are already signs that vulnerable Republicans in districts whose communities heavily depend on programs like Medicaid are feeling the heat from their constituents over the planned cuts. Trump himself has felt the need to claim, falsely, that Medicaid is not "going to be touched" and has already once had to do a high-profile walkback of his sweeping pause on federal grants after constituent outrage at the resulting Medicaid disruptions put pressure on GOP congresspeople.

For Sanders, this grassroots effort to defeat Trump's agenda that he hopes to breathe life into is part of a long American tradition. To-

ward the end of his speech, he and the crowd together recited Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and its call to ensure "government of the people, by the people, for the people" survives — not, Sanders stressed, "a government of the billionaire class, for the billionaire class."

"That is what this struggle is about — one hundred and fifty years later, same struggle," he said.

There were signs that that struggle might be fought by a different base of support than Sanders attracted in his first presidential run a decade ago. Saturday's was an overwhelmingly liberal crowd that cheered and applauded Sanders's references to women's reproductive rights and jeered mention of Trump's cuts to the US Agency for International Development and attacks on Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky. Jai told Jacobin that many of his non-voting friends in Fairfield who had initially been drawn to Sanders were now fully on the Trump train. Former union worker Otis, eighty-one, who had lived in Iowa for decades and seen its partisan loyalty shift red, said many of the young people he knew now supported Trump.

But at least among some, Sanders's speech seemed to have had its intended effect.

"I was that person who was complacent and checked out," said Audrey, twenty-seven, who had travelled the hour or so from Wapello to see Sanders for the third time in her life. The speech had given her the specific direction she had been yearning for.

For others, like Erin, who had come looking for hope, they found it just by being among hundreds of others who felt the same: "I felt alone, and now it doesn't feel so much like that." (IPA Service)

India is the second most preferred home for illegal migrants after the USA

By: Nantoo Banerjee

India, the world's second most preferred destination of illegal migrants, has a lot to learn from the United States about how the latter has been handling the situation in recent years. Although US President Donald Trump is lately hogging the limelight for forcing illegal immigrants out of the country, such deportations are not unique to the Trump administration. His predecessor, Joe Biden, carried out 1.5 million deportations — almost the same number as carried out under Trump's first term — without much publicity. Former US president Barack Obama also followed the practice. The US has been the most preferred destination for unlawful migrants for years. It is believed to have the world's largest illegal immigrant population, numbering around 11.4 million. The majority of illegal migrants to the US come from neighbouring Mexico, followed by El Salvador and Guatemala.

The International Organisation for Migration and other global agencies conservatively put the number of undocumented migrants in India at around 10 million. India's weak deportation policy has encouraged over the years large illegal migration into the country from its neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Few will disagree that the world's most populous country needs a strong policy to deal with illegal immigrants for the safety and security of its own nationals. Economically, India is much weaker than neighbouring China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE which are known to follow a strong immigration policy. However, India's soft democratic system and easy judicial interventions often make forceful deportation of illegal immigrants difficult. The US, itself a country of immigrants, has shown the world its ruthless resolve to deal with illegal immigrants.

Contrary to the poor economic status of those migrating illegally into India, Indian unlawful migrants to the US and Canada are reasonably well-off. Most of them take the help of private agents to enter their chosen overseas destinations at a huge cost. A good



In fact, as many as 15,756 illegal Indian immigrants had been deported by the US since 2009. Thus, the Trump administration's action is nothing new. According to the official data, the highest number of deportations occurred in 2019 (2,042), followed by 1,889 in 2020. The numbers declined to 805 in 2021 and slightly rose to 862 in 2022. In 2023, the figure dropped to 617, while 1,368 deportations were recorded in 2024

number of illegal immigration seekers are from Gujarat, Punjab, and Haryana. Fees paid to agents for facilitation of illegal migration to the US could be as much as ₹ 40-60 lakhs for an individual and ₹ 1-1.5 crore for a family unit. India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar made a statement in Parliament that the focus should be on a "strong crackdown on the illegal migration industry", following which central probe agencies and state police forces announced a slew of measures that they plan to take against such mischievous travel agents. According to the data provided by the government in Parliament last year, the Centre and states had notified 3,094 "illegal agents" on the eMigrate Portal until October 2024. The minister

said that on the "basis of information provided by returning deportees about the agents and others involved, law enforcement agencies will take necessary preventive and exemplary actions".

Interestingly, there is no authentic data on Indian migrants living illegally in the US. The number varies from 18,000 to 220,000 as reported by the US Department of Homeland Security as "unauthorised Indians" in 2022. The vast differences in estimates highlight the uncertainty surrounding the true size of the undocumented Indian population, according to the study. It is generally believed that Indian migrants make up only a small share of the overall unauthorised migrant population in the US. However, few are willing to buy Prime Minister Modi's views on the subject during his recent visit to Washington DC that "these are children of very ordinary families, and they are lured by big dreams and promises." India's illegal migrants are known to pay large fees to local agents to enter the USA. The prime minister said India would take back its nationals who were in the US illegally, and also crack down on the "human trafficking ecosystem".

In fact, as many as 15,756 illegal Indian immigrants had been deported by the US since 2009. Thus, the Trump administration's action is nothing new. According to the official data, the highest number of deportations occurred in 2019 (2,042), followed by 1,889 in 2020. The numbers declined to 805 in 2021 and slightly rose to 862 in 2022. In 2023, the figure dropped to 617, while 1,368 deportations

were recorded in 2024. As of February 5, 2025, a total of 104 illegal Indian immigrants have been deported. President Trump announced a flurry of immigration-related executive orders, paving way for a widespread effort to crack down on undocumented migrants in the US. In more than 21 actions, Trump has moved to overhaul parts of the US immigration system, including how migrants are processed and deported from the US.

India is as much at fault as the US with regard to the exit of illegal migrants and their entry to the US. Improperly documented migration to any country is a crime. The immigration and custom authorities are fully responsible for the exit and entry of these illegal migrants. These illegal immigrants are law offenders. They need to be treated and punished under the law of the land. There is nothing called innocent criminals. If the deportees are handcuffed before pushing them inside military aircraft, it could be for the safety of the pilot and crew members on board. There is no guarantee that the deportees on board will not attack the pilot or try to hijack the aircraft to a different destination.

There is much to learn from the process of the ongoing deportation of illegal immigrants from the USA for India, which has been suffering from the non-stop illegal immigration through its long sparsely guarded land, sea and river borders along Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar, even 77 years after the country's independence. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, India has a total land border length of approximately 15,106.7 kilometres, including those with countries such as Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. India is still negotiating with Bangladesh to erect fencing along some portions of its borders. India has the longest international land border with Bangladesh covering 4,096.7 km. Jobless illegal immigrants are often easy prey for terrorists, drug peddlers, pimps, swindlers and other criminals. While the country must try to prevent the entry of illegal immigrants, the process of deportation should be carried out earnestly with wide international publicity. (IPA Service)

Chief Minister Stalin sounds Tamil bugle against Narendra Modi's 'Namaste India'

By: Sushil Kuttu

Vanakkam' or 'Namaste'? Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin wouldn't mind a greeting in Russian, the language of his namesake, but greet him with a 'Ram-Ram' in 'khari-boli Hindi' and he might burst a blood vessel while soaking in the morning sun. The Tamil doesn't think 'Good Morning India' as 'English imposition' but 'Hindi imposition' is 100% the Tamil's 'Bogeyman'.

In 1937, Madras Premier S Rajagopalachari sounded the bugle for 'Hindi' and the first 'anti-Hindi imposition' stir upset the Tamil Street. 'Hindi imposition' thereafter did not raise its hydra-head till 1965. Now, there is another move at 'Hindi imposition' and the DMK is back to blackening Hindi signboards.

Targets include bank-boards and notices at railway stations and bus-stands, wherever there is 'Devnagari', there is also the darky and sticky tar! Chief Minister MK Stalin has challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three-language policy, which Stalin's DMK has vowed to fight till the cows come home, a wholly Hindi saying that goes back to the now debunked Aryan invasion.

The story goes that the Aryans went back to worshipping the cow while the Dravidians didn't mind chewing on jerky, dried beef and buffalo meat. Is it a cultural thing? No, more like denying the existence of the other.

And 'Hindi imposition' and hate for Hindi are two sides of the same coin; 3000 to 4000 years of history. The Dravidians were driven out of their well-laid out habitats and the hot-boiling hatred hasn't ebbed.

'Hindi imposition' is seen as an excuse for something buried deep in the collective memory of the Dravidian psyche with 'Vanakkam' and 'Namaste' not telling the story as eloquently as 'Poda patli', which is 'get lost dog', and 'Baagh yahan se', which translates to 'Scram'.

Sure, call the Tamil a 'madras' and there will be an equally squalid word in Tamil reserved exclusively for the 'Hindiwala'. Why don't Hindi-speaking Indians not learn the Tamil language? Why doesn't Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath introduce Tamil in UP's government schools?

So, it isn't the three-language policy alone responsible. Like somebody put it, the tussle is an administrative deficiency, call it a trust deficit. Chief Minister MK Stalin and the DMK aren't ready to relent so long as suspicions remain that 'Hindi imposition' will keep rearing its head time and again, as often the 'Hindiwala's' want.

To be honest, trusting Prime Minister Narendra Modi is hazardous. Modi's staple is a 'lie a day', which is both cultural and political. Riding the Hindi tiger has its plusses. And Chief Minister MK Stalin, too, has political and cultural reasons to keep the gates shut on Hindi.

The Prime Minister and the Chief Minister, both of them, are prisoners to their own political and cultural compulsions. The Modi government went one step further: It gave an ultimatum to the Stalin government, with the demand to fall in line or face the consequences.

Accept the three-language policy or forget the Centre's contribution of over Rs 2000 crore as part



of the New Education Policy (NEP) deal. This has added an edge to the deeply-rooted political and cultural battle. Chief Minister Stalin has called Modi's three-language formula 'Hindi imposition' and a violation of Tamil Nadu's linguistic autonomy.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan says Tamil Nadu has to "align with India's Constitution" and commit to the three-language policy, which translates to "my way or the highway", and Tamil Nadu says "no Hindi imposition" and commitment only to the two-language formula, which translates to "over my dead body!"

The anti-Hindi movement in Tamil Nadu is rooted in the Dravidian movement and linguistic autonomy is part and parcel of the Dravidian resistance to 'Hindi imposition'. Chief Minister Stalin says Tamil Nadu was "ready for another language war," linking it to Lok Sabha delimitation exercise, fear-mongering that Tamil Nadu was facing the "threat" of losing 8 Lok Sabha seats after the delimitation exercise.

Stalin says Tamil Nadu shouldn't have succumbed to pressure and successfully implemented the family planning programme that left its population stranded. The Chief Minister has called an all-party meet to discuss the delimitation as well as the three-language policy of the Modi government.

Stalin has called for Opposition unity, which is the Achilles heel of the opposition parties. Stalin has appealed for unity; for overcoming political differences and thwarting the Centre thwarting the Centre's "divisive agenda." BJP's Tamil Nadu president K Annamalai in turn charged Stalin with "trying to shift the narrative" by resorting to "imaginary fears".

The all-party meeting called by Stalin is scheduled to be held on March 5 and it will discuss the three-language policy, as well, along with National Education Policy, central funds and NEET. Stalin said delimitation is the Damocles Sword hanging over the southern states.

Tamil Nadu is leading in all development indices but faces the "threat" of losing out on Lok Sabha seats as post-delimitation, states' representation will be subject to population and because Tamil Nadu succeeded in population control, "she" stands to lose as many as 8 Lok Sabha seats.

The tally will come down from 39 seats to 31 seats. "Our representation will reduce, Tamil Nadu's voice will be stifled. This is a matter of Tamil Nadu's rights. All leaders and political parties should jointly speak across party lines on the issue," Stalin said, insisting that the "language war" was deeply divisive and that the "Centre was sowing the seeds for another language war." (IPA Service)

Chinese discourse on Trump tariff

By: Antara Ghosal Singh

On 1 February 2025, United States (US) President Donald Trump signed an executive order to impose additional tariffs on products from Canada, Mexico, and China. However, following talks with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo on 3 February, Trump agreed to postpone the implementation of tariffs by a month. There were also discussions about a prospective call between the Chinese and American leaders on the same day, which apparently could not take place. On 4 February, President Trump announced that he is not “in a rush” and would speak to the Chinese leader at an “appropriate time”. China responded by announcing a slew of retaliatory measures on the same day. First, it imposed additional tariffs of 10-15 percent on 80 imported goods originating from the US. Additionally, it included US companies like PVH Corp. and Illumina Inc. in the ‘Unreliable Entity’ list, implemented stringent export controls on key minerals like tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, molybdenum, and indium, initiated investigations into Google Inc. for a suspected violation of China’s Anti-Monopoly Law, and officially sued the US at the World Trade Organization.

Forcing the US to accept China’s rise ‘Counter-sanction’ has become a buzzword in Chinese policy circuits in the past few months. In December 2024, when the Biden administration sanctioned a large-scale chip export ban on China, the latter instantly retaliated with export controls of key raw materials such as gallium, germanium, antimony, and graphite on the US. It also took action against several US companies such as NVIDIA, Lockheed Martin Missiles, and Fire Control on various grounds. Chinese scholars are of the opinion that, through these strong measures, the Chinese government has formally set the tone for its prospective relations with Trump 2.0.

The Chinese state media, on the other hand, has been running a propaganda blitz, claiming major breakthroughs in various disruptive technologies including sixth-generation fighter jets, the Type 076 amphibious assault ship, the KJ-3000 early warning aircraft, the Hongqi-19 missile defence system, and a new laser-based radar technology that can detect submarines at a depth of 1,000 metres—showcasing China’s scientific and technological prowess. The message emerging from Beijing is clear: “China has made great progress and surpassed the US in many areas. It now has considerable strength, including in equipment production and industrial chain... to force the US to accept China’s rise. Afterall China is the only country with all industrial sectors, and the most complete industrial system in the world that can provide almost all the products of the Fourth Industrial Revolution to the world...no country or countries can decouple from China and that is the source of Chinese confidence,” asserted Zhang Weiwei, a professor of International Relations at Fudan University.

Who bears the cost of the Trump tariffs: US consumers or Chinese enterprises?

Despite the tall assertions, concerns persist, the key being who will ultimately bear the cost of the current round of Trump tariffs: US consumers and end-users or Chinese enterprises. The Chinese side hopes that their merchants will pass the burden on to American consumers, triggering inflation and intensifying public grievances, thereby forcing Trump to retreat on the tariff issue.

On the other hand, China is aware and increasingly concerned about the worsening trend of “involuntary” competition within the Chinese manufacturing industry. Competition is often considered to be positive as it can result in innovation and creativity. Low prices brought about by this involuntary competition among Chinese manufacturing enterprises has created competi-



tive advantages for its export companies, securing itself a dominant position in the international trade system. Nonetheless, in the new sets of development, with intensifying China-US trade friction and continued downward pressure on the Chinese economy, involuntary competition among Chinese companies is proving to be counterproductive.

The primary manifestation of the involuntary competition among Chinese companies is the endless price wars based on cost reduction through salary cuts, layoffs, and research and development cuts. Domestically, it is leading to a sharp decline in commodity prices, driving down corporate profits, and in turn, pruning the wages, employment,

and consumption power of the Chinese populace. Many Chinese speculators are of the opinion that the ongoing uncontrollable price competition in various industries, if not prevented, can devolve China from disruptive technological innovations to the age of “cutting corners, counterfeiting, and shoddy products”.

Furthermore, excessive price competition in overseas markets is becoming increasingly unsustainable for Chinese companies where, despite surges in deliveries and revenue, Chinese companies (especially in the domains of automobile, solar panels) are facing widening losses as prices plummet to the bottom. Complementing this, China’s export boom based on price-advantage is triggering trade disputes and

anti-dumping investigations in various countries including those that otherwise share comparatively closer ties with China, such as the European Union, Brazil, and South Africa.

For instance, the involution in China’s automobile manufacturing industry is one of the fiercest, where a common strategy for automakers has been to boost sales by “trading price for volume”. According to Chinese estimates, the scale of price reduction in the Chinese auto market from January to December 2024 reached 227 models, exceeding the figures of 2022 (95) and 2023 (148). Although the new energy-vehicle sector is certainly the hardest hit, with new car prices dropping by an average of 18,000 yuan (a dip of nearly 9.2

percent), additional relevant data highlights a 7.3 percent year-on-year decline in the profits of the Chinese automobile industry between January and November 2024. The same dataset delineated that profit margins were 4.4 percent lower than the average profit margin of 6.1 percent of downstream industrial enterprises. The profits of the automobile industry in November 2024 fell by 35 percent year-on-year, and the profit margin was only 3.3 percent.

Chinese media reports further claimed that, among 71 passenger car companies in the country, only three could remain profitable and only for three consecutive years. Even BYD Auto, the leading Chinese automaker, has seen its gross profit margin drop sharply despite a global heft in the sales of its new energy vehicles. Industry experts believe that, under the heavy pressure of price wars, the capabilities of technological innovation within Chinese new energy vehicles are bound to be impacted, with product homogeneity translating into an unwelcome trend.

Responding to the negative effects of involuntary competition in various industries and bringing the Chinese economy out of deflation continue to pose critical questions before the Chinese strategic community, which has been desperately urging Chinese enterprises “not to further reduce prices to bear the new US tariffs. That, in foreign trade, Chinese manufacturers need to maintain the bottom line of profitability and cannot further engage in vicious price competition...instead, they should compete for core competencies.”

As succinctly put by Xuetao Song, Chief Macro Analyst at Tianfeng Securities, the limit of the tariff war between China and the US is actually a question of the limits of US consumer tolerance of inflation on the one hand and the profit margin of China’s export manufacturing industry on the other. India must closely follow and accurately gauge the direction of the US-China tariff war if it hopes to leverage the situation to its benefit. (Courtesy: ORF)

Russia’s cancer vaccine : A milestone

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Cancer, one of the leading causes of death worldwide, continues to challenge medical science. Despite advancements in treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation, and immunotherapy, a definitive cure remains elusive. In a bold and promising development, Russia has introduced a cancer vaccine that aims to revolutionize the way we approach cancer treatment. Utilizing cutting-edge mRNA technology, the vaccine represents a significant milestone in oncology, offering a new, targeted, and personalized approach to combating this deadly disease. The promise of the vaccine extends beyond its scientific innovation; it also challenges the traditional structures of healthcare by focusing on accessibility and cost-free distribution. This shift towards a more equitable model has raised expectations for the future of cancer treatment globally.

The core strength of Russia’s cancer vaccine lies in its use of mRNA technology, the same platform that proved pivotal in the development of COVID-19 vaccines. This innovative approach works by programming the body’s immune system to recognize and target cancer cells specifically. Cancer cells often evade detection by the immune system because they have unique molecular signatures that differentiate them from healthy cells. The Russian vaccine addresses this challenge by decoding the genetic profile of an individual’s tumor, tailoring the vaccine to the specific markers of that tumor. The mRNA then instructs the body’s immune system to recognize these markers and attack the cancer cells directly. This personalized method stands in stark contrast to conventional treatments, which can harm healthy cells in addition to cancer cells, leading to severe side effects.

Personalized medicine has become one of the most promising areas of cancer research, and Russia’s vaccine represents a leap forward in this field. Cancer is a complex and heterogeneous disease, meaning that no two tumors are identical. This diversity requires treatments that are adaptable to the unique genetic makeup of each patient’s cancer. By focusing on individual genetic profiles, the Russian cancer vaccine tailors its approach to each patient’s specific needs, improving the likelihood of a successful treatment while minimizing the risks associated with other therapies. This approach has the potential to transform the way cancer is treated, offering a more precise and effective solution to a disease that has been notoriously difficult to manage.

In addition to its personalized nature, the vaccine’s promise is further bolstered by Russia’s commitment to providing it free of charge. One of the most significant barriers to cancer treatment today is the high cost of therapies, with some advanced treatments costing patients tens of thousands of dollars. By offering the cancer vaccine at no cost, Russia is aiming to ensure that this potentially life-saving treatment reaches as many patients as possible, regardless of their financial situation. This decision challenges the profit-driven motives that dominate the global pharmaceutical industry, calling attention to the ethical responsibility of governments and healthcare providers to prioritize patient health over financial gain. The free availability of the vaccine could have far-reaching implications, not

only for Russia but for the entire global healthcare landscape, encouraging other nations to adopt similar approaches to make healthcare more accessible.

However, as with any groundbreaking medical development, there are challenges and uncertainties surrounding the Russian cancer vaccine. The initial data from early-stage trials has been promising, but much more testing is required to ensure the vaccine’s safety and efficacy. The rigorous clinical trial process will be critical to verifying that the vaccine is both effective in treating cancer and free from serious side effects. mRNA technology, while proven in the context of COVID-19, is still relatively new in the field of oncology, and its long-term effects on the immune system are yet to be fully understood. These concerns are not unique to Russia’s vaccine but are part of the larger dialogue surrounding the potential of mRNA in cancer treatment.

The logistics of producing personalized cancer vaccines also present significant

challenges. Each vaccine is tailored to an individual’s tumor, meaning that the process of designing and manufacturing the vaccine is highly complex and resource-intensive. To scale up production and ensure that the vaccine can reach a wide population, Russia will need to invest heavily in biotechnology infrastructure and advanced medical technologies. Furthermore, the process of sequencing and analyzing genetic data, followed by the manufacturing of a custom vaccine for each patient, requires significant time and expertise. Ensuring that this process is both efficient and widely accessible will be essential to the vaccine’s success.



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There are also ethical concerns surrounding the use of genetic data in vaccine development. The collection and analysis of patient genetic material raise questions about data privacy and the potential misuse of such information. Ensuring patient consent and safeguarding their genetic data will be critical to maintaining public trust in the vaccine. With the potential for ge-

netic data to be used for a variety of purposes beyond medical treatment, stringent regulations will be necessary to protect patients’ privacy and to ensure that their data is not exploited for commercial or political gain. Beyond these scientific, logistical, and ethical concerns, the geopolitical context of Russia’s cancer vaccine is also worth noting. While the vaccine’s scientific promise is clear, its development and distribution are set against the backdrop of Russia’s strained relationships with many Western nations. This geopolitical tension has led to skepticism about the motivations behind the vaccine’s introduction and the role of the Russian government in promoting it. Some critics argue that the initiative could be a strategic move to position Russia as a leader in global healthcare and biotechnology, leveraging the vaccine as both a tool of diplomacy and a source of national pride. While this may be a factor, it should not detract from the potential life-saving benefits that the vaccine offers.

Trump’s MAGA + Modi’s MIGA = A mega contradiction

By: Ashok Swain

In his visit to Washington last fortnight, Prime Minister Narendra Modi proclaimed a new equation in US-India relations: “MAGA + MIGA = MEGA Partnership”.

By aligning India’s development goals with Trump’s signature slogan, Modi aimed to appeal to American conservatives while boasting about India’s rise as a global power. However, beneath the rhetoric of economic cooperation and shared nationalist aspirations lies a fundamental contradiction — one that exposes the fragility of this supposed alliance.

At its core, Trump’s Make America Great Again or MAGA movement has been deeply intertwined with white supremacist ideologies and an exclusionary vision of America. While some Indian-American conservatives have aligned themselves with MAGA politics, often based on a shared Islamophobia and anti-left sentiment, they have failed to recognise the movement’s broader racial and cultural prejudices.

The recent spate of anti-Indian rhetoric from MAGA figures and their supporters, from Silicon Valley to the White House, is a stark reminder that the movement does not see Hindutva supporters as equals, but rather as a convenient, expendable constituency.

Prime Minister Modi’s attempt to merge MAGA with MIGA or Make India Great Again is rooted in the assumption that nationalist movements can find common ground. Both movements center around a romanticised past, economic self-sufficiency and a muscular and majoritarian approach to governance.

However, while Modi’s brand of Hindu nationalism promotes India as a civilisational state with its own historical and cultural superiority, MAGA’s racialised vision of America is fundamentally opposed to such ideas. White nationalist segments of MAGA do not see Indians, Hindutva supporters or otherwise, as partners in their project.

Instead, Indians are often cast as job stealers, cultural outsiders, or, at best, temporary allies in the fight against “woke” ideology.

Recent incidents highlight the widening gulf between Indian MAGA supporters and the movement’s headline base. Marko Elez, a staffer for Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency was found to have posted blatantly racist, anti-Indian messages, calling for a “eugenic immigration pol-



icy” and urging his social media followers to “normalize Indian hate”.

Instead of condemning such remarks outright, prominent MAGA figures, including Vice President JD Vance, who is married to a woman of Indian origin, came to Elez’s defense, arguing that social media activity should not “ruin a kid’s life”.

This dismissive attitude toward anti-Indian racism within the movement has forced many Indian MAGA supporters to confront a harsh reality: their loyalty to MAGA does not grant them immunity from its deeply ingrained xenophobia.

The fall of biotech entrepreneur and former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy serves as a cautionary tale. Once embraced by MAGA circles for his critiques of “woke” culture and his nationalist rhetoric, Ramaswamy quickly found himself ostracised after making remarks about American mediocrity and the cultural discipline of immigrant families.

The moment he suggested that American-born workers were losing out to foreign talent due to cultural laziness rather than a flawed immigration system, MAGA supporters, who had initially celebrated him as proof that the movement was not racist, turned on him.

Ramaswamy’s ouster from Musk’s DOGE underscores the rigid racial hierarchy within MAGA. While the movement is willing to accept non-white figures who reinforce its broader narratives, any deviation from its core ideology leads to immediate ostracisation. The message is clear: Indian-origin figures in the MAGA movement are tolerated only as long as they do not challenge the racialised status quo.

One of the primary contradictions in the MAGA-Hindutva alliance is the question of immigration. Many Indian Americans in tech have supported Trump’s policies, believing that his administration would favor highly skilled immigrants. However, MAGA’s anti-immigrant base sees no distinction between undocumented migrants and legal visa holders, viewing both as threats to

American jobs and culture.

The recent uproar over Trump’s handling of H-1B visa policies and his crackdown on birthright citizenship for children of visa holders signals a clear hostility toward Indian immigrants.

Trump’s decision to deport several hundreds of undocumented Indian immigrants in shackles, on military planes, was met with outrage in India but barely a murmur from his loyalists in the Indian-American conservative community.

This silence is telling. While some pro-MAGA Indian Americans have begun to express concern about rising anti-Indian sentiment within the movement, others continue to delude themselves into thinking that they are integral to its future.

The reality is starkly different: MAGA does not prioritise Indian interests, and its base views Indian immigrants as expendable at best, and unwelcome at worst.

Despite these warning signs, many Indian nationalists continue to court MAGA support, believing that Trump’s strongman persona aligns with Modi’s leadership style. What they fail to acknowledge is that Hindu nationalists, in the eyes of white supremacists, are not natural allies but rather useful instruments.

The Indian diaspora in the US has long sought to position itself as a model minority — hard-working, successful, and aligned with conservative values. Yet, history has shown that model minority status is conditional and can be revoked at any time. The growing wave of anti-Indian racism within MAGA is proof that no amount of loyalty can override the fundamental racial biases at play.

Modi’s proclamation of a MEGA partnership between MAGA and MIGA is, at best, a wishful slogan and, at worst, a delusion. The contradictions are too vast to ignore. MAGA thrives on exclusion and racial superiority, while Hindutva envisions a Hindu-dominated but globally respected India. These visions are not just different: they are fundamentally incompatible. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Hamas calls for talks on next phase of ceasefire after hostage-prisoner exchange

KHAN YOUNIS, Feb 27: Hamas said Thursday it was ready to negotiate the next phase of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, after a swap in which it handed over the remains of four hostages in exchange for the release of more than 600 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

It was the final such exchange the two sides agreed to as part of a truce that's set to end this weekend. Negotiations over a second phase, in which Hamas would release dozens of remaining hostages in exchange for more prisoners and a lasting ceasefire, have not yet begun.

An Israeli group representing families of hostages held by Hamas said the remains of all four hostages returned early Thursday have been identified. The Hostages and Missing Families Forum identified them as Ohad Yahalomi, Itzhak Elgarat, Shlomo Mantzur and Tsachi Idan.

Mantzur, 85, was killed in the October 7, 2023, attack and his body was taken into Gaza. The other three were abducted alive and the circumstances surrounding their deaths were not known.

Hamas said in a statement that the "only way" for Israel to secure the release of the remaining hostages was through negotiations and adhering to the agreement. It warned that any attempt to pull back from the truce "will only lead



to more suffering" for the captives and their families.

Hamas confirmed that over 600 prisoners had been released overnight. Most were detainees returned to Gaza, where they had been rounded up after the October 7, 2023 attack that triggered the war and held without charge on security suspicions.

A joyful return for released prisoners

Some of the released prisoners fell to their knees in gratitude after disembarking from buses in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis. In the West Bank town of Beitunia, dozens of prisoners were welcomed by crowds of relatives and well-wishers.

The released prisoners, some of whom had been serving life sentences over deadly attacks against

Israelis, wore shirts issued by the Israeli prison service bearing a message in Arabic about pursuing one's enemies. Some of the prisoners threw the shirts on the ground or set them on fire.

Israel delayed the release of the prisoners on Saturday over Hamas' practice of parading hostages before crowds and cameras during their release. Israel, along with the Red Cross and UN officials, have called the ceremonies humiliating for the hostages.

Hamas released the four bodies to the Red Cross in Gaza overnight without a public ceremony.

The prisoners released Thursday included 445 men, 21 teenagers and one woman, according to lists shared by Palestinian

officials that did not specify their ages. Only around 50 Palestinians were released into the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem in this round, while dozens sentenced to life over deadly attacks against Israelis were exiled.

Last handover in ceasefire's first phase

The latest handover was the final one planned under the ceasefire's first phase, during which Hamas returned 33 hostages, including eight bodies, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. The family of Idan said Wednesday they had been told he is dead and his body was among those to be returned to Israel.

Idan was taken from Kibbutz Nahal Oz. His eldest daughter, Maayan, was killed as militants shot through the door of the family's safe room. Hamas militants broadcast themselves on Facebook holding the family hostage in their home as two younger children pleaded to be let go.

The truce is in peril

The ceasefire's six-week first phase expires this weekend. US President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, has said he wants the sides to move into negotiations on the second phase. Those talks were supposed to begin the first week of February.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to return all

the hostages and destroy the military and governing capabilities of Hamas, which remains in control of Gaza. The Trump administration has endorsed both goals.

But it's unclear how Israel would destroy Hamas without resuming the war, and Hamas is unlikely to release the remaining hostages — its main bargaining chips — without a lasting ceasefire.

The ceasefire, brokered by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, ended 15 months of war that erupted after Hamas' 2023 attack on southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people. About 250 people were taken hostage.

If the identities of the four bodies are confirmed, then 59 captives will remain in Gaza, 32 of whom are believed to be dead. Nearly 150 have been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals, while dozens of bodies have been recovered by Israeli forces and eight captives have been rescued alive. Israel's military offensive has killed more than 48,000 Palestinians, according to Palestinian health officials, who don't differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths but say over half the dead have been women and children. The fighting displaced an estimated 90 per cent of Gaza's population and decimated the territory's infrastructure and health system. (AP)

Trump administration says it's cutting 90% of USAID foreign aid contracts

The cuts detailed by the administration would leave few surviving USAID projects



WASHINGTON, Feb 27: The Trump administration said Wednesday it is eliminating more than 90% of the US Agency for International Development's foreign aid contracts and USD 60 billion in overall US assistance around the world, putting numbers on its plans to eliminate the majority of US development and humanitarian help abroad.

The cuts detailed by the administration would leave few surviving USAID projects for advocates to try to save in what are ongoing court battles with the administration.

The Trump administration outlined its plans in both an internal memo obtained by The Associated Press and filings in one of those federal lawsuits Wednesday. The Supreme Court intervened in that case late Wednesday and temporarily blocked a court order requiring the administration to release billions of dollars in foreign aid by midnight.

Wednesday's disclosures also give an idea of the scale of the administration's retreat from US aid and development assistance overseas, and from decades of US policy that foreign aid helps US interests by stabilizing other countries and economies and building alliances. The memo said officials were "clearing significant waste stemming from decades of institutional drift." More changes are planned in how USAID and the State Department deliver foreign assistance, it said, "to use taxpayer dollars wisely to advance American interests."

President Donald Trump and ally Elon Musk have hit foreign aid harder and faster than almost any other target in their push to cut the size of the federal government. Both men say USAID projects advance a liberal agenda and are a waste of money.

Trump on Jan 20 ordered what he said would be a 90-day program-by-program review of which foreign assistance programs deserved to continue, and cut off all foreign assistance funds almost overnight.

The funding freeze has stopped thousands of U.S.-funded programs abroad, and the administration and Musk's Department of Government Efficiency teams have pulled the majority of USAID staff off the job through forced leave and firings.

In the federal court filings Wednesday, nonprofits owed money on contracts with USAID describe both Trump political appointees and members of Musk's teams terminating USAID's contracts around the world at breakneck speed, without time for any meaningful review, they say.

"There are MANY more terminations coming, so please gear up!" a USAID official wrote staff Monday, in an email quoted by lawyers for the nonprofits in the filings.

The nonprofits, among thousands of contractors, owed billions of dollars in payment since the freeze began, called the en masse contract terminations a maneuver to get

around complying with the order to lift the funding freeze temporarily.

So did a Democratic lawmaker. The administration was attempting to "blow through Congress and the courts by announcing the completion of their sham review" of foreign aid and the immediate termination of thousands of aid programs all over the world," said Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

A coalition representing major US and global businesses and nongovernmental organizations and former officials expressed shock at the move. "The American people deserve a transparent accounting of what will be lost — on counterterrorism, global health, food security, and competition," the US Global Leadership Coalition said.

The State Department said Secretary of State Marco Rubio had reviewed the terminations.

In all, the Trump administration said it will eliminate 5,800 of 6,200 multiyear USAID contract awards, for a cut of USD 54 billion. Another 4,100 of 9,100 State Department grants were being eliminated, for a cut of USD 4.4 billion.

The State Department memo, which was first reported by the Washington Free Beacon, described the administration as spurred by a federal court order that gave officials until the end of the day Wednesday to lift the Trump administration's monthlong block on foreign aid funding.

"In response, State and USAID moved rapidly," targeting USAID and State Department foreign aid programs in vast numbers for contract terminations, the memo said.

Trump administration officials — after repeated warnings from the federal judge in the case — also said Wednesday they were finally beginning to send out their first or any payments after more than a month with no known spending. Officials were processing a few million dollars of back payments, officials said, owed to US and international organizations and companies.

But US District Judge Amir H Ali's order to unfreeze billions of dollars by midnight Wednesday will remain on hold until the Supreme Court has a chance to weigh in more fully, according to the brief order signed by Chief Justice John Roberts.

Ali had ordered the federal government to comply with his decision temporarily blocking a freeze on foreign aid, ruling in a lawsuit filed by nonprofit groups and businesses. An appellate panel refused the administration's request to intervene before the high court weighed in.

The plaintiffs have until noon Friday to respond, Roberts said.

The administration has filed an emergency appeal to the Supreme Court in one other case so far, arguing that a lower court was wrong to reinstate the head of a federal watchdog agency after Trump fired him. (AP)

Taiwan condemns China for conducting shooting drills off its coast

TAIPEI, Feb 27: Taiwan on Thursday condemned China's military exercises after Beijing designated an area to conduct shooting drills off the self-governed island's southwest coast.

China considers the island a renegade province to be taken by force if necessary and in recent years has increased military activity around Taiwan's waters and airspace.

"China is the biggest troublemaker for regional peace and stability, and the sole and greatest threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific region," Taiwan's Foreign Ministry said in its statement.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said in a 24-hour period it detected 45 aircraft, 14 navy vessels and one ship from the Chinese military operating around Taiwan, of which 34 had crossed into its waters and air-

space. Taiwan said that it "responded accordingly" without elaborating.

This comes after Taiwan said four Chinese coast guard boats entered into its waters near Kinmen island earlier this week, and that Taiwan dispatched its own boats to drive them away.

Xinhua, China's state-run news agency, reported that senior Chinese official Wang Huning during an annual meeting about Taiwan had called for China to take the initiative in cross-strait relations and push toward the "reunification of the motherland."

Taiwan this week also said it caught a Chinese-owned vessel severing an undersea cable and detained the ship. Beijing has accused Taiwan of exaggerating the situation before facts have been clarified in an attempt at "political manipulation." (AP)

Pope beats back speculation of imminent death or conclave

ROME, Feb 27: Pope Francis continued his slow recovery from double pneumonia on Thursday, beating back speculation of an imminent death, resignation or conclave and signalling that he was still very much in charge albeit in a weakened state.

The Vatican said the 88-year-old pope once again slept well during the night at Rome's Gemelli hospital and was resting Thursday morning.

Doctors on Wednesday reported further slight improvements in his clinical condition. They said the kidney insufficiency that had been detected in recent days had receded, blood tests showed a slight improvement and a chest CT scan showed that his complex lung infection was taking the "normal evolution" as it is being treated.

The prognosis remained guarded, however. The pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, is still receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen and respiratory physiotherapy to help his lungs expel fluid. But he hasn't had any more respiratory crises since Saturday, the Vatican said. Prayers for his health continued to pour in from near and far, with the dean of the College of Cardinals presiding Wednesday night over what has now become a nightly appointment in St. Peter's Square, the 9 pm Rosary prayer.

"We are gathered in St. Peter's Square to pray confidently that God will allow Pope Francis to resume his apostolic service as soon as possible, in the fullness of his physical strength and with that pastoral dynamism that characterises him," said Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re.

As is now popularly known thanks to the Oscar-nominated film "Conclave," the 91-year-old Re would have a key role in any papal death or conclave, called to preside over the funeral and organise the secret balloting in the Sistine Chapel to elect a new pope. Francis recently extended Re's term, keeping him on in the important job rather than naming someone new. But on Wednesday night, Re was merely one of the Catholic Church's most senior cardinals, an important point of reference for the men who lead the church, praying for Francis' speedy recovery. (AP)

North Korea appears to have sent more troops to Russia to back its war against Ukraine, Seoul says

SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA), Feb 27: South Korea's spy agency said Thursday that North Korea appears to have sent additional troops to Russia, after its soldiers deployed on the Russian-Ukraine fronts suffered heavy casualties.

The National Intelligence Service (NIS) said in a brief statement it was trying to determine exactly how many more troops North Korea has deployed to Russia.

The NIS also assessed that North Korean troops were redeployed at fronts in Russia's Kursk region in the first week of February, following a reported temporary withdrawal from the area. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in an address on February 7, confirmed a new Ukrainian offensive in Kursk and said North Korean troops were fighting alongside Russian forces there.

North Korea has been supplying a vast amount of conventional weapons to Russia, and last fall it sent about 10,000-12,000 troops to Russia as



well, according to US, South Korean and Ukraine intelligence officials.

North Korean soldiers are highly disciplined and well trained, but observers say they've become easy targets for drone and artillery attacks on Russian-Ukraine battlefields due to their lack of combat experience and unfamiliarity with the terrain.

In January, the NIS said about 300 North Korean soldiers had died and another 2,700 had been injured. Zelenskyy earlier put the number of killed or wounded North Koreans at 4,000, though US estimates were lower at around 1,200.

Earlier Thursday, South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper, citing

Russian and US diplomats discuss normalizing embassy operations at Istanbul talks

ISTANBUL, Feb 27: Russian and US diplomats held talks in Istanbul on Thursday to discuss normalizing the operation of their respective embassies after years expelling each others' diplomats.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the talks in Istanbul followed an understanding reached during President Donald Trump's call with Russian President Vladimir Putin and talks between top Russian and US diplomats and other senior officials in Saudi Arabia.

Last week's US-Russian talks in Riyadh marked an extraordinary shift in Washington's foreign policy under Trump and a clear departure from US-led efforts to isolate Russia over its war in Ukraine.

In Riyadh, Moscow and Washington agreed to start working toward ending the war and improving their diplomatic and economic ties. That includes restoring staffing at embassies, which in recent years were hit hard by mutual expulsions of large numbers of diplomats, closures of offices, and other restrictions.

A US Embassy official in Ankara confirmed that Thursday's talks in Istanbul would deal with issues affecting the operation of respective diplomatic missions.

Valentina Matvienko, the speaker of the Russian parliament's upper house, said Thursday during a visit to Turkey that US-Russia talks should help restore the "full-fledged

work of our diplomatic missions."

"I'm sure that the agreements will be reached and we will return to civilized communication, which was disrupted by the previous administration," she said in Ankara, according to Russian news agencies.

Prior to Trump's second administration, ties between Moscow and Washington plummeted to their lowest levels since the Cold War after Russia illegally annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and invaded Ukraine in 2022.

No Ukrainian officials were present at last week's talks. The Kremlin insisted that the meeting was about restoring relations and dialogue with the United States, something it said would pave the way for eventual peace talks.

Speaking to journalists during a visit to Qatar, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noted that Thursday's talks in Istanbul would focus on "the systemic problems that have accumulated as a result of the unlawful activities of the previous (US) administration to create artificial obstacles for the work of the Russian embassy, to which we, naturally, reciprocated and also created uncomfortable conditions for the work of the American embassy in Moscow."

Lavrov added that based on the outcome of the meeting, "it will be clear how quickly and effectively we can move forward." (AP)

8 killed in Philippine fire

MANILA, Feb 27: Eight people were killed in a nighttime fire in the Philippine capital region that gutted a three-story residential building early Thursday in less than an hour, officials said.

The fire, which also injured at least one resident, broke out after midnight in the building, which was mostly made of wood, as people slept in San Isidro Galas village in suburban Quezon city, officials said.

An investigation was underway to determine the cause of the fire.

Two of the dead were found on the ground floor and six others were recovered on the second floor, where the fire apparently started, senior fire officer Rolando Valena told The Associated Press, citing witnesses.

The blaze happened just two days before the Philippines marks fire-prevention month in March, when the government launches an annual campaign to raise awareness about fire hazards ahead of the onset of the scorching summer season. (AP)

Tunisian extremist imprisoned for life

LYON (FRANCE), Feb 27: A Tunisian national was sentenced late Wednesday to life imprisonment without parole, France's most severe sentence possible, over the killing of three people in a basilica in the French Riviera city of Nice in 2020, one of multiple attacks that year linked to Islamic extremism.

Brahim Aouissouli, 25, was charged with terrorist murder and attempted terrorist murder. He admitted responsibility for the attack during the trial in Paris, even though he had said he couldn't remember anything since then. He explained that he wanted to avenge Muslims killed around the world by Western nations.

On Oct 29, 2020, Aouissouli killed worshippers Nadine Vincent, 60, and Simone Barreto, a 44-year-old French-Brazilian woman, and church worker Vincent Loques, 55. Police officers fired at him as he lunged at them, shouting "Allahu Akbar" (God is great) and wielding a knife. He was shot and seriously wounded.

The attack was the third in less than two months that French authorities attributed to Islamic extremists, and prompted the government to raise its security alert to the maximum level. It came while France was holding a trial over the 2015 attacks on satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, which published caricatures.

Private company rockets toward moon in latest rush of lunar landing attempts

CAPE CANAVERAL, Feb 27: A private company launched another lunar lander Wednesday, aiming to get closer to the moon's south pole this time with a drone that will hop into a jet-black crater that never sees the sun.

Intuitive Machines' lander, named Athena, caught a lift with SpaceX from NASA's Kennedy Space Center. It's taking a fast track to the moon — with a landing on March 6 — while hoping to avoid the fate of its predecessor, which tipped over at touchdown.

Never before have so many spacecraft angled for the moon's surface all at once. Last month, US and Japanese companies shared a rocket and separately launched landers toward Earth's sidekick. Texas-based Firefly Aerospace should get there first this weekend after a big head start.

The two US landers are carrying tens of millions of dollars' worth of experiments for NASA as it prepares to return astronauts to the moon.

"It's an amazing time. There's so much energy," NASA's science mission chief Nicky Fox told The Associated Press a few hours ahead of the launch.

This isn't Intuitive Machines' first lunar rodeo. Last year, the Texas com-



pany made the first US touchdown on the moon in more than 50 years. But an instrument that gauges distance did not work and the lander came down too hard and broke a leg, tipping onto its side.

Intuitive Machines said it has fixed the issue and dozens of others. A sideways landing like last time would prevent the drone and a pair of rovers from moving out. NASA's drill also needs an upright landing to pierce beneath the lunar surface to gather soil samples for analysis.

"Certainly, we will be better this time than we were last time. But you never know what could happen," said Trent Martin, senior vice president of

test hops across the lunar surface using hydrazine fueled-thrusters for flight and cameras and lasers for navigation.

If those excursions go well, it will hop into the nearby pitch-black crater, an estimated 65 feet (20 meters) deep. Science instruments from Hungary and Germany will take measurements at the bottom while hunting for frozen water.

It will be the first up-close peek inside one of the many shadowed craters dotting both the north and south poles. Scientists suspect these craters are packed with tons of ice. If so, this ice could be transformed by future explorers into water to drink, air to breathe and even rocket fuel.

NASA is paying \$62 million to Intuitive Machines to get its drill and other experiments to the moon. The company, in turn, sold space on the lander to others. It also opened up the Falcon rocket to ride-sharing.

Tagalongs included NASA's Lunar Trailblazer satellite, which will fly separately to the moon over the next several months before entering lunar orbit to map the distribution of water below. Also catching a ride was a private spacecraft that will chase after an asteroid for a flyby, a precursor to asteroid mining. (AP)

Tribal people of Tripura need to remain united to realise their demands'

Tipra Motha Party is an alliance partner of the ruling BJP in the state

AGARTALA, Feb 27: Alleging that attempts are being made to break the unity of the tribal people of Tripura, Tipra Motha Party supreme Pradyot Kishore Debbarma on Thursday appealed to all sections of the indigenous people to remain united.

Tipra Motha Party is an alliance partner of the ruling BJP in the state.

Speaking in the first plenary session of the Youth Tipra Federation at the Rabindra Satabarshiki Bhavan here, Debbarma said there is planning by a section of people to break the unity of the 'Tipra' people in the name of different tribes like Reangs, Tripuri and others but "we have to remain united" to achieve our demands.

"When Tripura was a princely state, we fought the Mughals and won the battle because there was no Reang or



Debbarma. We fought unitedly and could defeat the Mughals. We have to remain united," he said.

He also asserted that only the youths can resist the conspiracy to divide the 'Tipra' people.

"The youths can resist the planning of some people to divide us. I can say that I will never betray our people," he said.

Debbarma said the tribal

party should be a factor in the 2028 assembly elections in the state, but if they are divided into different parties they would lose.

The elections for the sixty-member assembly state seats will be held next year.

He said, "We want free Tipraland, this is our demand, but this is not the right time. We want unity first and then we will be able to achieve everything. For how long, In-

dians had to fight for freedom? But they finally achieved it 200 years later. For how many years did the BJP fight for Ram Mandir, but they achieved it later."

Debbarma also said that the party has to fight against corruption, fight for land rights and political rights, and everything will be possible if the 'Tipra' people remain united.

The tribals constitute one-third of the state's population and the Tipra Motha party is also in control of the Tripura tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAAD), which constitutes two-thirds of the state's territory.

In the sixty-member assembly, the Tipra Motha Party has 13 MLAs, its partner BJP has 33, while another coalition partner IPFT has one MLA. The opposition CPI(M) has 10 seats and the Congress has three seats. (PTI)

104 weapons surrendered in six Manipur districts

IMPHAL, Feb 27: Altogether 104 firearms and ammunition were voluntarily surrendered by the public in six districts in strife-torn Manipur, police said on Thursday.

These weapons were surrendered in Kangpokpi, Imphal East, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Imphal West and Kakching districts on Wednesday, a day before the seven-day period given by the authorities for giving up firearms ends, a senior officer said.

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla had on February 20 urged the people of the strife-torn state to voluntarily surrender looted and illegally held weapons within seven days, assuring no punitive action would be initiated against those giving up arms during this period.

Chief Secretary PK Singh had on February 23 said the seven-day time given for voluntarily surrendering weapons is enough if one wants to give up arms, and asserted that the forces would take action after the expiry of the period to recover such guns. (PTI)

ENGINEERING WORKS AT LUMDING DIVISION
E-Tender Notice No. SCL/Engg/24 of 2025; Dated: 22-02-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: SN. 1. Brief Description of Item: Provision of Track Machine. Siding with Rest room, approach road, platform and other facilities at Jiribam and in between Katakhai Jn. - Bhairabi (01 station) under the jurisdiction of ADEN/BPG. Tender Value: ₹5,81,81,679/-; Earnest Money: ₹4,40,900/-; E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 17-03-2025 and opened at 15:00 hrs. on 18-03-2025. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 17-03-2025 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. DRMs/Works, Silchar
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a smile"

RENOVATION/MODERNISATION OF CAO/C/RSP/MALIGAON OFFICE BUILDING AT GM/NFR COMPLEX
Tender Notice No. CPM-GSU-MLGMIS-2025-03; Date: 22-02-2025. E-tender is invited by the undersigned for the following work: Tender No. CPM-GSU-MLGMIS-2025-03; Name of Work: At Maligaon: Renovation/modernisation of CAO/C/RSP/Maligaon office building (DS) at GM/NFR complex of N.F. Railway. Approx. Value: ₹4,12,50,082.69/-; E-tender will be closed at 14:30 hrs. on 18-03-2025 and will be opened at 15:00 hrs. on 18-03-2025. For details please visit www.ireps.gov.in. CPM/GS/Maligaon
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a smile"

QCI brings Gunvatta Sankalp to Nagaland

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 27: The Quality Council of India (QCI), in collaboration with the Nagaland government, organised Gunvatta Sankalp (quality resolution) Nagaland in Kohima on Thursday, aiming to support the state's efforts in driving quality-led growth across key sectors.

This one-day event served as a dynamic platform, bringing together senior government officials, industry leaders, policymakers, and experts to drive meaningful discussions and forge partnerships aimed at elevating quality standards in healthcare, education & skilling, industry and MSMEs, and tourism.

Gracing the inaugural session, Naga-

land tourism and higher education minister Temjen Imna Along, in his keynote address, said the people of Nagaland can serve as a beacon of quality for the nation.

He said the pursuit of excellence and quality is at the heart of "our progress" and that Nagaland is committed to partnering in this journey.

"The aspirations of our common people define the quality of Nagaland and they are the true brand ambassadors of our state," Along added.

QCI chairperson Jaxay Shah highlighted the role of Gunvatta Sankalp in empowering states through quality-driven reforms, stating Nagaland is a state that values sustainability, entrepreneurship,

and excellence qualities that make it a role model not only for India but for the world.

He asserted that the QCI firmly believes that Viksit Bharat is not possible without a Viksit Nagaland.

"Through the discussions at Gunvatta Sankalp today, we will uncover new pathways to embed quality into Nagaland's journey towards a developed future," Shah said.

He assured the QCI would support, collaborate and ensure that Nagaland's unique identity and strengths are amplified through quality-driven initiatives.

QCI secretary general Chakravarty Kannan highlighted the role of quality in transforming governance and services.

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL-A

KAAC::SECRETARIAT

DIPHU::782460

No. KAAC/G-Esstt./P(A)/RB/2025-26/3

Dated Diphu the 26th February, 2025

ADVERTISEMENT

Applications are invited from intending and eligible candidates who are permanent resident of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong district for filling up the following post under Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council in Standard Form as prescribed in Assam Gazette of Part-IX.

1 (one) post of Exploration officer (Senior Grade) under Art & Culture, KAAC.

- Scale of Pay:- Pay Band (PB-3) @ Rs.22,000-87,000/- and Grade Pay of Rs. 10,300/- P.M. plus other allowances as admissible under rules.
- Age:- must not be less than 21 years and not more than 38 years as on 01-01-2025 (Relaxable for SC/ST as per existing rules).
- Education qualification: Candidate must possess a Post Graduate in Ancient Indian History or Archaeology or Sanskrit or Anthropology.
- Desirable Qualification: Post Graduate Diploma in Archaeology from any Govt. recognized institute.
- Desirable Experience: Experience in Archaeological field works in a Govt. recognized institution especially in Archaeological exploration and Excavation.

General Instruction

- The Candidate must be permanent resident of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council areas comprising of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong district.
- Duly filled up application Form must be addressed to the Secretary, Department of Personnel (A), KAAC, Diphu alongwith Council money receipt of Rs. 20.00 only in case of General category and Rs. 10.00 only in case of SC/ST Candidates.
- The application will be received from 28/02/2025 last date of submission of application form is on 05/03/2025.
- Self attested copies of all certificates in support of the following must be submitted alongwith the application form.
 - Education qualification.
 - Age proof (HSLC Admit Card)
 - Cast certificate.
 - Current Employment exchange registration.
 - 1 (one) Passport size photo copy.
 - Incomplete and defected application will summarily rejected.
 - No application will be accepted/entertained after last date.
 - Canvassing directly or indirectly will lead to disqualification.
 - The application must be legibly filled up in all respects by the candidates with his/her own hand writing and should be submitted in sealed envelope written on it as "Application for the post of"
 - No TA/DA will be provided by the KAAC authority.
 - The Competent authority also reserves the rights to reduce or increase the numbers of post and also to cancel/postpone the interview at any time without assigning any reason thereof and without any intimation to candidate.

Sd/-

Secretary

Department of Personnel (A)

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council,
Diphu



KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

KAAC Secretariat :: Diphu

Invitation

Dear Sir/ Madam,

The authority of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Diphu requests your kind presence in the commemoration programme on the occasion of 77th Death Anniversary of Ru Semson Sing Ingti - Founder of the then Mikir Hills District and now Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council on 28th February, 2025 at Semson Sing Ingti Memorial Park (Old), Diphu as per programme overleaf.

Dr. Tuliram Ronghang, Hon'ble Chief Executive Member, KAAC, Diphu has consented to grace the occasion as Chief Guest.

Date :- 28th February, 2025
Time :- 08:00 AM Onwards
Venue :- Semson Sing Ingti Memorial Park (Old), Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

(Mukul Kr. Saikia, IAS)
Principal Secretary
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council
DIPHU.

OFFICE OF THE UDBODHAN Integrated Society for Development (NGO) Diphu town, Jining Mill Road, Opp. I&C.C Office

JOB VACANCY POST ADVERTISEMENT UNDER STATE AIDS CONTROL SOCIETY SACS/NACO GOVT. OF ASSAM

Sl. No.	Post Vacancy	Post	Salary	TA/DA
1	Project Manager (P.M.) Qualification:- He/She should be a Post Graduate in any discipline of Social Science preferably with one year experience at district level programmes related to health, livelihood programmes, rural development micro-finance and HIV/Aids programme	1	21,000/- (Per month)	1,400
2	M&E cum Account Officer- Qualification:- Graduation in Mathematic, Economics, Statistics and Commerce, trained in basic Computer Software application. Experience:- Experience in data management, monitoring and evaluation tools, data quality checks, analysis and interpretation & data on programme performance.	1	16,000/- (Per month)	600
3	Counsellor:- Essential Qualification:- Graduate in Degree holder in Psychology/Social Work/Sociology/Aanthropology/Human Development/Nursing with 3 years of experience in counseling/education under National Health Programme.	1	16000/- (Per month)	1,500
4	Outreach Workers(ORW) Qualification:- Candidates should read upto 8 th Standard with good knowledge of the local community and local language.	1	10,500/- (Per month)	1,500

UDBODHAN Integrated Society for Development, (NGO) invites application from eligible candidates for the following post under the State Aids Control Society (SACS) Govt. of Assam.

Interested candidates may apply by submitting their updated resume, cover letter, and relevant documents via email at uisdkad@gmail.com, through WhatsApp at 8473036766/9435066421, or by submitting them physically to the office address. All required details must be submitted within seven days from the date of this advertisement.

For more detail
Contact/Whatsapp:- 8473036766/9435066421

Mamata sets 215 plus seat target for 2026 assembly polls, aims for fourth straight term

KOLKATA, Feb 27: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday set an ambitious goal of winning more than 215 of the total 294 seats in the state assembly in the 2026 polls, emphasising that the TMC would work to significantly reduce the BJP's tally and secure a fourth consecutive term in power.

Setting the tone for the electoral battle, Banerjee reiterated the need to surpass the 213 seats won by her party in 2021.

"I agree with Abhishek (TMC MP and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee) that we should aim for at least one more seat than our 2021 tally. Our goal should be to secure 215 seats or more while ensuring that BJP, CPIM, and Congress candidates struggle to retain their deposits," Banerjee asserted.

Addressing an organisational meeting of the Trinamool Congress before the chief minister, the MP said the party should work for winning at least one additional seat than the current strength.

Responding to Mamata Banerjee's statement, BJP MP Samik Bhattacharya claimed that she is afraid of losing the 2026 assembly polls and is saying such things to galvanize TMC workers.

The BJP had secured 77 seats in the 2021 elections.

"We will win over 215 seats in the 2026 assembly polls and further diminish the BJP's numbers," Banerjee stated at the meeting.

She also criticised the BJP's previous electoral claims.

"In 2021, they boasted '200 paar' but faced defeat. In 2024, they claimed '400 paar' in the Lok Sabha elections but failed to secure a majority. What Abhishek said is correct. We will secure a two-thirds majority, and BJP candidates should lose their deposits," Banerjee remarked.

Congress slams govt over household indebtedness, says it failed to acknowledge 'crisis'



NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Flagging the issue of household indebtedness, the Congress on Thursday said the root cause of such a "deep-seated" malaise was the stagnation in real wages and claimed the government had failed to acknowledge the "crisis".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh cited the recently-released Indus Valley Annual Report 2025, an examination of India's economic landscape and start-up ecosystem by VC firm Blume Ventures, to attack the government.

The report offers a granular look into the Indian economy, he said and asserted that its most worrying implications were for India's household finances.

Ramesh said India's recovery from COVID-19 was based on consumption growth that was driven by loans.

Consumer loans in the post-Covid years were about 18 per cent of the Private Final Consumption Expenditure, he said.

In this time, personal loans replaced industry loans as the biggest segment of non-food borrowing, Ramesh said.

"This was a reflection of the slowing private investment levels. Much of this indebtedness was due to the rise in small ticket personal loans from non-banking financial companies -- they comprise 82 per cent of the new personal loans originated in 2024," he said citing the report.

Credit growth has now created a household indebtedness crisis instead of continuing to fuel consumption, Ramesh said.

Household debt to GDP has hit an all-time high of nearly 43 per cent, he claimed.

"As a flipside to the household indebtedness, households are saving less -- especially financially. Household share of savings dropped from 84 per cent in FY 2000 to 61 per cent in FY 2023, reflecting an increase in uninvested corporate profits," he said.

Without adequate savings to finance investments, combined with sluggish foreign direct investment, India is undergoing a massive slowdown in private investment, Ramesh said.

"The root cause of this deep-seated malaise is the stagnation in real wages, both in the salaried sector and in the informal rural sector. Without increasing labour productivity and higher wages, any growth in consumption will have to be based on unsustainable credit booms," the Congress leader said.

Ten years after this crisis first surfaced, and five years after COVID-19 hit, the government continues to fail to acknowledge this crisis, Ramesh alleged. (PTI)



Echoing her stance, TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee urged party workers to ensure a decisive victory.

"The battle for Bengal's future has begun. We must ensure the TMC's victory and make Mamata Banerjee the Chief Minister for a fourth consecutive term. Our aim is a two-thirds majority in 2026," he said.

At the meeting held at Netaji Indoor Stadium here, he outlined the party's election strategy while stressing discipline and unity.

"The BJP has ED-CBI-Income Tax trio backing them, but they lack the courage to fight on the ground. We will dismantle their 'chakravayuh' (a military formation used to surround enemies, depicted in the Mahabharata). We have done it before and will do it again," Abhishek Banerjee said.

In 2021, the ruling TMC secured 213 seats, ensuring a comfortable majority, while the BJP won 77 seats. With the 2026 elections approaching, the TMC is working to consolidate its base and counter the BJP's

challenge.

Banerjee launched a sharp attack on the BJP, accusing it of using agencies like the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and Income Tax Department to target opposition leaders.

"Before elections, they decide whom to send to jail, whom to charge, and whom to brand corrupt! Don't they feel ashamed? They haven't even resolved the RG Kar case," she stated.

Banerjee also emphasised that only dedicated workers would be rewarded.

"Those working sincerely will be promoted. But those who merely give speeches, don't fight the BJP or Congress, and don't work for common people—there will be no sympathy for them. My support is for grassroots workers who stand by the TMC wholeheartedly," she said.

She predicted a major setback for the BJP in the upcoming elections.

"They (non-BJP parties) failed to counter

the BJP in Maharashtra and Delhi. But in Bengal, we will take them head-on. By 2027-2029, the BJP will be finished. They have only 2-3 years left," she asserted.

BJP MP Samik Bhattacharya said Mamata Banerjee has realised that she is going to lose the assembly elections, that is why she is making such statements to boost the morale of party workers.

"The whole world knows TMC for its mastery in electoral malpractices and vote loot. If she truly believes in her work, why does she encourage violence? Hindus in Bengal have united, and that is why she is scared," he said.

Addressing concerns about the TMC's political consultancy agency I-PAC, Banerjee clarified its role.

"PK (Prashant Kishor) is no longer part of I-PAC. He has moved elsewhere and even started another political party. This is a new team here. Everyone knows that. Cooperation is essential. Stop unnecessary comments about them. We must work together," she said.

Her remarks came after senior TMC leader Madan Mitra accused I-PAC of damaging Mamata Banerjee's image by allowing opportunists into the party.

Before the 2021 elections, I-PAC faced local resentment, especially in villages, where some TMC members expressed dissatisfaction with its involvement. Some senior leaders also accused the agency of "interference" and "overreach".

In 2011, when the Trinamool Congress ended the 34-year rule of the Left Front, the TMC-Congress alliance won a total of 226 seats, with the Mamata Banerjee-led party alone securing 184 seats. In the 2016 elections, TMC contested independently against the Left-Congress alliance and the BJP, winning 211 seats. (PTI)

Telangana parties slam Union Minister Amit Shah's remarks on delimitation

HYDERABAD, Feb 27: Union Home Minister Amit Shah's assurance that the southern states will not lose a single parliamentary seat due to delimitation drew sharp criticism on Thursday from the ruling Congress and opposition BRS in Telangana.

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee president B Mahesh Kumar Goud urged the Centre to consult all states before proceeding with the delimitation exercise.

"We have certain doubts (on delimitation process). The central government has a respon-

sibility to clarify them. We will not accept even if a single seat is reduced," Goud told PTI.

Amit Shah had on Wednesday assured the southern states that they will not lose a "single parliamentary seat" due to delimitation and accused Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin of spreading "misinformation" on the issue.

The union minister was reacting to Stalin's remarks that the delimitation exercise would impact the southern states, especially Tamil Nadu, which the chief minister claimed stands to lose 8 out of its 39 Lok Sabha seats. He has convened

an all-party meeting on 5 March to discuss the matter.

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, earlier this month in Thiruvananthapuram, said the move to undertake the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats based on the new operational census is yet another step by the Centre to "sideline" South Indian states.

"It should be opposed as it will damage democracy. Why should the south Indian states be punished for effectively implementing the family planning programme," he had asked. (PTI)

TMC's Abhishek dismisses speculation of rift with Mamata Article 370 abrogation proved to be good for JK's development: Athawale



KOLKATA, Feb 27: Dismissing reports of his so-called 'rift' with Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, the party's MP and national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Thursday asserted that he remains a "loyal soldier of the TMC", and considered the party supreme as his leader.

Addressing a gathering of senior party workers and leaders at the TMC's organisational meeting at the Netaji Indoor Stadium here, Abhishek claimed that the opposition habitually takes recourse to spread such "canards" whenever an election comes knocking at the door.

The meeting was aimed at outlining strategies for the 2026 Assembly polls in the state.

"Those who say that I am crossing over to the BJP, let me say that even if they slit my throat, I will continue to raise the 'Mamata Banerjee Zindabad' slogan from my severed windpipe," Abhishek said.

Abhishek's statement assumes significance in the wake of his perceived recent absence from the forefront of Trinamool's organisational activities and largely remaining focused on social welfare pursuits, limited to the Diamond Harbour constituency which he represents in Parliament.

"I know those people who are spreading such fake news. They have vested interests ahead of the next year's assembly polls," the MP added.

Naming Mukul Roy and Suvenudh Adhikari, Abhishek said he had "identified them as traitors" ahead of the previous elections.

"I had exposed them before. I will do it once again with those who are trying to create unrest within our party," the Diamond Harbour MP asserted.

Stressing on the need to abide by party discipline, Abhishek alerted the TMC leadership to remain careful about their discourses in the public domain.

"If you think, you are an MP or an MLA or a block president and

enjoy the immunity to say things in public which demeans the party and weakens its position, you are wrong. Those who have done so have already been identified. Each one of us is guided by organisational rules. There should be no slackness in your work in the run-up to the state polls," he said.

Urging party members to focus on public service instead of internal conflicts, he said, "Forget about your own differences next year and concentrate on working for the people. There is no point in engaging in conspiracies. Those indulging in WhatsApp group politics should know that such efforts will be futile. Those conspiring will be impacted themselves."

Referring to the CBI's latest charge sheet which names him in connection with the teachers' recruitment scam probe, Abhishek, the party's perceived second-in-command, lashed out at the agency for allegedly "acting at the behest of its political masters".

"I find it amusing that the CBI is so scared that it is pointing fingers at me in an indirect manner. That's because they do not have a shred of actionable evidence against me. I said this five years ago and I will say it again: If you can produce a single piece of evidence that ties me to any form of corruption, you don't need to write charge sheets. Simply prove them in court and prepare a gallows. I will willingly walk up and hang myself," Abhishek claimed.

He sounded the 2026 poll bugle for his party workers by setting a target of winning "at least one additional seat than the current strength of 214" in the 292-member state assembly.

"The BJP has ED-CBI-Income Tax trio to work for it. But they don't have the courage to fight it out on the streets. We will break through the BJP's 'chakravayuh'. We have done it before time and again. There's no reason why we can't do it again," he claimed. (PTI)

JAMMU, Feb 27: The Centre's decision to revoke Article 370 of the Constitution proved to be "good" as it strengthened development and "ended" terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, Union Minister Ramdas Athawale said on Thursday.

There was a time when tourists were afraid of visiting Jammu and Kashmir but that has changed after the revocation of Article 370, the minister of state for social justice and empowerment said at a press conference here. On August 5, 2019, the Centre abrogated Article 370, which accorded a special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. The government also divided Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

"The (PM) Narendra Modi-led government has taken a lot of important decisions and the abrogation of Article 370 was a very big step which strengthened development in

J&K, ended terrorism and generated employment opportunities besides establishing peace and paving the way for unfurling the tricolour," Athawale said. Earlier, people were afraid of visiting J&K but the situation changed after Article 370 was revoked and more than 2.5 million tourists visited the union territory last year, he said.

"The increase in tourism means more development for the region. It was a very good decision to revoke Article 370. Now the people want us to give the status of a state to J&K. When (Home Minister) Amit Shah announced the removal of Article 370, he also announced that J&K's statehood would be restored at an appropriate time. Jammu and Kashmir will get the status of a state soon and all of people's problems will be resolved," he added.

The minister lauded the highest voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir in the assembly elections held last year. (PTI)

Nanaji Deshmukh played key role in formation of Janata Party leading to first non-Cong govt: Shah

CHITRAKOOT (MP), Feb 27: Union minister Amit Shah on Thursday said social reformer and politician late Nanaji Deshmukh played a crucial role in the formation of the Janata Party, which led to the formation of the first non-Congress government in the country in 1977.

He also hailed Deshmukh's contribution in different fields, saying some people leave a lasting impact and become the reason for change of an era.

The home minister was speaking during a function organised to pay tributes to Deshmukh, the recipient of the Bharat Ratna - the country's highest civilian award - on his 15th death anniversary.

"Nanaji, born in Maharashtra, worked as an RSS pracharak in Uttar Pradesh, and played a crucial role in the formation of the Janata Party and also in the merger of the Jana Sangh with other parties due to his nation-first approach, which led to the formation of the first non-Congress government," Shah said.

Former prime minister Indira Gandhi had imposed Emergency in the country and attacked freedom, he said.

"But when there was specula-



tion about what lies ahead without the Congress, Nanaji saheb stood up and played a crucial role in shaping the Janata Party which led to the formation of the first non-Congress government. When the opposition was shattered, the country stood up, leading to 19 months of struggle against the dictatorship and democracy won," Shah said.

After that, no one had the courage to impose Emergency in the country again, he added.

"Deshmukh was one of those who were opposed to Jawaharlal Nehru's policies as they were Western and lacked Indianisation," Shah said.

Shah said that after the BJP

Congress MLAs boycott Rajasthan Assembly proceedings

Party holds mock session outside as impasse continues



JAIPUR, Feb 27: There was no end to the nearly week-long impasse in the Rajasthan Assembly, with Congress MLAs boycotting Thursday's proceedings and holding a mock session outside to protest against a state minister's remarks against former prime minister Indira Gandhi.

The deadlock over Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Avinash Gehlot's comments in the assembly last week escalated after the Congress' state president Govind Singh Dotasra's "undignified remarks" against Speaker Vasudev Devnani.

Holding placards, opposition MLAs marched towards the assembly and sat outside the premises. They raised slogans and demanded an apology from the minister for his remarks.

The Congress lawmakers also held a mock Question Hour outside the House, with Ghanshyam acting as the "chair" while the other members asked him questions on ruling BJP leaders' behaviour.

Inside the House, ruling party MLAs accused the Congress members of disrupting the proceedings and demanded that the deadlock be ended.

Former chief minister and senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot told reporters outside the assembly that both sides should cooperate to end the impasse.

"This should end so that debate takes place in the assembly. The treasury and the opposition benches must cooperate and there should be no ego... This tension is unnecessary," he said.

Leader of Opposition Tikaram Jolly said they were open for talks but the government did not want to run the House.

"The minister had made the remarks. We slept in the assembly for three days. Talks were held to end the deadlock. Three opposition leaders expressed regret. Despite this, the minister is not replying," he said.

"I have communicated to the chief minister and the parliamentary affairs minister that our doors are open for talks. Dotasra ji also said that he could visit the speaker's residence to clear things up. The government is afraid of the performance of its ministers... That is why it does not want to run the House," Jolly said.

Rajasthan's Minister of State for Home Jawahar Singh Bedham told reporters that people elected the Congress MLAs but they ran away from the House.

"Undignified words were used by the Congress state president in the House and they were published prominently in newspapers. He is raising questions on that," he said.

The minister also said Ashok Gehlot was busy posting messages on social media but did not come to the assembly.

Bedham contended that the word "dadi" used by Avinash Gehlot to describe Indira Gandhi was not unparliamentary and noted that former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru was referred to as "chacha".

"Dotasra ji should apologise for his remarks against the chair. He holds a dignified post as the party's state chief. He should come to the House. Who is stopping him? He should apologise and let the House run smoothly," he demanded.

During Zero Hour, BJP MLA Arjun Lal raised the impasse issue and said no disrespectful remarks were made.

The deadlock should be ended, he demanded.

Replying to him, Bedham said positive efforts were made by the government to break the deadlock.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel, along with others, held several rounds of talks with senior Congress legislators during which the Laxmangarh MLA (Dotasra) agreed to tender an apology for his conduct and the words used to refer to Devnani, Bedham said.

But when he spoke in the House, he did not say the things that he had agreed to during the meeting in the speaker's chamber, he added.

BJP MLA Srichand Kriplani said the Congress legislators would not have created a ruckus had Avinash Gehlot used the word "grandmother" instead of "dadi".

On Tuesday, Devnani had said the words used by Dotasra against him were "insulting" to the chair.

Dotasra allegedly made the remarks against Devnani during the Congress' dharna in the House following the adjournment of proceedings.

During Question Hour on February 28, Avinash Gehlot had pointed to the opposition and said, "In the 2023-24 budget, like always, you named the scheme (on working women's hostels) after your 'dadi (grandmother)' Indira Gandhi."

The remark triggered an uproar, leading to three adjournments and the suspension of six Congress MLAs.

Demanding an apology from the minister and the revocation of its members' suspension, the Congress MLAs began a sit-in in the assembly. Several rounds of talks between the two sides were held in the speaker's chamber but the issue could not be resolved as Devnani and Patel were not satisfied with the statement made by Dotasra. (PTI)

Both Upadhyaya and Deshmukh were born in 1916, Shah said, adding that former President APJ Abdul Kalam described Deshmukh as "rashtra rishi".

Shah said, "The life of some people leaves an impact not only for years but for ages and they become the reason for the change of an era. Nanaji Deshmukh is one of those great personalities."

Recalling Deshmukh's contribution in the fields of art, politics, industries and service sector, Shah said he left an indelible impact in all these areas.

Deshmukh had contested and won the Lok Sabha election from Balrampur in Uttar Pradesh in 1977. After his victory, he had also met his rival - a Maharani of erstwhile royal family from the region - and sought her cooperation in the development of the constituency, Shah added.

On the occasion, Shah also inaugurated a newly renovated Ram Darshan complex.

According to Shah, Lord Rama spent a major part of his exile in Chitrakoot.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav also spoke during the event. (PTI)

Maha Kumbh was like a nation breathing with a new consciousness: PM

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday likened the massive Maha Kumbh congregation to the newly awakened consciousness of a nation breathing freely after breaking the shackles of a slavery mindset. "The Maha Kumbh has concluded. The 'mahayagna' of unity has concluded," he wrote in a blog, a day after the mega religious exercise concluded, and said the country has to now march ahead with a similar sense of self-confidence and unity to fulfil the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Modi said more devotees than were ever imagined took the holy dip in Sangam, asserting that India is now forging ahead with new energy and that this points to a change of era which will write a new future for India.

The prime minister offered apology to "Mother Ganga, Mother Yamuna, Mother Saraswati" as well as people, who he said are a form of God to him, for any shortcoming in the services rendered.

He noted that making such a massive arrangement was not easy.

At least 30 devotees had died during a stampede at the Maha Kumbh, which drew devotees in huge numbers from across the country.

The Uttar Pradesh government has said that over 65 crore people visited the sacred site in Prayagraj since the Maha Kumbh began on

January 13.

In his blog, Modi praised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, saying as an MP from Uttar Pradesh he can proudly say that the government, administration and people collectively under Adityanath's leadership made this "Maha Kumbh of unity" successful.

Everyone, be it sanitation staff, police personnel, boatmen, drivers and cooks, made it a success by working relentlessly with a sense of devotion and service, he said, praising residents of Prayagraj as well.

He asserted that what has never happened in the past few decades happened this time.

"It has laid the foundation for many coming centuries," he added.

Modi said the holding of Maha Kumbh has become a study subject for management professionals, and planning and policy experts, as there is no other example of such a gigantic event in the world.

"When the consciousness of a nation awakens, when it breaks all the shackles of hundreds of years of slavery to breathe with a new consciousness, then such a sight presents itself that we witnessed in

the Maha Kumbh of unity in Prayagraj after January 13," he said.

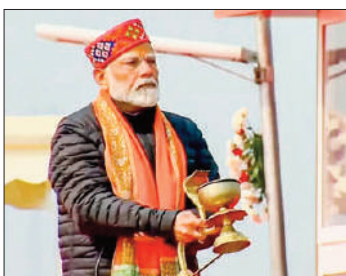
Modi said the tradition of Maha Kumbh has been reinvigorating India's national consciousness for thousands of years, suggesting new ways to the country and society.

"This time the Maha Kumbh of this kind came after 144 years and has given the message of a new chapter in India's development journey. The message is of 'Viksit Bharat'," he said.

People from every region, including abroad, caste and ideology were one in the Maha Kumbh, he said, calling upon people to come together in a similar way for building a 'Viksit Bharat'.

The faith of 140 crore countrymen had connected to this festival together at one time, Modi said, adding that the number of devotees has definitely made a record as people almost double the US population in numbers took the holy dip.

The administration had made its estimate based on the experience of previous Kumbhs, he said, noting that the real numbers turned out to be more than imagined.



The prime minister said it was a very pleasant experience for him to see young devotees attending the holy congregation in large numbers.

"This boosts the faith that India's young generation is the carrier of our values and culture, and understand its responsibility in taking it forward. They are committed to it," he said.

The prime minister said this pilgrimage to Prayagraj gives the message of unity and harmony, and invoked an incident from the epic Ramayana in which boatmen king Nishad Raaj had met Lord Ram at a place which is in the vicinity of the Uttar Pradesh city.

Noting that devotees in crores turned up at the sacred confluence without any invitation, the prime minister said he can never forget the sight of people reflecting in blissful content after bathing there.

Be it women, senior citizens or persons with disabilities, everyone turned up with whatever means they had, he said.

The way devotees were welcomed with devotion after they returned to their homes is also memorable, he said.

Modi said the mega event has strengthened his resolve to ensure cleanliness in rivers, be big or small, as he asserted the purity of Ganga, Yamuna or any other river is linked to people's life journey. (PTI)

Mega semiconductor conference to be held in Gujarat from Mar 5 to 7; top firms to attend



GANDHINAGAR, Feb 27: More than 2,500 delegates will take part in Gujarat SemiConnect Conference to be held in state capital Gandhinagar from March 5 to 7, a senior official said on Thursday.

The conference, to be held at Mahatma Mandir Convention Centre, will be inaugurated in the presence of Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) Ashwini Vaishnaw, said Mona Khandhar, principal secretary in the state Department of Science and Technology.

A parallel exhibition to take place at the same time will offer a panoramic view of the semiconductor value chain, highlighting the journey from the fundamental silicon sand to the intricate systems at the forefront of semiconductor technology, the official said.

Among those who will attend the inaugural ceremony include President and Managing Director, Infineon Technologies Asia Pacific, CS Chua, and EVP, Global Business Unit, JABIL, Matt Crowley, who will make announcements regarding their new investments in Gujarat, Khandhar said at a press conference here.

"Ambassador of Republic of Korea to India, Lee Seong-ho, will deliver a special address focusing on strong South Korea-India relations and Gujarat's emerging semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem. Netherlands Ambassador to India, Marisa Gerards, will deliver a special address focusing on strong Netherlands-India relations and Indo-Dutch technological collaborations," she said.

"Senior executives from anchor investors, including Tata Electronics, Micron, Kaynes Technology, and CG Semi, will also address the gathering. The inaugural session will feature the unveiling of plans for the development of new social infrastructure in Dholera and initiatives for a SMART industrial estate in GIDC Sanand," Khandhar informed.

The event will also include product launches from domestic semiconductor industries, she added.

"During the inaugural event, Kaynes Technology will perform ground breaking for its new OSAT (Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test) facility in Sanand. Tata Electronics Private Limited is also expected to make an important announcement during the event," said Khandhar.

Other prominent leaders from the semiconductor and electronics industry who will address the gathering are Global CTO of NXP Semiconductors Lars Reger and Chairman and CEO of Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) Ishiguro Norihiko, said Khandhar.

"During these three days, nearly 2,500 delegates from the industry, academia and research institutions are expected to attend this conference, while nearly 100 industry leaders and experts will share their views with the audience between March 5 and 7," said Khandhar.

The key objectives of this three-day conference is to attract investments by showcasing Gujarat's potential, driving capital inflow into the state's semiconductor industry, integrating local industries into global value chains and to enhance the state's capacity for innovation and production in the semiconductor sector, she said.

"Six country specific roundtables, including one between India and the US, will take place during these three days. It will also have the India-Japan roundtable, India-Taiwan roundtable, India-Korea roundtable, India-Singapore roundtable," Khandhar said.

The India-US Roundtable, facilitated by the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum and US-India Business Forum, will convene leaders from a multitude of sectors to discuss and enhance bilateral cooperation, she added. (PTI)

Delhi court acquits army officer in rape case

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: A Delhi court has acquitted an army officer accused of allegedly raping a woman on the pretext of marriage and said such a promise couldn't be held as "inducement for sex" over an indefinite period of time.

Additional sessions Judge Gajender Singh Nagar conducted the trial against the officer, who was also booked for the charge of unnatural offences and forcing the woman to undergo abortion twice.

In a verdict on January 25, the court said, "It has been held by the superior courts that inducement to have a physical relationship by promising marriage and the victim falling prey to inducement may be understandable in the context of the moment. A promise for marriage cannot be held out as an inducement for engaging in sex over a protracted and indefinite period of time."

The allegations, the court said, were "bald" and not proved beyond a reasonable doubt and the woman's testimony was untrustworthy, blemished and not of sterling quality.

"Rather, the undersigned (judge) is of the considered opinion that the accused did not make physical relations, if any, with prosecutrix forcefully against her will and consent, rather she was a willing party to the said act," it held.

The order went on, "It is apparent that no offence of rape is committed with her (the complainant) and she al-

ways wanted to be with the accused, however, due to certain circumstances, their relationship could not fructify."

The court pointed out several inconsistencies in the woman's allegations, including doubts regarding the alleged incident of rape on February 13, 2014, at her rented accommodation.

An order from the Army indicated to the court that the man was sanctioned leaves between February 14 and 15.

"When the accused's leave was sanctioned from February 14, then he must have taken some time to reach Delhi. In such circumstances, it is not possible that the accused was in Delhi on February 13 as claimed by the prosecutrix," it said. The court found it "strange" that the woman did not confide in her family her ordeal and instead accompanied the man to a hill station.

"It is very strange that despite being raped on February 13, the prosecutrix agreed to visit Manali alone with the accused and stayed with him in the same room where she was raped by the accused again and also got pregnant due to the same, but she did not inform her family about the same forthwith," the order said.

The allegations of pregnancy and abortion were not proved by any scientific or medical evidence, it added.

The statement about the woman's second pregnancy, after the accused refused to marry her in 2015, was also found to be inconsistent. (PTI)

Bengaluru psychiatrist sentenced to 10 years for abducting, selling newborn

BENGALURU, Feb 27: A city court has sentenced a 36-year-old psychiatrist to 10 years rigorous imprisonment for abducting a newborn boy and selling him for ₹ 14.5 lakh in 2020. Rashmi Shashikumar, a resident of Nagarbhavi, was also fined ₹ 1 lakh by Judge C B Santosh.

Rashmi, who had been out on bail, was present in court when the verdict was delivered on February 19. She was taken into custody immediately and sent to Bengaluru central prison.

The case dates back to May 29, 2020, when a newborn was stolen from the BBMP (civic body) Hospital in Chamarajpet. The child's mother, who had just given birth, fell asleep after taking medication prescribed by a doctor.

When she woke up 45 minutes later, her baby was missing. A police

complaint was lodged, but it took nearly a year to trace the child and arrest Rashmi. On May 29, 2021, police recovered the infant from a couple in North Karnataka, who had been misled into believing the baby was theirs through surrogacy. Shockingly, when officers arrived at their home, they found the couple joyfully celebrating the child's first birthday, unaware of the deception. The investigation was a painstaking effort involving over 700 witness interviews, the analysis of 300 CCTV recordings, and the examination of 5,000 phone call records.

With the help of CCTV footage, police created a suspect's sketch, which eventually led them to Rashmi and the unsuspecting couple.

According to the chargesheet, Rashmi had met the couple in 2015

while working at a private hospital in Hballi. The couple had a child with special needs, and Rashmi assured them that surrogacy could help them have a healthy baby. In 2019, she collected biological samples from the father, falsely claiming she had found a surrogate mother in Bengaluru. She also took ₹ 14.5 lakh from them, promising a baby by May 2020.

As the date approached, Rashmi identified BBMP Hospital as her target due to its lax security. She visited the maternity ward multiple times before carrying out the abduction.

On May 29, she instructed a hospital attendant to give the mother sleeping pills. Once the mother was unconscious, Rashmi took the baby and left. She handed the child over to the couple at a friend's house in Vijayanagar. (PTI)

NAGARKURNOOL (TELANGANA), Feb 27: Rescue teams working to save eight people trapped for over five days in a partially collapsed SLBC tunnel in the district have started cutting parts of the tunnel boring machine and other obstacles hindering their access to the area where the victims are believed to be.

Nagarkurnool Superintendent of Police Vaibhav Gaikwad said the damaged part of the conveyor belt in the tunnel is expected to be repaired during the day to facilitate the transportation of debris.

"Yes, it's already (gas cutting machines went inside). (even during) Nights they did some cutting. Yes, it has already started last night," the official told PTI to a query if the gas cutters started working.

Telangana Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy said the rescue and relief work is in full swing, and the operation would be completed in two days.

"I can assure you two things. In two days, the rescue and relief operation will be complete and in about two or three months, we will restart the (SLBC project) work and complete this project in record time. It is a natural accident. The debris and the machine will be removed.

Whether it is one day, two days or two and half days, the work is in full swing," he told reporters when asked about the status.

He further said national and international agencies and experts in tunnels are working in a coordinated and unified manner.

On Wednesday, he had said the TBM that is stuck inside will be cut into pieces using gas cutters and removed. After this, the Army, Navy, Rail Miners and NDRF teams will make another serious effort to rescue the eight persons who are missing, without compromising their own safety.

Manual scavenging: SC says dissatisfied with affidavits

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: The Supreme Court has expressed displeasure on the responses of the Delhi, Kolkata and Hyderabad authorities on how they stopped manual scavenging in their respective cities.

A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Aravind Kumar directed the municipal commissioner of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), director (S&DM) of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and managing director of the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board, Telangana, to remain present on the next hearing.

The apex court noted KMC, DJB and the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board did not explain how some deaths occurred in their cities due to manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning. It also directed the commissioner of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike to also remain present saying neither an affidavit nor any representation was made in the court.

"Meanwhile, of the five affidavits, which are given before this court,

two of the affidavits filed on behalf of Kolkata Municipal Corporation and Delhi Jal Board are not at all satisfactory," the bench said on February 19. While hearing a plea against the practice of manual scavenging, the apex court said there was no clarity whether manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning were stopped in these cities.

Regarding KMC's affidavit, it recorded the claim that the practices had stopped there.

"... yet there is no explanation from them which has come forward to explain to this court as to why even after manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning was stopped as per their claim, three deaths have occurred on February 2, 2025 due to manual scavenging as we have been informed at the Bar," the bench said.

The bench said the DJB affidavit was a "very evasive reply" to the question whether manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning were continuing in Delhi or not.

"What it says, is that manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning in DJB is totally prohibited. This is not

the reply that we had sought from them," it said. The court also found no explanation on how seven such deaths took place in the capital in the last one year. It noted there was no explanation from the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board as to how and when the practices were stopped and why three related deaths took place due in Hyderabad in the last one year.

The bench said the affidavits filed by the authorities of Mumbai and Chennai were satisfactory.

It, however, said the two authorities should file detailed affidavits like others elaborating on the machines and equipment were used and the date when the practices were stopped.

"We further need an explanation from all the authorities concerned as to why criminal prosecution may not be initiated against the officer concerned and/or the contractor who have employed manual scavengers and, on whose watch, and orders these deaths have occurred, due to manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning," it added. (PTI)

Maha Kumbh, a window of opportunity for gig workers and small vendors



was among the hundreds who came to Maha Kumbh for a gig as a photographer.

He said he belongs to a family of boatmen and his father also operates a boat back home but ahead of the Maha Kumbh he switched to learning photography and bought a camera.

Carrying an instant printer that runs on battery, he had his camera strung around his neck and other equipment in a backpack, ready to deliver a print out of images instantly.

"I am making ₹ 5,000-₹ 6,000 daily on an average. It's not difficult getting customers here. I charge Rs 50 per picture," a beaming Ram Kewat told PTI.

He said he sticks to only a small area and doesn't venture much towards other ghats.

Asked how he was handling all the money he was making at the Kumbh daily, Ram Kewat said, "It's modern time, I transfer all the money back home to my family at the end of every day through my mobile phone."

Abhishek, who hails from neighbouring Pratapgarh district, took to selling ceremonial threads.

"Otherwise I worked as a driver for a transport company, driving cars as and when required," Abhishek, around 20, told PTI as he went about his business in one of the hundreds of bylanes at the mega fair.

A technological leapfrog will transform India: Amitabh Kant

ALWAR (RAJASTHAN), Feb 27: A technological leapfrog will transform India and the country must seize the opportunity to lead in clean-tech manufacturing amid global disruptions, India's G20 Sherpa and former Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant has said.

In an interview with PTI on the sidelines of the Centre for Science and Environment's annual Anil Agarwal Dialogue, Kant also acknowledged that the lack of financial support from developed nations, historically responsible for climate change, could impact developing countries' new climate targets.

Kant said disruptions in global trade have created a significant opportunity for India. "There is a vacuum, and India can fill it. By doing so, we can accelerate economic growth," he said.

He said that India has made remarkable technological progress in areas like fintech, citing UPI as an example.

"We should replicate this success in clean-tech manufacturing, including solar energy, green hydrogen, batteries and electric vehicles. This is an opportunity for India to exceed 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030. Technological disruptions are inevitable and we must be the first to lead. A technological leapfrog will transform India," he said.

Kant warned that if India fails to seize this opportunity, it will become dependent on imports. "If India does not seize this opportunity, we will become dependent on China for imports. Our spending on clean-tech imports will far exceed what we currently spend on oil," he said.

Asked whether insufficient funding from developed countries would impact the new climate goals of developing nations, Kant agreed.

"The developed world, responsible for financing climate action in developing countries, has failed to provide adequate funds. They did not fulfil their promise of USD 100 billion annually by 2020. Developing nations need USD 1.3 trillion per year and the total requirement for both climate and sustainable development goals is USD 3 trillion," he said.

Kant said that developing nations are not responsible for the climate crisis. (PTI)

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, Feb 27: The Maha Kumbh Mela drew not just millions of spiritual seekers but also provided economic opportunity for many gig workers and small vendors, who were able to utilise the 45-day grand religious gathering as a source of livelihood by selling essentials and offering services.

Mahakumbh Nagar - a makeshift city set up for the Maha Kumbh - hosted over 66 crore devotees, who came here in hope to find 'moksha' after a dip in the sacred waters of Triveni Sangam.

As pilgrims flocked the Maha Kumbh Mela, the ghats, the lanes and bylanes were also dotted by street-side vendors, selling almost everything that accompanies faith - puja ware, idols, ritualistic threads, vermilion, literature.

And there was more on sale: oxidised jewellery, bangles, vegetables, grocery stores, cow dung cakes, chopped woods, utensils, clothes, blankets, tea stalls, fast food kiosks - all keeping the tent city spread in 4000 hectares abuzz round the clock.

Virendra Bind from Sahaswan set up a stall where he sold soft toys.

Bind, around 40, says he got decent sales, thanks to a lot of young children.

"I sell a soft toy for ₹ 60. Initially I quote it for ₹ 70 if a customer agrees to it, I happily make an extra Rs 10 profit on every sale," Bind told PTI. Rampal Kewat from Bulandshahr

Asked if it was profitable doing it, the upbeat young man explained: "I am selling one thread for ₹ 10. Whether red or black or saffron or yellow, all threads cost the same. I bought them in bulk from Banaras where it cost me ₹ 3 each. I'm making a clean profit of ₹ 7 on each thread that I sell and you can see the crowd here."

Manshu, who lives in Prayagraj, also benefitted from the gig works. Along with his family, he had set up a fast food stall near Sector 19. Tea for ₹ 10 and Maggi noodles for ₹ 50 were most in demand at his shop till late in the evening.

A small poster at his kiosk read: "Contact for bike taxi".

When asked, he said, "I ride bike also within the Kumbh Mela area to provide taxi service to visitors, making some additional money from the job."

"It depends on what distance and which area one wants to go and I charge accordingly but it is upwards of ₹ 50 and can go up to ₹ 200," he told PTI, as he sought to explain how he knows all routes and shortcuts to ghats since he is a local.

Considered among the holiest pilgrimages by Hindus, the Maha Kumbh started on January 13 and concluded on February 26.

Being held after 12 years, the Maha Kumbh 2025 logged a record over 66 crore devotees thronging the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati. (PTI)

APOLOGY

I'm sorry I, Moinul Haque, made negative comments about journalists in Karbi Anglong district. Sorry for the unintended comment. I'm sorry. Moinul Haque Murajhar, Hojai (Assam)

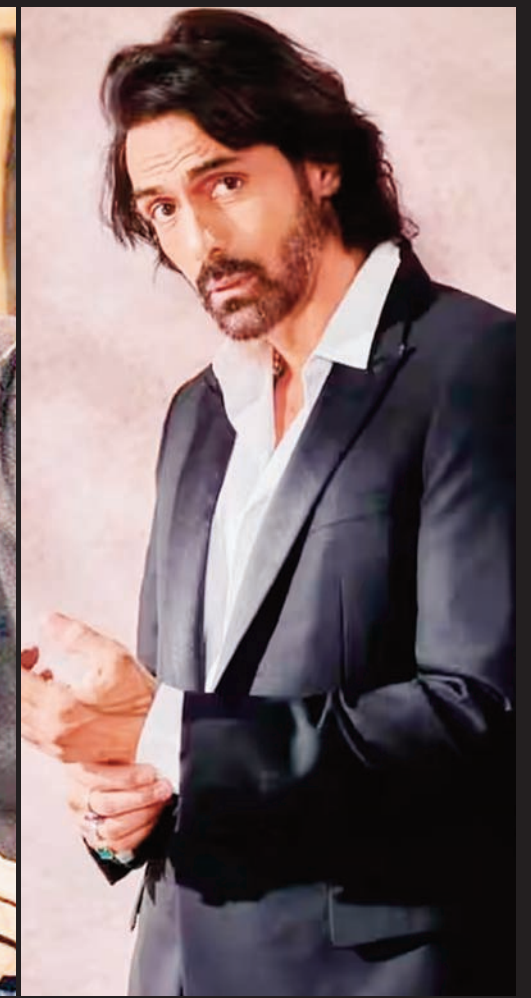
IMTIAZ ALI SETS 'O SAATHI RE' SERIES AT NETFLIX; ADITI RAO, AVINASH TIWARY & ARJUN RAMPAL TO STAR



NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Filmmaker Imtiaz Ali is set to reunite with Netflix for "O Saathi Re", a romantic drama series starring Aditi Rao Hydari, Avinash Tiwary and Arjun Rampal. Billed as an "evocative exploration of the vintage feeling of love in contemporary times", the show is created by Ali, who earlier worked with the streamer for crime series "She" and the critically-acclaimed movie "Amar Singh Chamkila". Arif Ali, who directed "She", will helm the new series.

"O Saathi Re" surprised me at every turn of its development. It is a modern story with a vintage heart, an enchanted fairytale set in the fiasco of Metropolitan life," Ali, who will also serve as writer, showrunner, and executive producer, said in a statement. "I feel both relieved and excited at having Arif direct the stellar cast of Avinash, Aditi, and Arjun (all Aces there) and it is the ever-strengthening relationship with Netflix that enabled us to enter the deceptively charming world of 'O Saathi Re'," he added. "O Saathi Re", which will commence production soon, will reunite Ali with Hydari after they worked on "Rockstar." Tiwary had featured in "Laila Majnu," which was produced by Ali. The series will be produced by Window Seat Films and Reliance En-

tertainment. Tanya Bami, Series Head, Netflix India, said the series explores themes of love, relationships, and human dilemmas. "We wanted something with an inherent musicality, perhaps inspired by a song, and then Imtiaz crafted a story, called it 'O Saathi Re,' and that story moved us as profoundly as the song still does. It's a fresh and innovative take on relationships in contemporary times. Now, with this phenomenal cast – Aditi, Arjun, and Avinash – we are ready to bring this beautiful and poetic story to life," she said. Amogh Kanaskar will also serve as a writer on the series, which will be creatively produced by Nidhi Sethia. Vishal Bajaj, Pratik Nandkumar, and Mohit Choudhary are the other executive producers. (PTI)



ABHISHEK BANERJEE, SHAHANA GOSWAMI, NEERAJ KABI TO STAR IN 'MAHASANGAM'



NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Actors Abhishek Banerjee, Shahana Goswami, and Neeraj Kabi will be featuring in "Mahasangam", a film set amidst the massive Maha Kumbh congregation in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj. Bharat Bala, best known for directing the 2013 Tamil movie "Maryan" starring Dhanush and Parvathy Thiruvothu, will helm the project, described as a "powerful exploration of family, legacy, and music." The film's story delves into the complex dynamics of a father, son, and daughter caught in a poignant struggle over a musical inheritance, a press release said. Bala said "Mahasangam" is a tribute to the world's largest gathering of humanity, the Maha Kumbh, which concluded on Wednesday.

"This is a story that delves into complex layers of human emotions and unfolds at an unprecedented gathering of pilgrims. This is a story that dives deep into a journey of redemption, inheritance, and music, narrated through the three lead characters." "I'm immensely proud and fortunate to direct this film, especially with the incredible talent backing it," the director said. "Mahasangam" will be produced by the Virtual Bharat banner and feature music by composer A. R. Rahman. The 45-day Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj started on January 13. The Uttar Pradesh government has said that over 65 crore people visited the sacred site. (PTI)



Alan Walker to perform in Guwahati, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar and Jaipur in April

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Norwegian DJ Alan Walker has extended his WalkerWorld India tour and has added four more shows.

A prominent figure in the electronic music scene with hit tracks like "Faded" and "On My Way" to his credit, Walker had performed in nine cities in 2024 - Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi NCR, Ahmedabad, Kochi, Hyderabad, Pune, Shillong and Chennai.

His 2025 tour of India will kick off in Guwahati on April 17, followed by Hyderabad on April 18, Bhubaneswar on April 19 and Jaipur on April 20, a press release said.

The Alan Walker: WalkerWorld India Tour is organised by Spacebound.

Karan Singh, CEO, Spacebound, said, "When we saw the overwhelming response to the tour last year, we recognised an opportunity to push boundaries even further. This expansion demonstrates our unwavering commitment to enable access to global talent across India's diverse regions." "The extraordinary success of bringing Walker to markets traditionally overlooked by international tours proves our belief that world-class entertainment shouldn't be limited to just metros. We're determined to continue this momentum by bringing more international artists to fans throughout India," he added. The tickets for WalkerWorld India tour will be available on BookMyShow from Friday. (PTI)

Dhanush's 'Kuberaa' set for June 20 release



NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Tamil superstar Dhanush's upcoming movie "Kuberaa" will be released in theatres globally on June 20, the makers announced on Thursday. Directed by Sekhar Kammula, the movie will be released in five languages – Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Kannada, and Malayalam. It also features Nagarjuna, Rashmika Mandanna, and Jim Sarbh in pivotal roles. The film, which is dubbed as a pan-India cinematic spectacle, is backed by Sri Venkateswara Cinemas LLP and Amigos Creations Pvt Ltd. "A story of power... A battle for wealth... A game of fate... SekharKammula's 'Kuberaa' is ready to deliver an enchanting theatrical experience from 20th June 2025," Sri Venkateswara Cinemas LLP posted on X along with posters of the film. Suniel Narang and Puskur Ram Mohan Rao have produced the film. Music for the film is composed by Devi Sri Prasad. (PTI)



THAT FILM NOT HAPPENING FOR NOW: JOHN ABRAHAM ON '1911' FOOTBALL FILM

MUMBAI, Feb 27: Actor-producer John Abraham has confirmed that 1911, a film based on Mohun Bagan's historic IFA Shield victory in 1911, is temporarily on hold.

The film, backed by JA Entertainment, was set to chronicle legendary footballer Sibdas Bhaduri, with Abraham in the lead role.

Initially planned to be directed by Shoojit Sircar and later handed over to Nikkhil Advani, the project has been shelved for now.

"Unfortunately, that film's not happening because we've been through a lot of processes, and the idea sounds good. But we've seen a lot of films on football..."

"But do we want to make it? Yes, in the future. We've parked that for now," Abraham told PTI. Meanwhile, the actor ad-

dressed reports about playing former Mumbai Police Commissioner Rakesh Maria in a biopic backed by filmmaker Rohit Shetty.

"The Rakesh Maria biopic is in the discussion stage. I haven't signed a single film. I'm waiting for the release of The Diplomat, and then I've got an exciting film, Tehran."

"I haven't signed anything but hopefully, the day I sign it I'll let everybody know," he said. Abraham's next film, The Diplomat, directed by Shivam Nair, is based on a true story and features him as Indian diplomat JP Singh. It is set to release in theatres on March 14.

Tehran, inspired by true events, marks the feature directorial debut of ad filmmaker Arun Gopalan and stars Manushi Chhillar. (PTI)

Odisha FC eye crucial win against Mohammedan Sporting, stay afloat in playoff race



BHUBANESWAR, Feb 27: With their playoff hopes hanging by a thread, Odisha FC will aim for maximum points when they take on Mohammedan SC in the Indian Super League here on Friday. The Juggernauts have struggled in recent weeks, registering just one win in their last five outings (W1, D2, L2) as they have slipped to seventh

place with 29 points from 22 matches -- three points adrift of sixth-placed Mumbai City FC (32), who have played one game fewer.

Odisha also face stiff competition from East Bengal FC (27 points from 22 matches) and Kerala Blasters FC (24 points from 21 matches) in their bid to secure a top-six finish.

To stay in contention, Sergio Lobera's side will be also hoping for favorable results from Mumbai City FC and NorthEast United FC in the coming rounds. Odisha FC are unbeaten in their last three home games (W1, D2) in the ISL. A victory on Friday would mark their first consecutive home wins since their four-match winning streak

between February and April 2024.

Odisha failed to score in their last ISL outing, a 0-1 loss to Mohun Bagan.

They will be eager to avoid back-to-back goalless matches for the first time since early 2023.

With 41 goals this season -- the second-highest in the league

-- Odisha FC's attack will be looking to fire once again.

Isak Vanlalratfela, who has three goals, four assists, will be one of their key players as they would also look forward to Diego Mauricio who has nine goals and six assists, boasting 95 touches inside the opposition box this season.

"As a team, we want to believe until the end, keep fighting, and hopefully qualify for the playoffs. We also want to make our fans happy and put a smile on their faces," said Lobera, Odisha FC coach.

Rooted to the bottom of the table, debutants Mohammedan SC have endured a torrid run, losing all of their last five games. Another defeat would mark Mohammedan SC's longest losing run in ISL history and they would be keen to avoid that. With just 11 points from 21 matches, their chances of survival look bleak.

However, their two wins this season -- against Chennaiyin FC and Bengaluru FC -- have both come on the road, offering them a glimmer of hope as they take on Odisha FC.

"We have been doing good preparation for the last few days to play against Odisha FC. Our performance off late hasn't been great, but we always try to give our best for the club. It's a game we want to win," said Mohammedan SC's Indian assistant coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo. (PTI)

Bundesliga duties call before Bayern, Leverkusen clash on Europe's big stage

BERLIN, Feb 27: Bundesliga contenders Bayern Munich and Bayer Leverkusen could be forgiven for thinking of their Champions League date before they fulfill challenging domestic obligations this weekend.

Bayern visits Stuttgart on Friday, while Leverkusen travels to Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

Bayern then hosts Leverkusen for the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Wednesday -- a match that has taken on added importance for both teams with Bayern enjoying an eight-point lead over defending champion Leverkusen in the Bundesliga.

Leverkusen's players know that a Bayern collapse at this stage of the German league is unlikely and that their best chance of silverware lies in the German Cup -- where they'll contest the semifinals -- and possibly in the Champions League, where a quarterfinal against Feyenoord or Inter Milan awaits if they can get past Bayern.

Leverkusen has already shown it's a match for the Bavarian powerhouse, dominating Vincent Kompany's team during their scoreless draw in the Bundesliga on Feb. 15, and knocking it out of the German Cup with a 1-0 win in the third round.

But first, the Bundesliga.

KEY MATCHUPS

Both Stuttgart -- against Bayern -- and Frankfurt -- against Leverkusen -- will be highly motivated with their own Champions League qualifications at stake. Frankfurt aims to hold on to third place after its 4-0 loss at Bayern last weekend, and Stuttgart is looking for its first win in three games to revive its hopes of reaching fourth place, the last for Champions League qualification.

Last weekend's 6-0 rout of Union Berlin will mean nothing for Borussia Dortmund if it doesn't follow up with another win at St. Pauli on Saturday. The Hamburg-based club has lost its last three games straight.

Werder Bremen coach Ole Werner is under pressure against visiting Wolfsburg on Saturday

after four straight defeats including Tuesday's loss to third-tier Arminia Bielefeld in the German Cup.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Bayern star Harry Kane has 21 goals already this season, but nine were penalties and there have been questions about the England forward's lack of goals from open play. He played only the last half hour against Frankfurt last week and Bayern arguably didn't need him.

Dortmund forward Serhou Guirassy scored four goals last weekend, suggesting he has finally adapted to the team after his summer switch from Stuttgart.

Leverkusen forward Patrik Schick scored last weekend to show it had been perhaps a mistake to leave him out in the league clash with Bayern the week before. He'll get another chance to state his case on Saturday.

Bremen midfielder Leonardo Bittencourt was outspoken in his criticism of the team after the side's loss to Bielefeld, where he started as a substitute. Whether he plays on Saturday will show how well those words were received.

INJURY LIST

Bayern's midfield dynamo Joshua Kimmich needs to "take it easy," the club said, with a strained tendon issue that forced his substitution against Frankfurt. He'll likely sit out Friday's match to be fit for Leverkusen on Wednesday.

TRANSFER NEWS

Leverkusen forward Victor Boniface could be leaving after all with Premier League team Newcastle reportedly keen on a summer transfer, according to local newspaper The Chronicle. Boniface's move to Saudi team Al-Nassr collapsed during the winter transfer period.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

"Just because they got beat, it doesn't mean that they're going to get beat again."

Leverkusen wing back Jeremie Frimpong tells The Associated Press his team won't benefit from Frankfurt's 4-0 loss to Bayern last weekend. (AP)

Praggnanandhaa draws with Navara; Aravindh escapes against Dai Van

PRAGUE, Feb 27: Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa split points with Czech hero David Navara while compatriot Aravindh Chithambaram escaped with a draw with another local star Nguyen Thai Dai Van in the first round of the Prague Masters.

German Vincent Keymer, who was famously part of team D Gukesh's team during the World Championships, scored the first big upset of the tournament taking down top seed Wei Yi of China.

American Sam Shankland was the other winner of the day as he defeated Gurel Ediz of Turkey while the game between Quang Leim Le of Vietnam and Anish Giri of Holland ended in a draw.

Keymer and Shankland emerged as early leaders after round one with Shankland stealing the limelight in his first outing against Ediz.

Praggnanandhaa, Aravindh, Giri, Le, Dai Van and Navara share the third spot on a half point each and they are followed by

Wei Yi and Ediz who will look forward to opening their account in the next round.

Praggnanandhaa faced the Ragozine out of a Queen's gambit declined as white and did not get much to have a go in the ensuing middle game.

It was a timely pawn sacrifice by Navara that equalised the position and after the trade of queens the players reached a theoretically drawn rook and pawns endgame.

Despite having an extra pawn, Praggnanandhaa tried on till the last nail but the

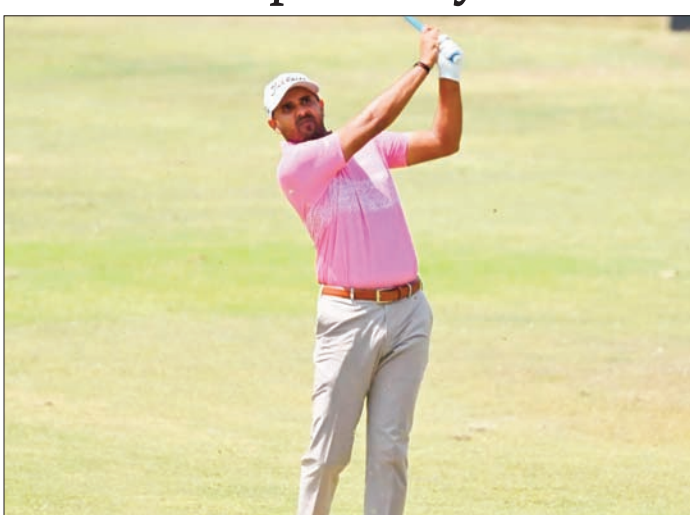
outcome of the game was never in doubt.

Aravindh also played white and Dai Van showed that his victory at the Tata Steel Challengers earlier this month was no flash in the pan.

The Neo-Grünfeld by the Czech Grandmaster faced no problems by the Indian. A few pieces changed hands and it looked as though the game would end soon.

Dai Van ran lower on time when Aravindh blundered and landed himself in a lost position. (PTI)

Shaurya Bhattacharya fires 61 to move five shots clear at the top on day three



NAYA RAIPUR (CHHATTISGARH), Feb 27: Delhi golfer Shaurya Bhattacharya fired a superb eight-under 61, which moved him five shots clear at the top on day three of the Rs one crore Chhattisgarh Open here on Thursday.

Bhattacharya (64-60-61), winner on the PGTI in his rookie season last year, has a total of 21-under 186 over three days and moved one spot from his overnight tied-second position.

Sri Lankan N Thangaraja (66-63-62) shot a 62 that propelled him 13 spots to tied-second place at 16-under 291.

Khalin Joshi (64-60-67), the halfway leader, returned a third round of 67 to stay in contention as he shared the second place with Thangaraja.

Sixteen-year-old rookie S. Manoj (65) of Bengaluru, playing only his third professional event, was tied fourth at 15-under 192 along with Faridabad-based Abhinav Lohan (64) and Bengaluru's M Dharma (66) at the Fairway Golf & Lake Resort. Bhattacharya, 22, the 2024 PGTI Emerging Player of the Year, had a quiet front-nine where he sank three birdies in

exchange for a bogey.

However, the Delhi golfer hit his stride on the back-nine where he collected six birdies.

Bhattacharya, the overwhelming favourite to win the title, said, "I hit my approaches really well today and that's exactly what you need on this course. I didn't have a great start to the season so I'm looking forward to finishing well here. I'm carrying the confidence from my victory last year."

"I will look to continue what I did in the first three rounds. I just want to keep the momentum going and execute my gameplan," Bhattacharya added.

Thangaraja mixed nine birdies with two bogeys on a day he landed most of his shots within seven feet of the pin. The Sri Lankan, who won his last title in 2023, will be among the contenders on the final day.

Khalin, a winner of six titles including one on the international stage, kept himself in the fray with a 67 that featured five birdies and three bogeys.

Among the prominent names, Udayan Mane (64) was tied seventh at 14-under 193 while Om Prakash Chouhan (65) was tied 24th at 10-under 197. (PTI)

Vani uses experience to carve out a win in 4th leg of Hero WPGT

MUMBAI, Feb 27: Vani Kapoor utilized all her experience to secure a crucial birdie on the back nine and clinch victory at the fourth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Thursday.

It was Vani's first win in 2025 and the first since the success at the DLF Golf and Country Club in the 12th leg of the 2024 season.

Vani, 31, bogeyed the 11th and the 13th and at that stage trailed two amateurs, Saanvi Somu, the overnight leader, and Anuradha Chaudhuri. The three were playing together in the final group.

Then came the turnaround as Vani birdied the Par-4 15th. On the same hole Anuradha dropped a bogey for a two-shot swing. From

being one ahead Anuradha fell one back. Saanvi, who with five holes left was even par for the tournament and in the lead, also bogeyed the 15th to fall to 1-over. She was then tied with Vani.

Saanvi, who has finished runner-up four times in the past, parred the 16th but dropped shots on the 17th and the 18th, which were parred by Vani and Anuradha. The pars helped Vani stay ahead of the field at 1-under 69 for the day and 1-over 211 total.

Anuradha was stranded at 2-over and was sole second. Saanvi, meanwhile, fell to 3-over and finished in a tie for third alongside Sneha Singh (66) and Ridhima Dilawari (67), who had earlier taken

the clubhouse lead at 3-over.

Vani opened the day with two birdies on the first two holes, but then endured eight pars after that. She bogeyed the 11th and the 13th to fall back but produced a winning birdie on the 15th.

Anuradha played consistent with one birdie and one bogey, but the latter proved costly, while Sneha and Ridhima produced the two best cards of the day. Sneha was bogey free with 66 and Ridhima shot 67 with four birdies against one bogey.

Saanvi had three birdies and five bogeys, three of which came in the last four holes and cost her a maiden win on the pro tour, while still being an amateur. (PTI)



Sports Minister launches special capacity building course to develop more home-grown coaches

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday launched a special capacity building course in collaboration with Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports, Patiala for current and former elite sports persons in an effort to help India produce more home-grown coaches and officials.

The course has been designed and developed for athletes who are currently employed and serving in various central government or autonomous departments, organisations under central government or Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs).

The eligibility criteria for this course are participation or medal winner in Olympics, World Championships, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games.

The medal winners of Youth Olympics, Junior World Championship, World University Games, senior National Championship and National Games can enroll for the course.



The educational qualification required is minimum graduation or equivalent degree from any recognized university in India.

The course consists of four certification levels -- foundation, pre-intermediate, intermediate and advanced certificate.

"We are suffering from a crisis of coaches, referees and trainers, so to bridge that I am starting a special capacity building course and give them a six week course. If they pass this course, some will become coaches, some will become referees, and they can be utilized in different sport-related work," Mandaviya said in a meeting with reporters.

"The government is already paying them salary. I will send some abroad for further training. We are facing a crisis of

good coaches. Coach is a guide as well as judge for an athlete. Coach has important role to play in an athlete's career."

The course offers flexible learning options, allowing candidates to complete each level within two years while working.

The course will be made available in two modes -- hybrid (2 weeks online and 4 weeks offline) and fully offline.

It follows a credit-based system, whereby each certification level carries 10 cumulative credits, totalling 40 credits, which are equivalent to a diploma course.

The course has been designed focussing on areas like modern coaching, sports science, yoga and leadership, and will equip the candidates to integrate with the sports ecosystem and enhance their professional skills.

The minister also said his ministry is in the process of making an annual calendar for approximately 15 games.

"I will make a calendar for the entire year, like Khelo India Summer Games, Khelo India Winter Games, Khelo India Snow Games, Khelo India Beach Games, Khelo India Northeast Games, Khelo India Tribal Games etc. These Games will be held in one location, for e.g. last year Beach Games were held in Diu and this time also it will be held there," Mandaviya said.

The minister also informed that his ministry will organise a brainstorming session in Hyderabad next month in order to strategise for 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

"Keeping in mind 2028 Olympics and to strategise for it, we will organise three-day Chintan Baithak (brainstorming session) in Hyderabad from March 7 to 9."

The meeting will be attended by sports ministers and sports secretaries of states, IOA members, experts," Mandaviya said. (PTI)

With semifinal berth at stake, Australia's pedigree meets Afghanistan's panache

LAHORE, Feb 27: Eyeing a semifinal spot, Australia's historic pedigree in cricket's biggest tournaments will count for nothing when they run into an Afghanistan side that is fast cementing its place in the game's top table, in the Champions Trophy here on Friday.

Basking in the afterglow of their memorable win over England at the Gaddafi Stadium on Wednesday, Afghanistan have a realistic chance of making their second successive semifinals of a global event, less than a year after their entry into the last four stage of the T20 World Cup in the Americas.

On the other hand, a win for Australia will secure their passage to the semifinals of the tournament while eliminating Afghanistan with a game to spare.

However, it is easier said than done. For one, for all their firepower in batting, Australia are without their three leading fast bowlers in Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood.

The trio's absence was felt as England

racked up a 350-plus total in their tournament opener before the Aussies rode on Josh Inglis's counterattacking hundred to emerge victorious by five wickets and 15 balls to spare.

Two-time winners Australia are seeking to regain the Champions Trophy title after a gap of 15 years. They had won back-to-back titles in 2006 and 2009 but have failed to reach the finals in the 2013 and 2017 editions, after which the event was discontinued.

In the absence of their big fast bowlers, Australia know that their strength lies in batting with the likes of Travis Head, Steve Smith, Marnus Labuschagne and Glenn Maxwell capable of inflicting plenty of damage on the opposition bowling attack.

While there is no doubt the absence of regulars has weakened the team, it has also provided an opportunity for the young Turks to impress, cement their place in the side, and carry forward the rich Australian legacy in marquee events.



Australia are expected to produce a strong performance with the bat but for people like Ben Dwarshuis, Spencer Johnson, Nathan Ellis, and Adam

Zampa, who will shoulder the responsibility with the ball in challenging conditions, they are aware that they will have to put their best foot forward if they are to progress from the group stage. Dwarshuis and Johnson were profligate against England (the match against South Africa was washed out), and they will look to make amends on Thursday, and in Zampa, Australia have a spinner capable of exploiting the conditions in Pakistan.

As far as Afghanistan are concerned, their batting will be spearheaded by swashbuckling opener Ibrahim Zadran, whose 177 against England is now the highest individual score in the Champions Trophy.

Having lost to the Afghans in the T20 World Cup last year, Australia will not take their upcoming opponents lightly, and Afghanistan head coach Jonathan Trott acknowledged that in the press conference after the victory over England.

But Trott has no reasons to worry as he also has a formidable bowling attack at his disposal with Azmatullah Omarzai leading the pace unit besides the spin trio of Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi and Noor Ahmad.

Teams:

Australia: Steve Smith (captain), Sean Abbott, Alex Carey, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Aaron Hardie, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Spencer Johnson, Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell, Tanveer Sangha, Matthew Short, Adam Zampa.

Afghanistan: Hashmatullah Shahidi (captain), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqullah Atal, Rahman Shah, Ikram Alikhil, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharoti, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Farid Malik, Naveed Zadran. Reserves: Darwish Rasooli, Bilal Sami.

Match starts at 2.30 PM. (PTI)

Women's Premier League: In-form MI eye revenge against DC



BENGALURU, Feb 27: Former champions Mumbai Indians will look to avenge their first-leg loss and continue the recent winning streak when they take on Delhi Capitals in a top-of-the-table Women's Premier League clash here on Friday.

Only DC managed to upstage MI in the four matches at Vadodra earlier this month, and revenge will be high on the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side's mind when it takes the field on Friday.

Since that loss, MI have been on a three-match winning streak, beating Gujarat Giants by five wickets, Royal Challengers Bengaluru by four wickets and UP Warriorz by eight wickets respectively.

And come Friday, MI would want to continue the run to keep their place at the top of the league standings.

MI are currently leading the WPL table with six points from four games, but are closely followed by DC on six points from five matches.

MI's strength lies in its power-packed batting line. English batter Nat-Sciver Brunt has been in terrific form for the inaugural champions, leading the run-getters' chart with 254 from four matches, including three half-centuries.

Skipper Harmanpreet too is in good touch and has a fifty in her name in four games.

Hayley Matthews's return to form augurs well for MI. The West Indies opener hit a 50-ball 59 in MI's comfortable eight-wicket win over UP Warriorz in their last match here on Wednesday.

But wicketkeeper-batter Yastika Bhatia hasn't come good at the top of the order which remains a cause of concern for MI. Besides

New Zealand's Amelia Kerr too will be desperate for runs in the middle-order.

Sciver-Brunt is not just contributing with the bat. With the ball in hand, she returned with impressive figures of 3 for 18 in MI's last match.

Shabnim Ismail has also been impressive for MI with the new ball, while they will depend on Amanjot Kaur, Mathews and Kerr's all-round abilities in the middle overs.

DC, on the other hand, have not been particularly consistent in their three wins out of five games.

The team is one of the pre-tournament favourites, and it will take confidence from the six-wicket win over Gujarat Giants in its last game on Tuesday.

DC's batting lineup has finally fired with Shafali Verma (44) and Jess Jonassen (61 not out) striking form.

But skipper Meg Lanning, who had just one good outing, continues to struggle at the top.

Jemimah Rodrigues, and Annabel Sutherland have provided occasional fireworks in the middle-order but DC would look for more consistent performances from the batting department.

In Shikha Pandey, Marizanne Kapp, young Titas Sadhu, Sutherland and Minnu Mani, DC also boast of a formidable bowling attack.

Teams:

Mumbai Indians: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Yastika Bhatia (wk), Nadine de Klerk, Sanskriti Gupta, Saika Ishaque, Shabnim Ismail, Jintamani Kalita, G Kamalini, Amandeep Kaur, Amanjot Kaur, Sathyaamoorthy Keerthana, Amelia Kerr, Akshita Maheshwari, Hayley Matthews, Sajeevan Sajana, Nat Sciver-Brunt, Parunika Sisodia, Chloe Tryon.

Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning (c), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Sneha Deepthi, Alice Capsey, Annabel Sutherland, Arundhati Reddy, Jess Jonassen, Marizanne Kapp, Minnu Mani, N Charani, Niki Prasad, Radha Yadav, Shikha Pandey, Nandini Kashyap (wk), Taniya Bhatia (wk), Sarah Bryce (wk), Titas Sadhu.

Match Starts at 7:30 pm IST. (PTI)

RAWALPINDI, Feb 27: Pakistan's campaign in the Champions Trophy ended on a winless note after their match against Bangladesh was called off without a ball being bowled due to incessant rain here on Thursday.

The match was effectively a dead-rubber, with both teams already out of contention after failing to secure a win in their two previous matches. Pakistan, hosting an ICC tournament for the first time in 29 years, had hoped for a strong finish but ended their disastrous campaign without a victory.

Persistent downpour left the ground soaked, with covers in place and puddles forming around the field. With weather not improving, match officials called off the game nearly two hours after the scheduled start time. The gloomy weather prevented even the toss from taking place.

As a result, the two teams shared one point each, though both Pakistan and Bangladesh finished the tournament winless.

This is the second match in Rawalpindi to be called off without a ball being bowled, following the washout between South Africa and Australia earlier this week.

The rain-induced abandonment left the home fans frustrated, as they hoped for play at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

Pakistan have faced criticism for their poor showing in the tournament, having suffered defeats to New Zealand (by 60 runs) and India (by six wickets).

"We wanted to do well and perform well in front of our nation. The



expectations are very high. We didn't perform well and it is disappointing for us," Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan said.

Reflecting on the road ahead, Rizwan said: "You can learn from your mistakes. We have made mistakes in the last few games. Hopefully, we can learn from these."

"We are next going to New Zealand and, hopefully, we can perform there and the mistakes that we did against New Zealand here in Pakistan, we can learn from that. And we will do better in New Zealand."

Pakistan's assistant coach, Azhar Mahmood, who hails from the city, attributed his team's poor show in the tournament to injuries to key players, and the fact that the team took too much pressure against India.

"We haven't played well in this tournament. We have played good cricket in this format, but in the tournament it has not gone well because of injuries. Against India, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves,"

he said.

"We know where we need to improve. It is all about adapting and taking responsibility. The results have also been a surprise for us," he added.

The former Test all-rounder said that the people need to keep faith in the players.

"We have to stick with the talent we identify for it to come good over the months," said Mahmood.

Pakistan had lost two top players -- Fakhar Zaman and Saim Ayub -- to injuries, affecting their campaign.

"The guy who has been performing from the last few months in Australia, South Africa, Zimbabwe... the team was combined and then suddenly when someone is injured, the team will be disturbed," added Rizwan.

"As a captain, you can look forward to that as well. One side you can say that the team is disturbed, but this is no excuse. Yes, Fakhar Zaman and Saim Ayub were injured, but we will learn from this," the captain added. (PTI)

Zone level competitions of 70th Bordoloi Trophy 2025 concludes in Diphu



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 27: The 70th Bharat Ratna Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Trophy 2025 (Zone Level) concluded with a thrilling grand finale at KASA Stadium, Diphu on February 27. The much-anticipated final match, under Cluster 5, was played between Lenruol FC and Dima United FC, with the kick-off at 2 pm. Organised by the Directorate of Sports and Youth Welfare, Assam, in collaboration with the Guwahati Sports Association and various District Sports Associations of Assam, the tournament brought together some of the finest football talents from the region.

The closing ceremony was graced by several distinguished dignitaries, with Dr. Bishnu Ram Nunisa, Chairman of

BRLGB (Cluster 5), attending as chief guest. Other notable attendees included Zahir Khan, Observer of BRLGB and DSO, Dima Hasao, Shri Relif Ronghang, DSO, Karbi Anglong, Shri Kensing Engti, Treasurer of KASA, Pradip Ronghang, assistant secretary of KASA, Horen Engti, Football Secretary of KASA, along with Terangpi, Eva Singfo, Hellen Enghipi, and other KASA members.

After an intense match, Dima United FC (4-2) emerged as the champion of this edition of the Gopinath Bordoloi Trophy, showcasing remarkable skill and determination. Football enthusiasts witnessed an electrifying game, marking yet another successful chapter in the history of this prestigious tournament.

Afghanistan is never going to be taken lightly ever again: Jonathan Trott

LAHORE, Feb 27: Afghanistan is "never going to be taken lightly" by any team after his "resilient" side knocked England out of the Champions Trophy with a memorable win, head coach Jonathan Trott has asserted.

Ibrahim Zadran's majestic 177 and pacer Azmatullah Omarzai's flier trumped Joe Root's masterful hundred, as the Afghanistan registered a thrilling eight-run win against England here on Wednesday.

Looking ahead to their next must-win game against Australia, Trott also said that Afghanistan team will take confidence from their fine showings against the Aussies in recent World Cup outings.

"Since I've been coach we've played against Australia three times and we've been in the game each of those games. So, we should take a lot of confidence from that."

"And I think certainly what happened in the World Cup, T20 World Cup, and I say this to the players as

well, that Afghanistan's never going to be taken lightly ever again," Trott said at the post-match press conference.

"I see every game that we play is going to be competitive and every game we go into I expect to win," the Englishman added.

Wins by Afghanistan against established Test nations are no longer seen as upsets and recent performances on the world stage mean they cannot afford to fly under the radar. (PTI)

'Dressing room camaraderie among Indians, Pakistanis and Afghans propelled UAE to Asia Cup'

SHARJAH, Feb 27: The UAE cricket team largely comprises players from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and it's the dressing room camaraderie between these men that has propelled the side to the Asia Cup, feels head coach Lalchand Rajput.

Some of these UAE players served as net bowlers for teams playing their Champions Trophy matches in Dubai, having a go at the likes of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

"It's good that we have qualified for Asia Cup, that will be a good opportunity for our players to play against India and Pakistan, big teams that will give a lot of confidence to the players as well."

"Now we are in the last stage of the T20 World Cup qualifiers. We have topped our group and now we will try and qualify for the T20 World Cup as well," Rajput told PTI after his team's four-hour practice session at Sharjah Cricket Ground.

A 35-member core probable group is training in Sharjah as the ICC Academy in Dubai, where they normally practice, has been allotted to teams playing in the ongoing Champions Trophy.

"See we have a mixture of Pakistanis and Indians and the main thing is that the dressing room atmosphere is very good, we are playing as one unit, everybody is happy for each other's performance, that's very



good and the camaraderie is excellent.

"When a team does well, I think the dressing room atmosphere should be very good and I am sure this is the area where we focus on and if you look at our team, I think that is the main USP," the former India player observed.

Back home, these players have represented their state teams at U-16 and U-19 levels to gain some experience before ar-

riving in this country.

"Somebody has played first-class cricket also, so it's good to see that they have got the experience and they carry forward their experience with the UAE team," he pointed out.

Rajput emphasised on exposure and said they are now also focusing on the longer formats of the game.

"Exposure is very important, and that's

why I have introduced red-ball cricket because we want to play 90 overs, like a longer version because our second focus is 50 overs qualifier.

"So we started to build now only because we have to play 21 matches, and in 21 matches, I think we have to try and make sure that we win most of the games," he said.

"The focus is on batsmen playing long innings, for bowlers to bowl 10 overs. We are playing with SG ball which seems a little more, the batsmen can try and play or focus more on the swing as well and since we are going to Netherlands for the World Cup Qualifier League 2, I think this is the best preparation we can do."

Rajput has lauded the role of ICC in the development of cricket in these regions.

"I think we have got every support from them, that's why cricket is big here, if you look at it, we are getting a lot of matches which have been played in Dubai as well."

"I think cricket has been improving so much here because of the ICC as well. ICC's headquarters is also in Dubai, so it's a natural advantage for you."

Speaking of the most talented players in his group, Rajput picked Rahul Chopra, Mohammad Wasim, Tanvi Suri, Junaid Siddique, Javedullah, Simranjeet, and Ayaan Khan. (PTI)