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Cong convenes meeting of Assam, Kerala leaders for upcoming assembly polls

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: The Congress has called a meeting here of its senior leaders from Assam and Kerala this week in which the status of the organisation and preparations for the assembly elections to be held next year will be discussed, sources said on Wednesday.

The meeting of Kerala leaders on Friday comes amid a row over Congress' Thiruvananthapuram MP Shashi Tharoor's recent article in a newspaper that drew criticism from some Congress leaders in Kerala for his perceived praise of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in the state for boosting the investment climate.

In Assam, the Congress has opened a front against the BJP government and Chief Minister Hi-

manta Biswa Sharma on the issue of alleged corruption. On the other hand, Sharma and the BJP have accused Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's wife of having links with Pakistan and its neighbouring country's intelligence agency ISI.

The meeting with senior leaders from Assam will be held on Thursday.

The Congress is the main opposition party both in Kerala and Assam and seeking to wrest power from the LDF and the BJP in the two states respectively.

Assembly elections are set to take place in Kerala and Assam in March-April next year.

The two meetings with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former president Rahul Gandhi will be attended by the party in-charges (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



**'Advantage Assam 2.0 concludes ● Around 270 deals signed during valedictory prog
● Infrastructure sector to receive around ₹1 lakh cr: Himanta**

Investments worth ₹ 4.78 lakh cr announced: State Govt

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: Investment announcements worth around ₹ 4,80,000 crore were made at the Assam government's two-day business summit, Chief Secretary Ravi Kota said on Wednesday.

During the valedictory function of the 'Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit', around 270 agreements worth ₹ 2.75 lakh crore were signed among the state government and various companies, he said.

"We have received a total investment proposal of around ₹ 4.78 lakh crore so far. This includes MoUs and announcements by top industry leaders," Kota said.

The total figure includes ₹ 1.25-lakh crore investment announcements by industry leaders like Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, and ₹ 78,000-crore investment by the government sector in



infrastructure development, he added.

Meanwhile, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said a total investment of nearly ₹ 1 lakh crore was announced for

infrastructure development by various government agencies during the business summit here.

The investments will be made by the central government in sectors such as road transport, railway

connectivity, waterways enhancement and air connectivity, he added.

Speaking at a session on roads, railway and waterways infrastructure during the 'Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit 2025', Sarma said, "Announcements have been made by Union ministers for various projects in road, railway, airways, waterways and I-way since yesterday. If all the amount is taken together, it comes to nearly ₹ 1 lakh crore."

Mentioning the road projects to be undertaken, Sarma said these will reduce travel time drastically and help in economic development.

The Guwahati-Panchagram expressway highway, first such in the Northeast, will bring down travel time to Silchar to five hours from over (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ethanol blending to be increased to 20 percent in India: Puri

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, announced on Wednesday that India is planning to increase its target for blending ethanol with gasoline to over 20%.

A committee has been formed under NITI Aayog to look into this initiative, he said.

Speaking at the Advantage Assam 2.0 investment summit in Guwahati, Puri highlighted that 19.6% ethanol blending has already been achieved.

"We are considering blending more than 20% biofuel. An NITI Aayog group has already been established to explore this," he said.

The Union Minister further emphasised, "Biofuel blending is nearing 20%. Achieving this target six years (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam key player in India's energy sector: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday asserted that the state remains a key player in India's energy sector, with vast hydrocarbon reserves and a skilled workforce and oil and gas potential extending to neighbouring regions serving as a stimulus for development.

Assam has played a pioneering role in India's oil industry with four operational refineries and a combined refining capacity of 7.45 million metric tonnes (MMT), ensuring a consistent supply of energy to fuel the nation, the chief minister (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tuliram Ronghang presents budget for 2025-26 with key allocations

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 26: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, presented the budget for the financial year 2025-26 on Wednesday.

The session, chaired by KAAC Chairman Raju Tisso, began with an obituary reference to former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, who passed away on December 26 last year.

In his budget speech, the CEM

announced several key allocations, including an increase in the monthly honorarium for Members of the Autonomous Council (MACs) to ₹ 1 lakh. He also announced a budget allocation of ₹ 420 lakh to the Land & Revenue Department from KAAC sources for enhancing the monthly honorarium for Sarkari Gaon Buras (SGBs) from the existing ₹ 3,000 to ₹ 4,000.

Additionally, a provision of ₹ 75 lakh was made for the promotion

of the culture and languages of various indigenous communities.

A budget allocation of ₹ 1 crore per year has been earmarked for the development of the MACs' constituencies. Moreover, ₹ 56 crore has been set aside for the pension of former MACs. The Education Department also received a budget allocation of ₹ 9,304 lakh for the payment of salaries to teachers at UPSC and APSC coaching centers for ST candidates, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sonowal announces ₹ 4,800 crore for waterways development

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Wednesday announced an investment of ₹ 4,800 crore for the development of waterways and related infrastructure in Assam over the next five years.

Sonowal was speaking at a session on the state's road, railway, and riverine infrastructure during the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit here.

"I want to announce that in the next five years, ₹ 4,800 crore will be invested by my ministry in Assam," Sonowal said.

He further emphasised that under the dynamic lead-

ership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is advancing toward realizing the vision of a Viksit Bharat.

"Assam and the Northeast play a crucial role in advancing this effort to realise PM Modi's goal. Inland Waterways are an essential part of this plan, as the Prime Minister has worked to revive the sector from near oblivion and neglect since 2014," he added.

Sonowal explained that with its rich network of rivers, the inland waterways in Assam aim to rejuvenate their historic role as the primary conduit for trade and commerce. Globally seen as a futuristic mode of transportation, inland waterways offer an economical, efficient, and environmentally (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Shri Ashok Singhal
Minister, Health & Family Welfare etc., Assam



SCREENING DRIVE ON NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES (NCDs)

20 February to 31 March 2025

I humbly request the people of Assam to actively participate in the ongoing Screening Drive on Non-Communicable Diseases from 20th February, 2025 to 31st March, 2025 by visiting your nearest Government Health Facility.

All government health facilities will conduct a screening drive for :



Hypertension



Diabetes



Oral, Breast & Cervical Cancer

Wellness activities during the camp

Yoga, Personal Hygiene, Eat Right activities, diet and nutrition, substance abuse (Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs), Mental Health, physical activity among others

Call 104
For health related queries

Call 108
For Ambulance Service

COMMITTED TOWARDS HEALTH FOR ALL

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India with the support of various State Government is conducting special screening drive for Non-Communicable Diseases from 20th February, 2025 to 31st March, 2025.

Government of Assam is also doing the special screening drive in all the Health Institutions including Ayushman Arogya Mandirs.

Key highlights of the drive

- To screen all the population above 30 years for Non-Communicable Diseases.
- Free blood tests.
- Free Medicines.
- Extended services through outreach camps.

Are you 30 years and above?
Get screened for free at your nearest Government Healthcare Facility.

(NHM/D/2024-25/566)

AS-CFMS signs MoU with TERI to collaborate on policy innovations

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: The AS-CFMS, a special purpose for implementing public financial management reforms, and the TERI, a think tank dedicated to conduct research for sustainable development, signed an MoU to collaborate on policy innovations and solutions in finance and climate change, an official said on Wednesday.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed during the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure summit here.

The Assam Society for Comprehensive Financial Management System (AS-CFMS) is administered under the Governing Body and Executive Committee of the Assam Finance Department.

AS-CFMS is administered under the Governing Body and Executive Committee of the Assam finance department.

The MoU was signed by Fi-



nance Secretary Laya Madduri and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) Senior Director Di-pankar Saharia.

Madduri said the partnership with TERI will advance Assam's sustainable development goals, with green budgeting and eco-friendly procurement strengthening the state's climate resilience.

"This partnership underscores

our commitment to driving sustainable solutions through policy and practice. By integrating green finance into public systems, we aim to support Assam in achieving its sustainability goals," TERI Director General Dr Vibha Dhawan said.

The MoU aims to strengthen the policy ecosystem to accelerate Assam's transition towards a

greener economy.

The collaboration will also strengthen frameworks for Green Budget reporting and Green Procurement in Assam, while building the capacity of Administrative Departments and engaging stakeholders to promote awareness and drive meaningful action, Madduri said.

AS-CFMS will apply its expertise in public financial management to integrate sustainability principles into Assam's fiscal policies and reporting systems.

It will also serve as a nodal agency to facilitate the adoption of research-driven policy measures and ensure the active involvement of stakeholders in policy innovations, capacity-building programs, and awareness initiatives.

TERI, in turn, will bring its domain knowledge in green finance, capacity building, and policy research to strengthen the state's green public finance ecosystem, Dhawan added. (PTI)

Cong convenes meeting of Assam,

of both the states, the president of the Pradesh Congress Committee, the Leader of the Legislative Party, MPs and many other senior leaders. Tharoor's article in the English-language daily, praising the entrepreneurial growth in Kerala under the LDF government, kicked off a political storm in the state a week ago, with the Congress questioning the basis of it while the CPI(M) welcomed it.

Later, Tharoor's remarks in a Malayalam podcast were seen by many as pitching himself for leadership in the state. He is said to have been upset with a section of the state leadership. Speaking with reporters in Thiruvananthapuram, Tharoor noted that a party meeting has been called on Friday and he "will be there with every-one else". Amid reports that the Congress high command is planning a revamp of the party in Kerala from the top, KPCC president K Sudhakaran on Wednesday said he will abide by any decision taken by the All India Congress Committee.

While making it clear that no one from the AICC has asked him to step down, Sudhakaran said it is up to the high command to take a decision on reorganising the party and changing the KPCC president.

In Assam, Gogoi has rejected the allegation against his wife as "ridiculous" and top Congress leaders have stood by him, slamming Sarma for the claims. (PTI)

Investments worth ₹ 4.78 lakh

10 hours now. Relevant authorities have cleared the elevated corridor at Kaziranga National Park and tunnel under Brahmaputra River, and these projects will be game-changers for the state, the CM said.

He said work has already started for an express highway to Dibrugarh from Guwahati to drastically reduce travel time. Sarma stressed that skilled manpower would be required for executing the infrastructure development projects, including engineers and other technically qualified people.

"For executing these projects, we will need skilled labour. And hence, we have involved youth in this sum-

mit," he said. The CM urged engineering colleges to align their curriculum to the needs of the industry. "Emotion cannot build a community. We have to create a pragmatic, realistic and futuristic roadmap," he said. "Our next challenge is for academic reforms. We have to overhaul our education system to create skilled manpower," Sarma added. He maintained that with proper planning and training, Assam will be able to meet the skilled manpower requirement for the projects. The state could get a headstart and later on provide skilled manpower to other states where similar infrastructural projects are undertaken," Sarma added. (PTI)

Ethanol blending to be increased to 20

ahead of schedule under the leadership of PM @narendramodi ji demonstrates that India's efforts are on the right track." Regarding India's Green Hydrogen revolution, Puri stated, "In the field of green hydrogen, we are employing technology used in submarines. Thanks to the efforts of PM @narendramodi ji, electrolyzer manufacturing companies from around the world have joined India's campaign. The Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme has given new momentum to this sector." Despite the challenges in India's development, Puri affirmed that all fossil fuel production sectors are expected to reach net zero by 2045.

"The economic performance of any nation is assessed based on its energy utilization because energy is the backbone of a country's economy, its lifeline. India's crude oil consumption has been rising and is expected to increase by 20%-30% in the near future," he added. Earlier in the day, Puri lauded the Assam government's ambitious initiative in organizing the investment summit, stating, "The Advantage Assam 2.0 program marks the beginning of a new future, not just for Assam, but for the entire Northeast. This program is connecting the world with Assam's progress and opportunities. The potential of the Northeast will give a fresh impetus to India's journey toward becoming a developed nation."

"I am also grateful to have joined this event in Guwahati, alongside the state's Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and shared my views on India's energy potential," he added.

Meanwhile, CM Sarma took to X (formerly Twitter) to share his thoughts, stating, "It was a privilege to listen to Hon'ble Union Minister Shri @HardeepPuri Ji's insights on the dynamism of India's energy sector at #AdvantageAssam2. India has set an ambitious vision to transition to green energy and is achieving its goals ahead of schedule. Assam is committed to significantly contributing to this vision set by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji and is already making progress toward meeting its green energy targets."

"I was also honored to join the Hon'ble Union Minister in signing an important MOU between the Government of Assam and @ONGC, and in dedicating the City Gas Grid projects by @AdaniOnline," he added.

"At the previous Advantage Assam Summit, the Ministry of Petroleum announced plans to bring a gas grid from Barauni to Numaligarh—a 1600 km pipeline," The chief minister mentioned.

"Despite Assam accounting for 14% of India's total gas production, the state's domestic output can only meet 7-8% of the country's demand due to increasing industrialization and the City Gas initiative. You have disproven the misconception that Assam's gas is being used elsewhere by completing the 1600 km pipeline and the Northeast gas grid in record time. For Assam's development, we are instead importing gas from other parts of the country and the global market," he concluded.

Tuliram Ronghang presents budget for

along with ₹ 2,468.71 lakh for the payment of Karbi Language Teachers. A tentative budget amount of Rs. 600 crore has been allocated for transferred/trusted subjects of the state government, including SOPD funds, CSS, etc. The CEM expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for allowing the KAAC to prepare its own budget.

"I thank the Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma for allowing the KAAC to prepare our own budget. Previously, the budget for the inherent subjects of the KAAC was prepared under the directive of the state government, but now, with the blessings of our CM, we have the autonomy to prepare our own budget. Our Chief Minister has clearly stated that, except for the Home department and law and order, he is willing to provide full support for the development of all other departments in the autonomous districts of Assam. This is the first time in the history of the KAAC that we are able to prepare our own budget," the CEM said. The CEM also emphasised the need for strict regulation of brick kiln industries and the closure of those operating illegally.

"There are many brick kilns operating illegally in Bokajan. I have directed the Taxation Department to shut them down by March. These brick kilns lack a trading license from the KAAC and other necessary documents," he said. Speaking to media persons after the session, the CEM informed them that the budget had reflected all the queries and development schemes raised by the people during the CEM Interaction Program. Although the state government has not yet convened its budget session, it has proposed a tentative allocation of ₹ 2,500 lakh for entrusted subjects, which includes both salary and non-salary expenses.

Sonowal announces ₹ 4,800 crore

friendly way to transport cargo and passengers. "With the launch of schemes like Jalvahak, the Modi government has incentivized businesses to switch to inland waterways, improving economies of scale, decongesting railways and roadways, and creating an ecosystem that is essential for Assam's crucial role in India's rise as the world's largest and most self-reliant economy by 2047," he added.

At the summit, the Union Minister also announced an allocation of ₹ 1,500 crore for the planned transition to Green Vessels by 2030 under the Harit Nauka scheme. Over ₹ 1,500 crore has been earmarked to facilitate cruise tourism and enhance cargo handling capacity by 2027-28 in NW2 and NW16. This includes the construction of jetties with onshore facilities at Silghat, Bishwanath Ghat, Neamati Ghat, and Guujan, along with the construction of a new building for the Regional Office, MSDC, guest house, and office space for ITAT at Fancy Bazar in Guwahati.

An amount of ₹ 375 crore has been allocated for the development of Phase II of the Ship Repair Facility at Pandu. To maintain the fairway, the government has entrusted the Dredging Corporation of India (DCI) with ensuring a guaranteed draft of 2.5 meters from the Bangladesh border to Pandu in NW-2 until 2026-27, with ₹ 191 crore earmarked for this purpose. "Advantage Assam has always served as a catalyst for the region's economic revival, providing businesses with a strategic platform to expand trade and investment opportunities. With the immense support Assam has received from our Prime Minister, we remain firmly committed to the holistic development of Assam and the Northeast's economy," Sonowal said.

"Among the various ongoing projects to enhance Assam's inland waterways, we are also planning to transform conventional vessels into Green Vessels under the Harit Nauka scheme," he added.

"This affirms our government's commitment to sustainable development, a milestone set by our dynamic leader, Narendra Modi ji. Given the immense potential of riverine tourism in the state, we are developing an ecosystem that includes infrastructure and fairways for smooth, regular, and viable operations. You may be happy to know that Dredging Corporation of India (DCI), with its extensive experience in sea dredging, has been entrusted with dredging NW2—this will be the first such project on any river in India," Sonowal said.

Sonowal also announced the development of the Water Metro Service in Guwahati and Dhubri with an estimated investment of ₹ 315 crore. Based on the success of the Kochi Metro Service, a feasibility study is being conducted. He also announced the deployment of two Electric Catamarans being built by Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL). A world-class cruise terminal will also be built in Guwahati with an estimated investment of ₹ 100 crore. An investment of more than ₹ 646 crore has been earmarked to construct riverine infrastructure across the Brahmaputra under the Sagarmala Scheme, the flagship program of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways.

At the session, the Union Minister was joined by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other dignitaries.

Assam key player in India's energy

said on the concluding day of the Advantage Assam 2.0 Infrastructure and Investment Summit.

The march of the oil industry had gained momentum in the late 19th century and the state contains 12 per cent of the country's natural gas reserves and produces half of India's onshore natural gas, he said at the thematic session on "Unlocking Assam's Energy Potential: Building Future-Ready Oil and Gas Infrastructure, Innovation, and Investment Aligned with Global Energy Transitions". The session dealt with Assam's strategic initiatives in the oil and gas sector with a special focus on energy infrastructure development, innovation, and investment opportunities in tandem with global energy shifts. The state's retail network includes 1,180 outlets and its annual LPG consumption stands at a significant 0.5 MMT, he said.

The major players in the petrochemical sector, such as Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL), Assam Petrochemicals Limited (APL), and Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL), also contribute substantially to state revenues, with royalties and taxes amounting to over ₹ 11,700 crore annually, the CM said.

The horizon for Assam's hydrocarbon sector is promising and by 2030, crude oil availability is projected to double, and natural gas production is set to increase from 3.2 to 6.3 billion cubic meters (BCM), he said.

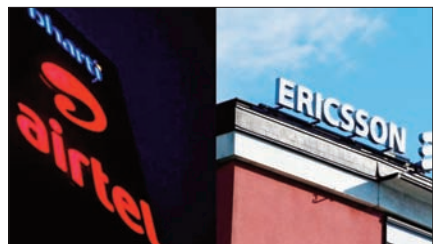
Sarma also spoke about developments in BCPL and NRL and the capacity expansion of the refineries that signify Assam's emergence as a petrochemical hub, fostering both industrial growth and job creation.

Projects like the Barauni-Guwahati Pipeline (BGPL) is connecting Assam to the national gas grid, and the 1,670 km North East Gas Grid (NEGG) is promoting regional connectivity, ensuring seamless energy distribution. The City Gas Distribution (CGD) network is expanding rapidly, with 22 CNG stations across the state, promoting clean energy adoption among citizens, Sarma added.

Oil India Limited (OIL) has commissioned India's first Green Hydrogen plant in Jorhat, producing 10 kilograms per day using solar power. Collaborative efforts between IIT Guwahati and OIL are furthering research in this field, with plans to integrate green hydrogen into transportation and industrial sectors, he said. (PTI)

New agreement spans packet core, signaling, charging & policy solutions

Bharti Airtel partners with Ericsson 5G Core technology to drive 5G evolution



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: Bharti Airtel and Ericsson (NASDAQ: ERIC) have strengthened their longstanding partnership through a new collaboration to deploy Ericsson's secure, high-performing 5G Core network offerings to the benefit of Airtel's millions of customers and enterprises across India, a press note said on Wednesday.

The collaboration will enable Airtel to seamlessly transition to a commercially live, full-scale 5G Standalone network over time, bringing the high-end capabilities of 5G to their customers.

Randeep Sekhon, CTO, Bharti Airtel, says: "Ericsson's enduring partnership with Airtel has entered an exciting new phase, marked by the deployment of Ericsson's 5G Core solutions to support Airtel's transition to 5G Standalone. This rollout will play a pivotal role in Airtel's long-term 5G strategy, boosting network capacity and enabling

the delivery of innovative, differentiated services to customers."

Andres Vicente, head of market area Southeast Asia, Oceania and India, Ericsson, says: "As a global 5G leader, Ericsson is committed to providing Bharti Airtel its latest technology solutions. This deployment is a significant step towards making Bharti Airtel's network 5G Standalone ready and future proof". "Ericsson's dual-mode 5G core enables monetization through network slicing-based services and network API exposure, unleashing new, innovative use cases for consumers and enterprises," he added.

As part of this agreement, Ericsson will deploy its Signaling Controller solution within Bharti Airtel's network, the note further said.

Furthermore, Ericsson's 5G Standalone-enabled Charging and Policy solution will be introduced. These new capabilities represent a strategic enhancement to Bharti Airtel's 5G monetization efforts, enabling the development of new business models.

Ericsson is a longstanding Bharti Airtel connectivity partner with a close relationship spanning more than 25 years and covering every generation of mobile communications, including the award of Bharti Airtel's first 5G contract in India, the statement concluded.

Tata Motors launches New Tiago, Tiago EV, and Tigor in Guwahati



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: Tata Motors, India's leading SUV manufacturer, on Wednesday launched the 2025 Tiago, Tiago EV, and Tigor at Kamakhya Motors, Kamakhya Gate.

The Tiago starts at ₹4.99 lakh, the Tiago EV at ₹7.99 lakh, and the Tigor at ₹5.99 lakh.

Customers can visit the company's official website (cars.tatamotors.com) for more details and to register their interest.

Following its 'Multi-Powertrain' strategy, Tata Motors will introduce the 2025 Tiago and Tigor in petrol, CNG, and electric variants.

Both cars will be available in MT and AMT options.

The event was attended by Sujit Kumar Jha (Chief Manager, SBI RLI Maligaon), Ujjal Chakraborty (ASM, HDFC Bank), Prakash Choudhury (ASM, HDFC Bank), Neelakshi Choudhury (Section Manager, SBI Maligaon), Anjan Baruah, Amal Sharma (Regional Training Manager), Yogesh Malhotra (MD, Kamakhya Motors), and Prakhyaat Baruah.

HDFC life launches click 2 achieve par advantage to enable dreams and goals for everyone

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: HDFC Life has launched its latest product HDFC Life Click 2 Achieve Par Advantage. This participating product has been designed keeping in mind milestones associated with the different life stages of an individual.

As one continues to save for their growing aspirations/goals, it is observed that there is a preference for early liquidity (for short term needs), flexibility and financial security for the future.

HDFC Life Click 2 Achieve Par Advantage comes with following key features:

In Policy Continuance Benefit (PCB), future premiums are waived in case of death of the Life Assured. The Death Benefit is paid

out as a lump sum immediately and also the future benefits under the plan continue for the nominee or survivor.

The Choice of Death Benefit Multiple, enables one to choose a customised Death Benefit Multiple – 5x, 7x or 11x – as per their need.

Through Paid Up Addition one can convert partial or the entire cash bonus payable into Paid-Up Additions which can be encashed anytime during the term of the policy. Customers can choose any combination from the above options as per their future needs.

Along with life insurance cover for financial security of the family, the plan also offers:

Additional Life Coverage by which one can choose to cover one's spouse.

Tax benefits as applicable for an individual, based on prevailing tax laws

Life insurance is a necessity for every working individual with financial responsibilities.

HDFC Life has been an innovator in the life insurance space offering customisable products that meet the ever-evolving needs of Indian consumers.

The Company offers a robust digital platform that provides multiple servicing options to customers as per their convenience.

HDFC Life's commitment to customers is reflected in its consistently high claim settlement ratio, which was 99.50% for FY24.

Speaking on the product launch, Aneesh Khanna – Head Products & Segments, HDFC Life, com-

mented, "We, at HDFC Life, believe that life insurance products need to be designed to fit the specific needs of every individual, depending on their age, life stage, current income and future plans. Every individual dreams of a financially secure future for their loved ones and also of achieving goals such as buying a home, sending their children for higher education to a prestigious institute, etc. These dreams need long-term planning with an instrument that offers flexibility, liquidity and financial security. HDFC Life Click 2 Achieve Par Advantage has been designed to offer a solution to individuals who endeavour to create a better future and protect their dreams against uncertainties with a financial safety net."

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Piyush Goyal calls for unified electrical industry expo to strengthen India's global leadership

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: On the third day of ELECRAMA 2025, Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal delivered a keynote address emphasizing the need for a unified, large-scale exposition to position India as the premier global destination for electrical and energy solutions. Accompanied by key industry leaders, including IEEMA President Sunil Singhvi, ELECRAMA 2025 Chairman Vikram Gandotra, and IEEMA Vice Chairman Siddharth Bhutoria, Goyal outlined the government's commitment to strengthening domestic manufacturing, fostering clean energy adoption, and ensuring a future-ready power sector through innovation and collaboration.

Goyal proposed merging major industry exhibitions, including ELECRAMA, into a single, world-class platform that could showcase India's full capabilities to global investors and stakeholders. He argued that consolidating these events into one large-scale exhibition, with over 1,500 exhibitors and 100,000 visitors, would reinforce India's standing as a global leader in electrical innovation. He called on industry associations to take the lead in making this vision a reality, emphasizing that India must not only strengthen its domestic sector but also expand its exports and global partnerships.

"India is at the forefront of the global energy transition, and our electrical industry plays a critical role in this transformation," Goyal stated. "Instead of hosting multiple fragmented expos, we must come together to create a single event of scale and impact. The world should



say, 'Go to India, and you will see the future of electrical innovation.'"

With India rapidly scaling up its manufacturing capacity in the electrical and power sector, Goyal highlighted the opportunities emerging from renewable energy expansion, smart grids, and digital automation. He urged the industry to act with greater ambition and urgency, positioning India as a dominant player in the global supply chain.

The day also witnessed key developments in international collaboration, with the signing of MoUs led by Vimal Anand, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, at the Reverse Buyer Seller Meet (RBSM). These agreements are expected to drive investment, open global market opportunities, and accelerate technology-led growth in India's power sector.

On the sidelines, Anand remarked on India's rapid economic ascent, stating that the country is set to become the world's third-largest economy sooner than expected. He linked this growth directly to India's expanding infrastructure, logistics, and utility solutions, reinforcing

the government's focus on sustainable and tech-driven development.

Adding to the momentum, the fifth edition of the eTECHnext conference was inaugurated, bringing together experts to discuss clean energy, carbon markets, energy storage, and digital transformation in power generation. A key highlight was the launch of a whitepaper titled New Frontiers in Power Generation, which explored the role of energy storage in grid modernization and cost-efficiency. The conference also underscored the need for digitalization, smart grids, and workforce upskilling to ensure a seamless transition to a cleaner, technology-driven energy sector.

The day concluded with a high-level roundtable, Bharat, the Vishwamitra, led by Dr. Philipp Ackermann, Germany's Ambassador to India. The discussion focused on structural reforms, digitalization, and infrastructure investments as key drivers of India's sustained economic growth. Experts from the energy and electrical sectors deliberated on India's transition to clean energy, emphasizing the importance of investments in renewables, smart grids, and energy storage.

With participation from global policymakers, business leaders, and technology pioneers, ELECRAMA 2025 continues to serve as a crucial platform for shaping the future of India's power sector. By bridging the gap between policy, technology, and market readiness, the event is accelerating India's clean energy transformation and reinforcing its role as a global leader in sustainable power solutions.

Mahashivaratri celebrated across state with devotion and gaiety

Governor Kataria visits Bhima Sankar temple at Pahomi

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: On the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivaratri, Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, accompanied by the First Lady of Assam, Kumud Devi, visited the Bhima Shankar temple at Pahomi on Wednesday.

During his visit, Acharya performed Puja and offered his prayers for the well-being and prosperity of all sections of society.

Emphasising the significance of Shivaratri, he stated that worshipping Lord Shiva is a symbol of meditation, prayer, and fasting.

This sacred occasion also underscores the importance of reflecting on the ethics and virtues associated with Lord Shiva.

The governor further expressed his hope that the devout feelings associated with the festival would inspire individuals to embody the values of honesty, charity, and forgiveness.

He believed that this celebration would help people understand the essence and greatness of Lord Shiva.

Our Dibrugarh correspondent adds: Devotees from all across Dibrugarh gathered at the 200-years old Prachin Shiv Mandir during the morning hours to observe Mahashivaratri on Wednesday.

Devotees were seen waiting in a queue from early morning in front of the Shiv Mandir.

"Every year, we come here to observe Shivaratri. We have performed our puja and we would also thank the organisers for holding the Shivaratri in a well-organised way," said Bulbul Sharma, a resident of Dibrugarh.

The devotees offered prayers and worship at various Shiv temples across Dibrugarh and many people observed fasting during that auspicious day.

Over thousands of devotees visited the historic Raidongia Dol situated at Lezai-Khalkhwa area in Dibrugarh



during Shivaratri.

The Doui was built in 1750 by the Ahom King Swargadeo Parmatta Singha.

"Every year during Shivaratri, we come to Raidongia Dol to pray for the good health and well-being of my family members and every citizen. I urge the government of Assam to take steps for the preservation of the historic Doui," said a resident of Dibrugarh.

Our Margherita correspondent adds: The celebration of Mahashivaratri, a significant Hindu festival honouring Lord Shiva, was celebrated with huge gaiety, enthusiasm and devotion here at Margherita.

The celebrations began early in the morning, with devotees taking a holy bath in the nearby rivers and streams as they then gathered at the local Shiva temples, where they offered prayers, and offerings to the deity.

The temples were decorated with colorful lights, flowers and other ornaments, creating a festive atmosphere.

The devotees also performed the sacred ritual of Rudra Abhishek, where they bathed the Shivalinga with milk, honey and holy water as this ritual is believed to cleanse the soul and seek di-

vine blessings.

Dil Bahadur Chetry general secretary of Mahashivaratri celebration committee of Jharna Basti, Ledo said that Mahashivaratri is considered a sacred night for spiritual awakening and divine connection as it is believed that the planetary positions on this night create an ideal atmosphere for meditation and spiritual practices as the festival is also associated with the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva, the union of Shiva and Parvati, and a night for seeking liberation and divine blessings.

Dil Bahadur Chetry also said that Lord Shiva temple of Jharna Basti, Ledo was established in the year 1948 where today more than 5000 devotees attended from Margherita Co-District area irrespective of caste, creed, race, language and religion and prayed to almighty Lord Shiva.

During the night hours, devotees gathered for a night-long vigil, chanting prayers and singing bhajans as the celebrations will conclude with a grand cultural programme and a distribution of prasad among the devotees said Dil Bahadur Chetry.

Our Demow correspondent adds: People thronged to the Mandir in



Demow and offered prayers to Lord Shiva on the occasion of Mahashivaratri on Wednesday.

Shiva Mandir in Thowra Bamunbari near Demow and Shiva Doui in Sivasagar also witnessed huge crowds of people who gathered here to offer their prayers and offerings to Lord Shiva on the auspicious day.

Under the patronage of Raichai Sarbajanin Shiv Mandir Operating Committee, Shivratri and Bhaona Organising Committee, and in Association with Raichai, Konwar Dehingia, Kenduguri, and the people of the surrounding areas, Maha Shivaratri started in Raichai Shiv Mandir premises from Wednesday.

Our Kheroni correspondent adds: On the eve of Mahashivaratri, hundreds of devotees from across the region gathered in Mailoo Basti village under Kheroni Police Station in West Karbi Anglong district to participate in the annual "Kalash Yatra", a vibrant procession from the revered Baram Baba Sthan to the Mailoo Raisen Dayang River ghāt.

The event, marked by spiritual fervor, saw participants of all ages carrying yagya and traditional mud pots (Kalash) to collect holy water from the river for Yagya rituals.

The Baram Baba Sthan, a site of faith and divine beauty since its establishment in 1958, served as the starting point for the procession. Committee leaders, including President, Bhagwan Dayal Singh (SGB), Secretary, Banshu Chauhan, and Finance Secretary, Mital Chauhan, orchestrated the event alongside volunteers.

The yatra also received institutional support, with Rina Terangpi, local Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) of 9th Amren constituency and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Executive Member, allocating Rs 10 lakhs for constructing a community hall (which is under construction) to streamline future celebrations.

Speaking to reporters, committee member Tripurari Chauhan highlighted that the 24-hour "hawanatmak yagya" (sacred fire ritual) today began at 1:26 pm and will conclude today at the same time, with the distribution of mahaprasad—sweets, khichdi, and sanctified water.

Former committee president Harkhu Chauhan reminisced about initiating the yagya in the early 1990s during his tenure, emphasising its growth as a cornerstone of local tradition.

The spiritual fervour extended beyond Mailoo Basti, with massive gatherings reported at prominent Shiva temples across the district, including Mailoo Shiv Mandir, Kheroni Charali Shiv Mandir, and Shivbari Diphu.

As night fell, devotees continued to throng at these sites, offering prayers and participating in rituals to honour Lord Shiva on this auspicious occasion.

The Kalash Yatra and accompanying ceremonies underscore the enduring cultural and religious significance of Mahashivaratri in West Karbi Anglong, uniting communities in devotion and celebration.

Our Sivasagar correspondent adds: Thousands of devotees from across the country thronged to the historic Sivadol on the occasion of Mahashivaratri on Wednesday.

People queued up from last evening to offer their prayers in the garbha-griha of the three century old Siva-doul built by Ahom queen Modambika, consort of the Ahom King Siva Singha.

It is considered as one of the tallest in the world.

Suresh Borthakur, the head priest of the temple conducted the puja during the day and began the next phase at 9pm and wished the devotees to get blessings of Lord Shiva.

Thousands gathered in the centrally protected monument every year on the Shivaratri night and also to visit over 500 shops in the Shivaratri mela.

The Shivaratri mela at Fuleswari HS School Field, and Station Chari, organised by the Doui Development Committee in association with Sivasagar District Administration was inaugurated by Akhil Gogoi, MLA Sivasagar on Tuesday night.

Jorhat MP Gaurab Gogoi offered prayers in the historic temple on Wednesday along with the Congress party workers and expressed happiness over the enthusiasm shown by the devotees on the occasion of Mahashivaratri.

NFR advancing towards 100% Railway electrification by 2025

Commemorating 100 Years of Electric Traction in India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has made remarkable strides in electrification, significantly enhancing rail connectivity, reducing travel time, and improving freight movement across its jurisdiction, said an official statement on Wednesday.

A major milestone in this journey was achieved on April 11, 2017, when the Katihar-Amritsar Express train no 15708/15707 became the first passenger train to run on electric traction in the Katihar - Barauni section.

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has stated that the electrification of railway networks in the Northeast is set to be completed by March 2026.

"This initiative is expected to boost connectivity, enhance operational efficiency, and support sustainable transportation in the region," the statement quoted.

Despite challenging geographical and logistical conditions, NFR has successfully overcome these hurdles, leading to substantial improvements in connectivity, travel efficiency and freight operations.

As of January 2025, NFR has electrified 2,828 Route Kilometers (RKM).

The electrification of the Rajdhani route is set to be completed by March 2025, with full electrification across NFR targeted for completion by the end of the calendar year 2025.

The electrification of major routes such as Katihar - Guwahati, Guwahati-Lumding, Lumding-Furkating, Agartala-Sabroom and

Agartala - Jiribam has played a crucial role in strengthening regional connectivity and driving economic growth.

"NFR's electrification journey has been marked by significant milestones, starting in April 2017, when the first freight and passenger trains on electric traction were introduced in Katihar Division, followed by the first Rajdhani Express from Katihar on April 14, 2017," the statement said.

Other landmark achievements include the first passenger train on electric traction between New Jalpaiguri and Kolkata on January 9, 2020, the historic arrival of Brahmaputra Mail in Kamakhya station of Guwahati from New Delhi on October 22, 2021, covering over 2,000 km on full electric traction and the launch of the first Rajdhani Express between Guwahati and Katihar on February 26, 2022.

Prime Minister Modi dedicated the fully electrified Katihar-Lumding route, encompassing major stations such as New Jalpaiguri, New Coochbehar, New Bongaigaon, Rangiri and Guwahati, further strengthening connectivity in the region.

To sustain electrification, NFR has established electric locomotive sheds at Malda, Siliguri, and New Guwahati, with further expansions in progress to facilitate a complete transition from diesel to electric locomotives, the statement further informed.

The WAG9 series of electric locomotives are currently in operation for freight transport, and loco trip inspection sheds are being developed

at key locations.

Additionally, the open access to Electrical Power initiative is in its advanced stages, allowing NFR to procure electricity from multiple sources across India.

Several traction substations across Assam are also being commissioned to enhance power supply and reduce the burden on the state's grid.

In line with Indian Railways' commitment to sustainability, NFR is actively incorporating solar and wind energy into its railway operations.

Plans are underway to install 50 MWp solar power plants across its jurisdiction, supporting the transition to a greener and more energy efficient railway network.

With full electrification, NFR will further boost regional development, tourism and economic growth, making rail transport more efficient and environmentally friendly.

With a vision of achieving a fully electrified, self-sustaining railway network, NFR is set to play a crucial role in India's green and sustainable future.

As India marks 100 years of railway electrification, this transition from steam and diesel to electric locomotives underscores the country's dedication to modernisation, efficiency, and sustainability.

A fully electrified, self-sustaining railway network is now within reach, paving the way for a new era of progress in Indian Railways, the statement concluded.

Shivaratri celebrated in historic Gorokhia Doui

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 26: Shivaratri festival got underway in the historic Gorokhia Doui situated in the outskirts of north west of Jorhat.

The three day festival began with traditional rituals and flag hoisting. Thousands of devotees rushed to the temple, and lighted lamps, seeking blessing from Lord Shiva on Wednesday.

The second day of festival started with the offerings for the puja along with rituals where an estimate of thousands of devotees participated.

Woman from Howraghat gone missing

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Feb 26: A married woman identified as Shivani (Josmi) Majumder, wife of Suman Majumder of Uttar Borbil Ghanbati under Howraghat police station in Karbi Anglong district has been missing for the last 10 days.

Informing the media about his missing wife, the husband said that 10 days ago Shivani went out taking along their 2-year-old son saying that she was going to her mother's house, which is nearby.

She has not been sighted again since then. After searching for Shivani which proved unsuccessful, the victim's mother, who is also a resident of the area, filed a missing person report with the Uttar Borbil Police Outpost.

The couple has another son, a six-year-old, and he is at home.

Anyone with information about Shivani (Josmi) is asked to contact her family on 7099192125 and 9707975355 or any police station.

State must embark on a path that is realistic, futuristic and pragmatic: CM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attended an engaging session on "Assam's Road, Railway, and Riverine Infrastructure" at the Advantage Assam 2.0 in the presence of Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal in Guwahati on Wednesday.

The session aimed at highlighting Assam's emerging role as a key trade and connectivity hub, brought together government leaders, industry experts, and investors.

The session focussed on the transformative projects designed to integrate Assam more seamlessly into national and international trade networks.

Speaking in the session, chief minister Sarma said that under the



leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the state has undergone a remarkable transformation in infrastructure and connectivity.

"The state must embark on a new path that is realistic, futuristic and pragmatic," Sarma added.

With immense capabilities and resources, Assam has potential to transform aspirations of the people into achievements, he said.

Speaking on the economic growth of the state the chief min-

ister optimistically said, "Every year, the state has been making around ₹ 25,000 cr capital investments and this year it will surpass that".

He further said that the state government is increasing capital investments every year by 10%.

High Commissioner of Singapore Simon Wong, Krishnendu Paul, Minister for PWD Roads etc, Vijay Kumar, Chairman of Inland Waterway Authority of India, Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager of North East Frontier Railway, Adil Zaidi, Partner EY, Giridhar Rajagopal, Deputy Managing Director of Afooms Infrastructure, R K Bansal, Executive Vice President and SGB head-Roads, Bridges, Foundations, and L&T Construction, and others were present in the session.

FHASM to organise rally

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 26: The Forum for Hills Autonomous State Movement (FHASM) will hold a rally in Diphu demanding Autonomous State on March 4.

Earlier the rally was scheduled for February 27 but it has been postponed due to ongoing school examinations.

FHASM said their demand for immediate implementation of Article 244 (A) remains firm.

The government should fulfil its constitutional obligation and grant Autonomous Statehood to Karbi Anglong and Dimas Hasao as per Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution.

FHASM is an umbrella organisation comprising of All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) and Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and their front organisations in an attempt to come on a common platform for Autonomous State movement.

Career Counselling Programme held in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 26: A one-day career counselling programme was held at the Girls' College auditorium hall in Kokrajhar on Tuesday that witnessed a huge participation of student and citizens. The event was organised under the mission of the Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Development Mission, under the aegis of the Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department (SEED), government of Bodoland Territorial Council. The programme was attended by distinguished dignitaries and renowned counselors, Raju Narzary, secretary of UPPL, inaugurated the event, and emphasised on the importance of Artificial Intelligence and careers related to climate change.

Kwrmndao Wary, Faculty of Law College, Kokrajhar, and Vice President of the All Bodo Students Union, elaborated on career opportunities in law and strategies for success in this field. Dr Sangrang Brahma, secretary of the Assam Football Association, advised students to remain emotionally stable and focused on their studies. Dr Sanghamitra Choudhury, Head of the Political Science Department at Bodoland University, shared her academic experiences and encouraged students, especially girls, to aim high and explore opportunities.

Ranjan K Baruah, adviser of SEED, BTC, briefed the students on various career opportunities and essential attributes for success, including 21st-century skills and employability skills. Other esteemed guests included Dr Anil Kr Basumatary, vice principal, and Dr Rajib Kr Das, librarian of Girls College. Students from various colleges, including Kokrajhar Government College, Science College, UN Academy, Aronai College, Commerce College, and Bodoland University, actively participated in the programme and appreciated the initiatives of Pramod Bodo, chief executive member, and Wilson Hasda, executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Region, in promoting career development through such outreach programmes.

Silchar gears up for transformative leap with ₹200 crore technology centre initiative



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: In a landmark move set to redefine the industrial and technological landscape of Barak Valley, a high-profile Stakeholder Consultation Meeting was held recently at the new conference hall of the Office of the District Commissioner, Cachar.

Presided over by District Commissioner, Mridul Yadav, alongside District Development Commissioner, Norsing Bey, the meeting brought together key industry leaders, academic institutions, and financial organisations to discuss the ambitious plan for a state-of-the-art Technology Centre in Panchagram, Silchar.

This transformative project, under the Government of India's "Establishment of New Technology Centres / Extension Centres" scheme by the Ministry of MSME, is set to receive an investment of ₹200 crores and will span 20 acres of land.

The initiative aims to usher in a new era of industrial growth and technological advancement, equipping the local economy with cutting-edge training facilities and skill development programs tailored to meet the region's employment and entrepreneurship needs.

IRCON International Limited (IRCON) has been entrusted with the execution of this mega project, while Grant Thornton Bharat, serving as the knowledge partner, presented an insightful blueprint on how the centre will enhance MSME competitiveness.

The centre's core objectives include providing advanced training and technological access to local industries, upskilling youth to bridge employment gaps, catalysing startups and entrepreneurship, and generating employment opportunities to drive sustainable economic growth.

The representatives from premier institutions such as NIT Silchar, Silchar Polytechnic, and IIT Srikona, as well as local businesses and financial bodies participated in the meeting.

The discussions revolved around ensuring that the upcoming Technology Centre aligns with the industrial demands of Barak Valley while fostering self-reliance and innovation in the region.

As Silchar takes a decisive step towards a technologically advanced future, this initiative is expected to become a cornerstone for economic development, empowering local industries and aspiring entrepreneurs alike.

The vision set forth by the stakeholders marks the beginning of a promising journey, positioning Silchar as a hub for skill development, industrial excellence, and technological innovation in Northeast India.

This was stated in a press release issued from Regional office of Information & Public Relations, Barak valley Zone, Silchar, Assam.

36 Bird species identified in Bodoland University campus

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 26: The Campus Bird Count event in the Bodoland University concluded on Tuesday with the identification of 36 species, including 10 migratory species in Kokrajhar.

A total of 15 students from the department of Zoology of Bodoland University were involved in the Bird Count activities that gathered a knowledge and information about the bird species during the event.

The Campus Bird Count event is a sub-event of the larger Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). It is a coordinated effort to document the birdlife in multiple campuses across India.

These include campuses of educational and training institutions, government institutions, research stations, corporate campuses, etc. GBBC India is the Indian imple-



mentation of the global GBBC, which runs for four days every February. Indian birders have been participating in the GBBC since the event went worldwide in 2013.

GBBC India is coordinated by

the Bird Count India collective, which supports listing and monitoring of birds in India from individuals maintaining their bird lists, to groups of students or birders monitoring local birds, to large India-

wide projects to document the abundance and distribution of species.

It engages with citizen scientists (birdwatchers) across the country to generate both informal (casual birding) and formal (systematic surveys and monitoring) data on birds and converting this data into knowledge.

Prof Hillojyoti Singha) director, Centre for Wildlife Research & Biodiversity Conservation asserted, "All together 36 bird species, including 10 migratory species were recorded during one-hour bird watching for each of the three days in the university campus. Common Myna and Red-vented Bulbul were the most abundant species, while Greenish Warbler, Gray-headed Canary Flycatcher and Taiga Flycatcher were rare winter visitors in the campus".

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A cloudy day is no match for a sunny disposition
- William Arthur Ward

Trouble beckons for Punjab govt

Political developments in Delhi have been making Punjab politics complex. AAP's loss of power in Delhi has emboldened the opposition Congress in Punjab which hopes to topple the government through defection. BJP is trying to make inroads by taking credit for conviction of ex-Congress MP Sajjan Kumar by a Delhi court in 1984 anti-Sikhs riots, and also through Dalit politics. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has also become active seeking clarification from Congress after conviction of Sajjan Kumar. Though, Vidhan Sabha election in Punjab is two years away in February 2027, and AAP has comfortable majority in the House, latest developments are serious concern for the ruling establishment. Challenges before AAP have just been piling up, both in governance and politics. Though, AAP leadership in Punjab is taking all precautions, it clearly needs to keep its flock and support base together, especially in the backdrop of rumours that AAP in Punjab is heading for split. Punjab Congress leader Pratap Singh Bajwa stirred up politics in the state by claiming on February 24, that 32 MLAs of AAP, including ministers, are in his touch who are expressing interest in switching sides. Even though it happens, AAP government will not fall, since AAP has 94 MLAs now in 117 member Punjab Vidhan Sabha, while Congress has only 15 MLAs. However, it is of course a serious concern within AAP on account of infighting in the party.

What is happening in Punjab must be a serious political matter for the AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal who has been meeting the party leaders from Punjab, especially after defeat in Delhi. Kejriwal is concentrating in Punjab politics, and the party has nominated Rajya Sabha MP Sanjeev Arora on February 26 for Ludhiana West Assembly Constituency by-poll. One Rajya Sabha seat is being vacated, presumably for Arvind Kejriwal to enter in the Parliament. Ludhiana West seat has been vacant after death of AAP MLA Gurpreet Singh Gogi on January 11. Kejriwal has lost his seat in Delhi elections from New Delhi seat. Apart from political challenges, AAP government in Punjab has also facing several challenges in governance. They need to keep Punjab farmers on their side. It is precisely for this reason that AAP has got a resolution passed in the Assembly on February 25 that rejected the Centre's draft of the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing, calling it an attempt to bring back the three controversial farm laws repealed by the Centre in 2021. However, the farmers agitation has put the governance in Punjab in very difficult situations to deal with.

While giving conditional support to the resolution Congress has also accused the BJP of being "anti-Punjab" both "economically and politically". Ruling AAP in Punjab has other challenges relating to governance, especially on law and order issue, and rising extremist trends in the state. AAP will have to stand united to ward off multiple challenges and deliver the poll promises made in 2022 election on development of the state and welfare of the people. It holds the key for the future of AAP.

KIIT student death has many lessons for academic institutions

The tragic death of Prakriti Lamsal, a Nepali B.Tech student at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), a private engineering college in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, in February 2025, exposed serious problems of institutional incompetence and poor management. Prakriti's death was followed by protests by Nepali students who claimed that the university administration had not adequately responded to their harassment. The administration's decision to compel all Nepali students to leave the university in response to their protest, resulted in heightened tensions as the Nepalese government intervened diplomatically.

Educational institutions in India are infamous for concealing allegations of wrongdoing to preserve institutional reputations. Public confidence erodes by this propensity to hide instances of harassment, abuse, and carelessness. It also serves to maintain systemic flaws. By discouraging victims from coming forward, this playbook creates an atmosphere that fosters violence and harassment. There are apprehensions that transparently handling wrongdoing could result in bad press that could impact financing and student enrolment. Financial reliance on donors or political lobbies also discourage administrations from pursuing strong action or owning accountability.

This problem is additionally exacerbated by the law. Organizations continue to conceal misconduct despite a weak enforcement framework and lenient penalties. Prolonged complaint resolution processes deter victims from reporting occurrences and enable organizations to avoid prompt accountability, thus sustaining institutional impunity.

Vague definitions of malfeasance and insufficient safeguards for whistleblowers also allow organizations to evade accountability. Administrations are able to take advantage of these vulnerabilities in the absence of clear norms and strong oversight systems, thereby silencing victims and sustaining systemic problems in the educational sector.

In the US, schools that receive federal funds are required to address and correct cases of sex discrimination, including sexual harassment and assault, under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Noncompliance by institutions may result in the loss of federal funding.

In the United Kingdom, the Office for Students (OfS) monitors universities as a regulatory agency. Universities that violate mandatory requirements, like safeguarding students from sexual harassment and misconduct, may face fines, suspension, or even deregistration from the OfS. This strict regulatory framework guarantees that educational institutions continue to be responsible for the well-being of their students and adhere to set standards.

However, India's enforcement agencies on higher education, such as the Bar Council of India (BCI) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) face routine criticisms. Both the bodies lack strict enforcement and sanctions. As a result, higher education institutions



disregard their obligations without suffering serious consequences, in the process jeopardizing the safety and rights of students. Further, bureaucratic hold-ups prevent complaints from being promptly resolved.

A number of legislative changes are necessary to improve accountability in India's higher education institutions.

Firstly, it is imperative to establish required reporting procedures. Institutions must be obligated to notify an impartial regulatory agency of any misbehaviour, including financial fraud and harassment, within 48 hours of the incident. This quick reporting system would guarantee immediate action and stop cases from being internally suppressed. In addition to ensuring unbiased investi-

gations, the establishment of an independent monitoring body would promote an open and accountable culture.

Institutions that suppress cases of misbehaviour ought to be subject to severe sanctions. Revocation of accreditation, reduction or termination of financing, and dismissal of responsible managing staff are possible sanctions. Such disciplinary actions would signify compliance with ethical norms in higher education institutions.

The BCI uses a number of regulations and guidelines to control professional conduct and legal education. But, there is a noticeable weakness in the way accountability measures for institutions are enforced. For example, although the BCI's Rules of Legal Education set forth requirements for law schools, they fail to address sanctions for establishments that conceal unlawful incidents.

To quicken the settlement of student claims, a specialized National Student Rights Tribunal must be established. In order to guarantee prompt and efficient justice, this tribunal should be mandated to settle cases within 30 to 60 days. The widespread problem of bureaucratic delays, which frequently deter victims

from reporting occurrences and obstruct the administration of justice, would be addressed via a fast-track adjudication process.

Another crucial reform may be giving whistleblowers legal protection. Faculty and students who report wrongdoing must be protected from reprisals of any kind. Whistleblower protection laws applicable upon higher education institutions would foster more open and responsible institutional culture. All educational institutions should be required to submit annual transparency reports. Stakeholders would gain insight into the institution's dedication to legal compliance via these reports. This would include specifics of reported wrongdoings and the resolutions that followed.

A special clause could be included in the BCI Rules of Legal Education that addresses the institutional duty to stop and handle instances of violence, suicide, and harassment. Institutions must set up required procedures for reporting and dealing with violence, sexual assault, and other serious unlawful activities on campus. The Rules of Legal Education must incorporate sanctions against organizations which perpetuate concealment. BCI must exercise its authority to suspend accreditation or revoke recognition for law schools that fail to report or assist law enforcement officials with such events.

An impartial oversight committee should be set up by the BCI to examine how law schools respond to complaints about significant incidents and assess the effectiveness of their grievance redressal procedures in order to guarantee accountability and openness.

The committee's audits require cooperation from law schools, and on noncompliance with its recommendations, BCI should suspend accreditation or pursue legal action.

In serious situations like harassment, assault, suicides, and misconduct, both the UGC and BCI rules should be strengthened to provide a secure and encouraging atmosphere for

instructors and students by adding independent monitoring, mental health support, required reporting requirements, and whistleblower protection.

Although the UGC Guidelines (such as the UGC Act, 1956 and the UGC Grievance Redressal Regulations, 2018) mandate that colleges set up grievance redressal procedures, they fall short of addressing institutional repression or negligence to report violence, harassment, or suicide instances.

Similar to this, the BCI Rules of Legal Education offer a framework for law school accreditation and operations, but they make no mention of institutional accountability for such serious instances or the requirement that these problems be reported to law enforcement.

Mandatory mental health services, such as counselling and suicide prevention programs, should be made available in educational institutions in order to prevent instances like suicides and to create a supportive environment. All employees and students should have access to these services, and there should be procedures in place for intervention if needed.

A whistleblower protection strategy in higher education institutions that ensures protection for individuals who disclose instances of wrongdoing, harassment, or violence must be enacted. This is necessary to guarantee a safe reporting environment and to stop retaliation against those who file complaints.

Higher education institutions are often able to put their own interests ahead of the interests of justice, and frequently repress harassment, violence, and suicides in order to preserve their reputations. Academic integrity, public confidence in the educational system, and student safety are all compromised by such avoidance. In order to ensure that institutions are held accountable for their acts and students are given a safe and supportive environment in which to flourish, extensive policy intervention is required to compel transparent, responsible practices. (IPA Service)

How can India seize opportunity amidst US-China trade war

By: Dr. Nilanjan Banik

The US-China trade war has been a focal point of economic discussions for a significant period, as the world's two largest economies have imposed tariffs on each other's goods. The Trump administration imposed 10% tariffs on Chinese imports, while China, in turn, levied 15% tariffs on US liquid natural gas (LNG) and coal, as well as 10% tariffs on oil, farm equipment, and some automobiles. Trump's idea of imposing tariffs is build around the narrative of "Make America Great Again." He believes that tariffs will reduce the trade deficit by encouraging foreign companies to invest in the US. In 2017, when Trump took office for his first term the US had trade deficit with 116 countries. In 2024, the US has its largest trade deficit with China, totalling around \$300 billion, followed by Mexico with over \$200 billion, and a deficit of approximately \$40 billion with India.

Contrary to the wishful thinking that tariffs would make a difference, data shows otherwise, as the US trade deficit with China continued to rise even after the major tariff announcement against China in 2020. The average annual trade deficit with China was \$311 billion during Barack Obama's tenure (2009-2016), rose to \$361 billion during Donald Trump's first term (2017-2020), and decreased to \$327 billion under Joe Biden (2021-2024).

Tariffs may not be effective, as trade interdependence between the US and China has decreased over the past decade. Data reveals that China's reliance on the US has declined at a faster rate. In contrast, the US continued to remain dependent on China. Between 2009 and 2024, China's GDP grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.01%. Excluding China's trade component with the US, the Chinese economy grew at a slightly lower pace of 8.62%. In contrast, the US economy grew at a CAGR of 4.78% during the same period, and without

China, the US economy's growth rate drops to 4.07%. These small changes in growth rate numbers are significant in absolute terms, especially when considering the two largest economies in the world—the US at \$29.16 trillion and China at \$18.27 trillion in 2024.

There are two important take-aways from these numbers. First, trade is beneficial for any country's growth. Second, in the event of trade war, the US economy is likely to lose out more compared to China. The result remains unchanged even if we conduct the same analysis for the past five years. It's little wonder that Beijing's leadership is in such a defiant mood.

Apart from the growth aspect, tariffs negatively impact jobs. A study finds that job losses from trade retaliation surpass job gains from tariff protection. In 2019, the US exports to China supported 1.2 million jobs, while 1,97,000 people were employed by Chinese multinationals – both affected by tariff escalation. Interestingly, after Trump took office in January 2025, jobless claims in Washington, D.C. surged to 1,780, with nearly 4,000 workers in the city filing for unemployment insurance.

The recent slowdown in China's GDP is not due to US tariffs, but rather a decline in consumption demand, caused by falling property construction, an aging population, a hostile business environment, and the lingering effects of prolonged COVID-19 lockdowns.

China is no stranger to protectionism. The Global Trade Alert, a database tracking protectionist measures, reveals more than 17,737 measures have been initiated against Chinese exports. In response, Chinese policymakers recognized the need for a new approach and began heavily investing in Asia, Africa, Central America, and, to some extent, Latin America.

This strategy led to three key outcomes. First, as production costs are lower in these regions, Chinese firms are benefiting from shifting their production bases outside of

China.

Second, Chinese firms were able to evade protectionist measures targeting their exports by exporting from countries outside China. Take for instance, Mexico. In April 2024, the US Trade Representative Katherine Tai accused China of disguising its steel products as Mexican steel to enter the US market. In 2023, US imports of Mexican goods totaled \$475 billion, approximately, \$20 billion more than in 2022. During the same time the US imports of Chinese goods amounted to \$427 billion, around \$10 billion less. At least 30 Chinese firms now operate out of Mexico including Chinese automobile giants such as BYD and Cherry International.

Third, investing in Africa and Asia has helped reduce China's energy requirements, allowing Beijing to secure cheaper foreign energy sources (oil and power) and minerals. Chinese companies have built six hydropower plants and one thermal power station in Myanmar and have invested in power transmission and copper processing in Vietnam.

In countries like Sri Lanka (Hambantota port), Pakistan (Gwadar port), and throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia, Chinese investments are being used to develop port infrastructure.

Now that China's actions are becoming more assertive, the US needs India not only to counterbalance China's military influence but also as a key economic powerhouse. Trump wants India to increase its purchases of defense equipment, and oil and gas. At a time when advanced economies are adopting protectionist measures—such as the US Inflation Reduction Act and CHIPS Act, and the EU's Net Zero Industry Act and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism—to re-shore manufacturing, India should seize this opportunity. However, this should be accompanied by a caveat: joint production of defense items, which would allow India to access crucial technology as a key component of trade. (IPA Service)

USAID in India issue is turning bizzare with every passing day

By: Sushil Kutty

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar never seems to finish his thoughts. People might mistake him to be a hesitant hacker. But that isn't the case. EAM Jaishankar is the second longest serving foreign minister after Jawaharlal Nehru, who kept the external affairs portfolio with him, for the entirety of his tenure as the Prime Minister of India.

"It would suggest that there are activities which have a certain objective out there, to push a narrative or a viewpoint," Jaishankar said on the USAID row. "USAID Was Allowed Here In Good Faith." The \$21 million "Voter Turnout Fund" earmarked for India was scrapped by Trump's DOGE led by Elon Musk, the world's richest man.

President Trump's Department of Government Efficiency or DOGE has disrupted the workings of the United States and Trump's got the title 'Disruptor-in-Chief'. Guess what, a Harvard poll says the majority of American voters are more satisfied with President Trump than they were with President Joe Biden.

President Trump's approval rating stood at 52% as 58% of voters are "more satisfied" with Trump, says the Harvard CAPS/Harris Poll. And 72% are "supportive" of having a government agency such as DOGE, which is "focused on efficiency initiatives."

So much for President Trump and 'Disruptor-in-Chief'. Americans who voted for Trump are solidly behind him as he goes about draining the Washington Swamp, a poll-promise going back nearly 10 years. Americans who voted for Trump are happy, even those who voted for Kamala Harris are willing to give Trump time to settle in his job.

Indian detractors can take a hike and stop hyperventilating like their trousers were on fire! Trump is only doing his job, fulfilling the mandate given to him by American voters. Trump garnered over 76 million votes on promises he made to his constituency of diehard MAGA voters and other Americans who wanted zilch to do with President Joe Biden and Democrat candidate Kamala Harris.

Biden and Harris have moved on but Indians of a certain bent are mad at President Trump for daring to disrupt global politics. These Indian interlocutors of President Trump are as if they had voted Donald Trump to power to pursue their goals and were now being denied their pound of flesh.

It is under such circumstances that EAM Jaishankar is the USAID the benefit of doubt. Subramanyam Jaishankar has been a fixture in India's foreign affairs apparatus through the decades



when USAID operated in India with impunity and no questions asked. In fact, Jaishankar would know a whole lot more about USAID than most others in the Modi government.

And President Trump is point-blank blaming USAID for splurging US taxpayer money to line pockets in places around the world including in India. Trump wants USAID out of the gated-community. He is angry USAID had been bleeding American dollars, asking Trump-esque questions for which answers are taking their own sweet time coming.

President Donald Trump is not like Prime Minister Narendra Modi and EAM S. Jaishankar must know this better and plainer than the average Indian Foreign Service officer. President Trump will keep disrupting Prime Minister Modi and EAM Jaishankar questioning them about what they did with the info on the \$21 million he excised from USAID grants.

President Trump will disrupt and disrupt, keep disrupting till his goals are met. Trump met Prime Minister Modi and told him in good faith that there were forces out there to "replace him" and the \$21 million was intended to fund the effort. The question is, has the revelation sounded the alarm in the Modi government?

"Your security can be threatened without you leaving your house... I think some information has been put out there by the Trump administration people and obviously that is concerning... It would suggest that there are activities which have a certain objective out there, to push a narrative or a viewpoint," Jaishankar told a bunch of Delhi University students, suggesting that the Modi government was looking into Trump's revelation and that his "sense" was that the facts would come out.

When? The question has been roiling media and common folk even as President Donald Trump kept repeating his thoughts on the USAID grant and his allegation that Prime Minister Modi was in the crosshairs. So will the facts come tumbling out, will Prime Minister Modi order time-bound action, will the "crooks" who profited from

USAID largesse be named and shamed?

The US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), perhaps the most revolutionary of President Trump's executive actions, has put out a list of "cancelled US taxpayer-funded initiatives", including the \$21 million set aside for boosting "voter turnout" in India.

But the ice-cool S. Jaishankar isn't alarmed, shocked or surprised, a mite angry or betrayed, perhaps. "Now, I read saying so-and-so dealt with USAID or so-and-so. Look, it's not a question of do you deal with USAID or not. USAID was allowed – has been here historically. But USAID was allowed here in good faith, to do good faith activities. Suggestions are (now) being made out of America that there are activities which are in bad faith. So, it surely warrants a look."

The problem is, Jaishankar is only thinking, not resolving. "I think the country should know who are the people involved in the bad faith activities." So, the question remains, does the Modi government and the BJP want the names of the "crooks" revealed? All that is heard is that the "Bharatiya Janata Party itself" was seeking a probe.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump has called the fund "kickbacks" and that might be worrying for the Modi administration. "Kickbacks" can be devastating for everybody concerned. The Trump administration wants to lead the Modi government by the nose for the ace in the hole but the Modi-friendly mainstream Indian media are making all the noise leading to nowhere and to no one except to "deep state assets" of the USA.

In other words, Joe Biden's "deep state" is still active and President Trump should be thinking of himself instead of worrying about Prime Minister Narendra Modi. President Trump called the now nixed USAID grant of \$21 million a "kickback scheme".

One Indian media outlet, running contrary to the flow, linked the \$29 million USAID grant to Bangladesh to the \$21 million grant to India saying Trump fumbled, but there was a separate USAID grant of \$29 million, which too now stands obliterated. The question is, how widespread is that part of the scam which relates to USAID and Indian journalists?

Reports are that the Enforcement Directorate and other Modi government agencies have started probing USAID's tentacles in India and identifying Indian entities and individuals who took USAID funds to peddle influence in India. Reports say those being investigated include non-profits, social workers, media firms and individual journalists, all of them in violation of anti-money laundering laws. A section of the media have labelled them traitors and "name the crooks" has become a war-cry. (IPA Service)

Green Manuring and liming for management of acid soils under multiple cropping

By: Dr. Manjuri Gogoi
& Dr. Neethi Baruah

It is a widely accepted fact that nitrogen is the most limiting factor or nutrient in food production and is the key macro-element for increasing the crop production. Hence, any cropping system that adds to the nitrogen-nutrition of the soil, will go a long way in increasing sustainable crop yields of subsequent crops. Cultivation of green manuring crop or legume crop is viewed more as a soil fertility improver than as independent crops grown for their other usual benefits. They have the unique capability of using the nitrogen in the air through symbiotic root nodule bacteria as an available nutrient. It is a fact that an inexhaustible store of nitrogen exists in the atmosphere and all the plants except legumes are not able to use it directly.

What happens to the soil during multiple cropping?

- Depletion of soil fertility;
- Frequent cultivation of soil breaks down crumbs of aggregates and destroys organic matter which renders the soil to loss of structure and more vulnerable to erosion;
- Continuous cultivation of cereals and non-leguminous crops renders inevitable a heavy drain on the soil nutrients supply that intensifies the loss of organic matter and physical conditions.

Why green manuring crops?

The practice of growing a suitable crop preferably a legume and burying it, while green at the appropriate time in the soil for improving productivity is called green manuring.

A large number of plants both legumes and non-legumes are used as green manure. Leguminous crops used as green manure are more advantageous as they don't require nitrogen but improve the nitrogen status of the soil through biological nitrogen fixation process. These crops develop nodules on their roots that provide a suitable environment and necessary food materials for the growth of rhizobia. The growing of such crops therefore, does not exhaust the nitrogen of its soil, rather the decay of the plant biomass of such plants help to build up the nitrogen content of the soil. The burying the whole crop is very much beneficial because all the nitrogen fixed by the bacteria is returned to the soil in organic form provides not only nitrogen but also carbon and other nutrients for a long time and in an easily available form.

- Chiefly, the green manuring crops add nitrogen nutrition and organic matter to the soil. This stimulates the activity of micro-organisms. Plant nutrients are provided in a better form and over a longer period for the crops grown after green manuring;
- It concentrates plant nutrients in the surface layer of the soil;
- It improves the structure of the sub-soil by deep rooting system;
- It facilitates the penetration of rainwater, thus decreasing run-off and gives good soil cover thereby checking soil erosion;
- Green manuring crops hold plant nitrogen that would otherwise be lost by leaching;
- It increases the availability of certain plant nutrients like phosphorus, calcium, potassium, magnesium and Iron;
- It also checks weed growth by quick ini-

tial growth;

- It also aid in reclamation of problem soils, the structure of heavy, light and sandy soils is considerably improved and unproductive lands can be converted into fertile ones with green manuring;
- It increases the water holding capacity of the soil;

Choice of green manuring crop

The choice of a particular green manuring crop depends upon the type of soil, the time available to raise the green manure crop and the soil moisture status.

To be an ideal green manure crop

1. It should have a very little cost of production of inputs;
2. Its growth should have full synchronization with the climate rhythm so that it requires no additional irrigation or plant protection measures;
3. It should have very quick initial growth so as to be able to suppress weeds;
4. It should be able to yield a large quantity of green matter in a short period;
5. It should have the ability to grow under adverse condition of both soil and environment.

What are the green manuring crops?

1. Sunhemp (*Crotalaria juncea*);
2. Dhaincha (*Sesbania aculeata* and *Sesbania rostrata*);
3. Barseem (*Trifolium alexandrinum*);
4. Cowpea (*Vigna sinensis*);
5. Clusterbean (*Cyamopsis tetragonoloba*);

6. Mungbean (*Greengram*), Urdbean (*Blackgram*), Chickpea, Fieldpea, Lentil, Rajma and other Pulses;
7. Lajukibon (*Mimosa pudica* and *Mimosa invasa*).

Practices for growing green manuring crops

1. Sunhemp is grown in the moonsoon season;
2. Seed rate is 50-65 kg/ha.;
3. Sowing is by broadcasting;
4. No fertilizer is applied, but application of 200 kg/ha of SSP promotes better growth and nodulation and increases atmospheric nitrogen fixation in the soil;
5. In the absence of rainfall and in moisture stress condition, better growth can be achieved by application of three irrigation at fortnightly interval;
6. Topping should be done in varieties of erect-growing nature to encourage lateral branching;
7. Weeding is not necessary as quick growth normally suppress weeds;
8. Should be harvested within 45-60 days after sowing. For proper rotting of the buried green manure crop, it is necessary that the green material should be in succulent stage and soil should have adequate moisture.

Dhaincha

1. Dhaincha can be grown with the start of early moonsoon;
2. Seed rate is 45-50 kg/ha.;
3. Sowing is by broadcasting;
4. No fertilizer is generally applied; but application of phosphorus fertilizer would certainly enhance nodulation;
5. It should be harvested within 45 days after transplanting i.e. before flowering;
6. There should be enough moisture in the field for complete and quick decomposition of buried dhaincha plants.

Barseem (as fodder and green manuring crop)



1. Performs well on well-drained, medium-loamy soils, rich in phosphorus and calcium.

2. Soil should be brought to a fine tilth for good germination as the seed size is very small. The field should be ploughed 3-4 times followed by planking for breaking the clods and levelling the soil as waterlogging is not desirable for nodule bacteria.

3. Seed soaking is done in water for 10-12 hour prior to sowing preferably in the evening to soften the hard seed coat.

4. Seed is sown generally from the beginning of November to the first week of December. Seed rate is 25 kg/ha.

5. Farm Yard Manure or compost should be applied @ 8-12 tonne/ha and mixed thoroughly with the soil 20-30 days before sowing. Inorganic fertilizer should be applied @20-13-8 kg nitrogen, phosphorus and respectively. Like other green manuring crops, Barseem also responds well to phosphatic fertilizer.

6. Barseem can be more conveniently rotated in a cycle like Barseem (only few cuttings to be taken) boro rice maize (fodder).

7. It can also be practised with barley, oats, sugarcane and napier as intercrop.

8. Regarding harvesting of barseem as fodder, first cut is usually taken after 60-70 days after sowing, whereas, the subsequent cuttings are done at 30-45 days interval.

Harvesting of green manure crops is optimum when plants are at flowering stage as plants contain greatest bulk of succulent organic matter in this stage. The incorporation of the green manure crop into the soil at this stage facilitates the liberation of nitrogen quickly in the available form. With advancing age of green manure crops, the percentage of carbon increases and that of nitrogen decreases. If such crops are ploughed under, the micro-organisms bringing about its decomposition drew upon the released nitrogen and mineral nutrients and cause a temporary nutrient deficiency. Therefore it is important that green manure crops need to be buried in the soil when the flowers begin to appear all over the crop and the green matter is tender and of maximum weight during this stage.

The contribution of green manuring crops towards soil improvement

The capacity to supply the nutrients required by a crop during its active growth period depends on fertility status of the soil. Besides this, favourable environment is also required for optimum plant growth which is created by the presence of organic matter in the soil. Thus, it is essential to use the practice of green manuring in the soil. Nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), potassium (K), other plant macro and micro nutrients are released during mineralization of organic material in the soil. Besides its own stock, a number of other elements present in the mineral compounds are also converted into available forms by the organic acids produced during decomposition of green manure crops. The temporary reductions in the soil pH increase the rate of release of plant nutrients.

Improved soil structure helps in raising a good crop, because it influences porosity and regulates soil-air-moisture regimes in the soil. Addition of organic matter further improves soil structure and maintains favourable condition for aeration and permeability in the soil. Green manuring improves water-holding capacity of the soil, especially in sandy soil, where losses of nutrients occur due to fast downward movement of water. The effect of draught is reduced and irrigation interval may be prolonged and the loss of water and costly nutrients are minimized.

Liming for management of acid soils
The practice of liming dates back to Before Christ (BC) for improving the productivity of acid soils. Among the soil fertility constraints responsible for low productivity of the crops in acidic soils, poor availability of phosphorus is the dominant one because phosphorus is rendered immobile and unavailable to plants due to low pH and dominance of active forms of aluminium (Al) and iron(Fe) that not only fix the applied phosphorus, but also make it inert. Besides such lands also become problematic in relation to the availability of other nutrients such as calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), sulphur (S), molybdenum (Mo) and boron(B) by creating nutrient imbalances. Therefore to overcome this barrier, liming could be a good management practice, which eventually can be responsible for elimination or reduction in soil acidity due to repression of active forms of Al and Fe. Similarly, most

of the desirable soil microbiological processes are adversely affected.

Liming is the practice of addition of alkaline material to soil. An alkaline substance provides a conjugate base, such as carbonate, hydroxide or silicate that reacts with hydrogen ion (H⁺). Commercial liming materials must be cheap, available and safe.

Causes of Acidity

In simple terms, acidity normally develops in horizons where the supply of bases to the soil water by weathering of primary minerals or from other sources is less than the losses suffered by leaching. The amount and strength of acidity further modified during formation of secondary minerals and by decomposition of organic matter added to the system. Some of the most important external factors which are responsible for creating acidity in Assam soils are high precipitation, wide precipitation and evapotranspiration ratio, accumulation of organic matter, old parent materials and time. Assam is situated in a high rainfall area and about 90% of the rainfall is received during summer and monsoon. Therefore water supply exceeds in these two seasons which keeps the soils moist for 7-9 months and bases are removed from the surface owing to heavy leaching. The oldest materials in Assam plateau are usually most weathered and are strongly leached. Leaching of weathered materials leads to removal of bases and silica and residual concentration of Fe and Al oxides in the soil.

On the basis of pH measurements, the degree of soil acidity may be approximately indicated as below:

pH		Reaction
6.6	7.5	Near neutral
6.1	6.5	Slightly acidic
5.6	6.0	Medium acidic
5.1	5.5	Strongly acidic
4.6	5.0	Very strongly acidic
Below 4.5		Extremely acidic

Influence of lime on nutrient availability

The value of lime is generally considered not owing to as a source of nutrient but an amendment for soil acidity and its influence on the availability of plant nutrients.

- Lime increases the availability P, N and Mo
- Reduces the availability of Fe, Mn, Al
- Appreciably enhances the mineralization of soil N and increase the content of both ammonical and nitrate N in the soil while volatile loss of N due to chemical decomposition was considerably reduced when pH of these soils was raised to 7.0.

- Higher availability of P is because liming decreased phosphate fixation capacity of acid soils through decreasing the amount of iron phosphate and increasing the amount of soluble phosphate.

- Liming also increases the rate of mineralization of organic phosphorus.

Liming with dolomite or agricultural lime is a good management practice for acid soils of Assam. As far as multiple cropping is concerned, liming has emerged as one of the most important prerequisites as it leads to increased production of wheat, vegetables, pulses and other winter-season rabi crops in Assam. (The writers are Scientists in the Soil Science and Plant Pathology Department respectively, AAU-Zonal Research Station, Diphu)

Saving the planet shouldn't mean making life harder for women

By: Anjali Roongta

Let's cut to the chase. Everyone knows, and numbers show, that it's mostly women bearing the brunt of environmental work. Despite not getting any formal acknowledgement of positions, most of women are present in the conversation and making active choices to be more sustainable and eco-friendly.

Yet, their comforts and needs are forgotten in the conversation, to the extent that they're shamed on Instagram and YouTube for not being sustainable enough. It's the age-old "perfect environmentalist" trap where we shift the focus on consumers and how they're not doing enough, thus looking away from the industries and systems that make living an eco-friendly life a nightmare.

But why am I specifically talking about women?

Because of the way the "sustainability community" looks at menstruation.

Let's see what the discourse is. Now, many creators do approach this issue sensitively, but some do not. We are talking about them.

1. If you care about the environment you won't use disposable period products.

Yes, sure they've chemicals that some argue are bad for health, but how much do we hear about that as opposed to hearing about plastic in landfills and pads? Or how...

2. Using a menstrual cup is one of the easier eco-friendly swaps.

Except when it's not. The same goes for cloth pads. Menstrual cups work in cultures where women are taught autonomy and how to use them. Not in places like India where the concept of virginity and menstrual shame are predominant, leading to cases where women get hurt because they can't pick the right-sized cup. And let's not forget- what about those with vaginismus? Or those without access to clean water to clean the cup after every use?

The problems don't stop at the cup. For cloth pads, proper cleaning can be a cultural issue, especially dying them in the sun.

Moreover, cloth pads are tough to secure and one of the most freeing things for women was the ability to not be ruled by their flow. Should we take away women's freedoms to work and play and call it environmentalism?

While promoting these swaps is important, why not also highlight organizations like PadCare which are trying to make single-use pads eco-friendly at the end of their lifecycle and reduce the plight of waste workers who have to dispose of them?

This is similar to the plastic straw problem. The problem isn't that cups and cloth pads and such alternatives exist or that they're encouraged. They should be. In an ideal world, we would all have access to the most eco-friendly products that work for us.

But in the real world, when we demonize something a group needs, especially an oppressed group, we end up harming or alienating that group. Just like some disabled people need plastic straws and an all-out ban will negatively affect their quality of life, the same happens when we shame women for disposable period products without a nuanced look at their circumstances. Or when companies try to take advantage of that to make fake eco-friendly products. For there are easy-to-use alternatives, but in the sea of products and greenwashing, they rarely reach their target at the right time.

Can we come to a point where we educate, encourage, and help people use more eco-swaps without making life tougher for those who need disposable options? And also innovate better options that serve a wider group of people while not destroying our planet.

More importantly, instead of attacking those who are making an effort, maybe even the bulk of the effort, can we move to a point where we are holding systems, governments, and major polluters accountable for excess and unnecessary pollution and ecological damage?

Just a thought. After all, what do I know? I'm yet another woman trying to keep a habitable planet a reality. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Empowering farmers: The new era of agricultural financing

By: Mowsam Hazarika

The agriculture and allied activities sector has always been a cornerstone of India's economy, serving as a vital source of livelihood and income for millions. With 46.1% of the population engaged in agriculture, ensuring accessible and affordable financial resources for farmers is a top priority for the government. In the Union Budget 2025-26, the government has announced a transformative enhancement in the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loan limit, raising it from ₹3 lakh to ₹5 lakh under the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS). This move signifies a significant step toward empowering farmers, promoting agricultural growth, and addressing the diverse financial needs of rural communities.

The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme, introduced in 1998, has been instrumental in providing financial support to farmers for cultivation, post-harvest expenses, household consumption, and allied agricultural activities. By offering short-term and investment credit at concessional interest rates, the scheme ensures that farmers can access timely institutional credit without the burden of high-interest loans from informal sources. The expansion of the loan limit in this year's budget reflects the government's commitment to uplifting the rural economy and addressing the evolving challenges faced by the agricultural sector.

The impact of this reform is particularly significant for Assam, a state where agriculture forms the backbone of the economy. Nearly 70% of Assam's population depends on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. The state is renowned for its diverse agro-climatic zones, making it suitable for the cultivation of a wide range of crops, including rice, tea, jute, and horticultural produce. However, farmers in Assam often face challenges such as floods, soil erosion, and limited access to credit, which hinder their productivity and income. The enhanced KCC loan limit is expected to address these challenges by enabling farmers to invest in modern agricultural practices, purchase better inputs, and adopt climate-resilient technologies.

The KCC scheme offers multiple benefits, including access to collateral-free loans up to ₹1.60 lakh, concessional interest rates of 7% (reduced to 4% for timely repayment), and financial support

for animal husbandry, dairying, and fisheries. These features are crucial for Assam's farmers, many of whom are small and marginal landholders. Additionally, the scheme's provision for working capital ensures that farmers can maintain essential farming equipment and infrastructure, further boosting their productivity. The inclusion of allied activities under the KCC scheme has been a game-changer for Assam, where livestock rearing and fisheries play a significant role in the rural economy.

In recent years, the government has taken several steps to enhance transparency and efficiency in agricultural financing. The launch of the Kisan Rin Portal (KRP) in September 2023 has streamlined the claim process for interest subvention and prompt repayment incentives, addressing delays and inefficiencies. By December 2024, the portal had processed claims worth ₹1.08 lakh crore, benefiting 5.9 crore farmers across India. In Assam, the digitization of credit processes is expected to bridge gaps in financial inclusion and ensure that farmers in remote areas can access timely credit without bureaucratic hurdles.

The achievements of the agriculture sector over the past decade highlight the success of initiatives like the KCC scheme. As of March 2024, India had 7.75 crore operational KCC accounts with a loan outstanding of ₹9.81 lakh crore. Institutional credit flow to agriculture has tripled since 2014-15, rising from ₹8.5 lakh crore to ₹25.48 lakh crore in 2023-24. Short-term agricultural credit alone has more than doubled, growing from ₹6.4 lakh crore to ₹15.07 lakh crore during the same period. In Assam, the increased availability of institutional credit has facilitated the growth of tea plantations, paddy cultivation, and horticultural ventures, contributing significantly to the state's economy.

One of the most notable achievements of the KCC scheme is its inclusivity. Over the past decade, the proportion of small and marginal farmers accessing agricultural loans has grown from 57% to 76%. This is particularly relevant for Assam, where the majority of farmers own small landholdings and rely on agriculture for subsistence. The enhanced loan limit under the KCC scheme is expected to further empower these farmers by enabling them to invest in productivity-enhancing measures such as high-yielding seed varieties, advanced irrigation systems, and organic

farming practices.

The emphasis on allied agricultural activities under the KCC scheme has also had a transformative impact on Assam's rural economy. The state has witnessed a significant increase in credit flow to fisheries and animal husbandry, with 1.24 lakh KCCs issued to fisheries and 44.40 lakh KCCs issued to animal husbandry activities nationwide. Assam, with its abundant water resources and traditional expertise in fish farming, stands to benefit immensely from this support. Similarly, the growing demand for dairy and poultry products in the state offers opportunities for rural entrepreneurs to expand their ventures with the help of KCC loans.

In addition to enhancing credit accessibility, the government has prioritized capacity building and financial literacy among farmers. In Assam, training programs and awareness campaigns organized by agricultural extension agencies and cooperatives have played a vital role in ensuring that farmers understand the benefits of the KCC scheme and utilize the available resources effectively. These efforts have not only improved the adoption of institutional credit but also encouraged farmers to adopt sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices.

The increase in the KCC loan limit to ₹5 lakh under the Union Budget 2025-26 marks a pivotal moment for agricultural finance in India. For Assam, this reform holds the potential to address long-standing challenges, empower small and marginal farmers, and drive the growth of allied agricultural sectors. By providing timely and affordable credit, the government is not only promoting agricultural productivity but also enhancing rural livelihoods and building a resilient farming community. The focus on inclusivity, transparency, and sustainability ensures that the benefits of this initiative reach every corner of the country, paving the way for a self-reliant and prosperous agricultural sector. With these measures, the agriculture sector in Assam and across India is poised for a brighter future, where financial empowerment and technological advancements go hand in hand to achieve food security and rural development. (The writer is a poet, Science Journalist, Sustainability Advocate, Former Director, Assam Seed & Organic Certification Agency, Ex-Joint Director of Agriculture, Assam. He can be reached at mowsam2000@yahoo.co.in or 9435103685)

Trump made deals during his first presidency with Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras

US lines up Latin American cooperation for migrant deportations

MEXICO CITY, Feb 26: Venezuelan migrants handed over to Mexico like it's a US immigration detention facility. Families from Central Asia flown to Panama and Costa Rica to await voluntary repatriation to their countries. Venezuelans from Guantanamo Bay handed off on a Honduran tarmac and returned to Caracas.

It all sends the unmistakable message that trying to get to the US border is no longer worth it. US President Donald Trump's administration has laid the groundwork to reverse the region's migration flow. And while the numbers remain modest, an outline of how the US hopes to overcome limited detention space as it gears up its deportation machine is emerging.

Making deals across Latin America

In its first month, the Trump administration has reached deals with Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama to act as stopovers or destinations for migrants expelled from the U.S. It has brokered deals with Venezuela to pick up its people in Texas, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and Honduras.

But none of the agreements have been detailed for the public, raising concerns about evading international protections for refugees and asylum-seekers. Adam Isacson, a researcher with the Washington-based human rights advocacy organization WOLA, suspects many were little more than improvised "handshake deals."

They were requests made while Trump threatened tariffs and to take back the Panama Canal. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio moved through the region while U.S. foreign aid was suspended,

bestowing exemptions when merited.

Trump made deals during his first presidency with Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador to take in asylum-seekers, though only Mexico and Guatemala actually received them.

But the agreements in his second term are more varied, ranging from Honduras letting Venezuelans get off a US plane and board a Venezuelan one in its territory last week, to El Salvador offering to imprison deportees — and even US citizen prisoners.

"They're being much more ambitious now," Isacson said. "The idea of sending people to be warehoused like goods, to deport them to third countries wasn't an issue" in Trump's first term.

The numbers remain relatively small, but images of deportees deplaning in shackles and deportees holding up signs asking for help in the Panama hotel where they're held are powerful.

Shock and awe' to get things started

This is still a preliminary phase because Congress has not approved a new budget, Isacson said. "While they're at that lowest level of resources they are doing all of the shock and awe possible," he said. "The idea is to scare them."

Now the migration flow that is visible is of deportations and migrants boarding boats in Panama to take them south to Colombia rather than migrants riding trains north through Mexico or massing at the U.S. border.

In just a month, Mexico has received more than 3,300 foreign deportees, who advocates say were from at least seven nationalities.

A number of them carried unusual US Immigration and Customs Enforcement documents that



read: "Reason for transfer: removal. Name of new facility (immigration): MEXICO." They appear to have nothing to do with the Remain in Mexico programme from Trump's first term that made asylum-seekers wait out the US process from Mexico.

President Claudia Sheinbaum has said little about Mexico's participation other than highlighting her administration's willingness to cooperate. The US Department of State has praised Mexico for receiving deportations and for returning migrants from elsewhere to their countries.

Farther south the numbers are smaller, but the imagery has been stronger.

Panama, a bridge in the other direction

Panama, where more than 500,000 migrants passed en route to the US border in 2023, suddenly became a bridge this month for US efforts to deport asylum seekers.

Nearly 300 US deportees from 10 mostly Asian countries were held in a Panama City hotel. Some put signs to their windows that read "Help" and "We are not save (sic) in our country."

About one-third of those in the

hotel who refused to voluntarily return to their countries were then sent to a remote camp back in the very jungle they had probably crossed in the other direction.

One deportee in the camp told The Associated Press they were not informed of their rights and weren't told how long they would be in the camp, which concerned her because of its poor conditions.

Similar flights landed in Costa Rica last week and they were sent to a remote facility that had also previously received migrants headed north.

In addition to those flights, 50 to 75 migrants are moving south through Costa Rica on their own daily, according to Omer Badilla, Costa Rica's vice minister of the interior. He raised the possibility of Panama and Colombia getting involved to organise boat trips south for migrants, but neither of those governments has publicly confirmed their involvement.

Panama and Costa Rica say UN agencies are assisting with the repatriations and that the US government is paying. The International Organisation for Migration said that it was helping authorities provide basic services and facilitating voluntary

repatriations "when it is safe to do so". "With the old flow (south to north) the situation is pretty under control," Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino said on Thursday. "That shows that now the problem is coming in the opposite direction and we hope that can be managed in an orderly fashion."

Concerns about vulnerable migrants

Even with the involvement of UN agencies, concerns abound about vulnerable migrants being passed from country to country and even sent back to countries they fled.

Advocates worry the US may be using third countries to deport migrants from countries where the US may not have diplomatic relations or strained ones, to get around constraints in international law that are supposed to prevent people from being sent back to places they would not be safe.

Gretchen Kuhner, director of IMUMI, a nongovernmental legal services organisation in Mexico, said recently a flight carrying Venezuelans from the United States to Venezuela made a stop in Cancun. But IMUMI wasn't able to speak with the migrants aboard directly to know if they wanted to try to request asylum in Mexico while in the country's territory.

Isacson said among the Venezuelans sent back to that country have been people who deserted the armed forces, who would now be in the hands of the military. The risks could be even more dire for some migrants from Iran and Afghanistan.

The region's governments are understandably sensitive about appearing to be aiding in Trump's deportation efforts, but Isacson said transparency will better shield them from those criticisms. (AP)

Latvia FM: Putin will try to achieve in peace talks what he couldn't in Ukraine war - weaken US



UNITED NATIONS, Feb 26:

Latvia's foreign minister warns that Russian President Vladimir Putin will try to achieve in peace talks what he hasn't been able to accomplish in his war against Ukraine — weaken the United States and restore control over his smaller neighbour.

Baiba Braze spoke to The Associated Press on Tuesday during a week of intense diplomacy between Europe and the United States following President Donald Trump's upending of US policy with his decision to hold direct talks with Russia, while excluding Ukraine and its European allies from the initial discussions.

Braze notes that Russia, with a population of 140 million, has managed to gain control of less than 20 per cent of Ukraine, population 40 million, since it seized Crimea in 2014 and launched its full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. Putin has failed to weaken the US and the NATO military alliance it leads, or to oust the democratic government in Kyiv.

So, when it comes to seeking peace, "I think the difficulty is with the Russians, because Russians are the ones who want to weaken US power, and who want to weaken the US in the world overall", Braze said. What the world is seeing, she said, is that when Putin interferes in other countries he wants to control both territory and the political choices of their governments. In Syria, for example, he supported the authoritarian regime of Bashar Assad and got military bases on the Mediterranean.

But Putin hasn't gotten what he wanted during the three-year war in Ukraine and "he will try to get it through the peace talks", Braze said. "So, it's important to clearly remember that perspective in whatever deal we negotiate or strike." She said although only US and Russian officials took part in last week's talks in Saudi Arabia, "Europe is included" in the peace discussions because of constant communications with both the Ukrainians and the Americans.

She has been in Washington three times since mid-December and said she was heading there later Tuesday for talks with lawmakers and administration officials. French President Emmanuel Macron met with Trump at the White House on Monday, and British Prime Minister Keir

Starmer was due to meet with him on Thursday.

Braze stressed that Europe's task now is to strengthen the transatlantic alliance and build up its own militaries and defence industries.

Last week, Latvia announced it will increase defence spending to 4 per cent of GDP next year and continue to move toward 5 per cent. NATO members have agreed to spend at least 2 per cent of their GDP on defence.

"We are investing in our own capability," she said. "We wish all Europeans would do that. That's one of the issues we are discussing." As NATO members, Braze said, Latvia and the neighboring Baltic states of Estonia and Lithuania need to make sure they are prepared for any future aggression from Russia. She said their focus is on deterrence — early warning, rapid response, military capability and political will.

The three Baltic states were occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II and fell under Soviet control after the war. Like Ukraine, they became independent countries with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Braze stressed Monday to the UN Security Council that "only Ukraine's victory can ensure lasting security and put an end to Russia's imperialist aggression." "We strongly believe that a rushed ceasefire will not lead to sustainable peace; instead, it will only embolden Russia, encouraging further expansion and putting global security at grave risk," she said.

Macron said he had spoken to 30 European and allied leaders, with some saying they are willing to be part of security guarantees for Ukraine in a peace deal.

Braze said that while there have been preliminary discussions, there is no peace process yet.

When there is, she said, "We will be guided very much by the needs of Ukraine."

"For any security force, we need military guidance," Latvia's top diplomat said. "We need military advice. What type of force is there? Where? Are the troops withdrawn on the Russian side from the contact line? How far? What is the location of any security force?"

But Braze said the most important thing is peace must be long-lasting, not just a ceasefire where war can restart again. "Nobody wants that," she said. (AP)

US, Ukraine near economic deal with mineral rights but no security promise

KYIV, Feb 26: Ukraine and the US have reached an agreement on a framework for a broad economic deal that would include access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals, three senior Ukrainian officials said on Tuesday.

The officials, who were familiar with the matter, spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. One of them said that Kyiv hopes that signing the agreement will ensure the continued flow of US military support that Ukraine urgently needs.

The agreement could be signed as early as Friday and plans are being drawn up for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to travel to Washington to meet President Donald Trump, according to one of the Ukrainian officials.

Another official said the agreement would provide an opportunity for Zelenskyy and Trump to discuss continued military aid to Ukraine, which is why Kyiv is eager to finalise the deal. (AP)

Pope resting as Argentines in Rome pray for his recovery

ROME, Feb 26: Pope Francis remained in critical condition and resting Wednesday, as Argentines and Romans alike gathered in the Eternal City to pray for his recovery from double pneumonia.

The Vatican's short morning update said: "The pope had a peaceful night and is resting." On Tuesday night, the faithful from Francis' homeland gathered in the Argentine church of Rome for a special Mass presided over by Cardinal Baldassarre Reina, the pope's vicar for Rome. The rector of the church, the Rev. Fernando Laguna, said that he hoped the pope could feel the embrace of the community's prayer from the Gemelli hospital where he is recovering.

"I can't go to Gemelli, because for him to recover he must be isolated," he said. "I know that I hug him and that he hugs me when I pray. And now I would like to embrace the pope." Sister Nilda Trejo said that she knew Francis' health has always been delicate, with problems breathing and speaking loudly, and that's why she always prayed for him.

"We knew that he often found it difficult," she said. "In fact, you see that at the beginning of Mass, the microphone always has to be turned up because he has a bit of trouble. But he always spoke to the people. To the heart of the people."

Across town, Romans and others gathered in St. Peter's Square for the nightly Rosary prayer, presided over by Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle. (AP)

Microsoft workers protest sale of AI, cloud services to Israeli military

WASHINGTON, Feb 26: Five Microsoft employees were ejected from a meeting with the company's chief executive for protesting contracts to provide artificial intelligence and cloud computing services to the Israeli military.

The protest on Monday came after an investigation by The Associated Press revealed last week that sophisticated AI models from Microsoft and OpenAI had been used as part of an Israeli military programme to select bombing targets during the recent wars in Gaza and Lebanon.

The story also contained details of an errant Israeli airstrike in 2023 that struck a vehicle carrying members of a Lebanese family, killing three young girls and their grandmother.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella was speaking about new products at an employee town hall meeting at the company's corporate campus in Redmond, Washington. Workers standing about 15 feet to his right then revealed T-shirts that when they stood side-by-side spelled out the question "Does Our Code Kill Kids, Satya?"

Photos and video of the incident, which was live streamed throughout the company, shows Nadella kept speaking and did not acknowledge the protesters. Two men quickly tapped the workers on the shoulders and ushered them out of the room. "We provide many avenues for all voices to be heard," Microsoft said in a statement provided to the AP.

"Importantly, we ask that this be done in a



way that does not cause a business disruption. If that happens, we ask participants to relocate. We are committed to ensuring our business practices uphold the highest standards."

Microsoft did not answer Tuesday when asked whether the employees involved in the protest would face disciplinary action. The company also previously declined to comment about the AP's February 18 story about its contracts with the Israeli military.

In October, Microsoft fired two workers for helping organise an unauthorised lunchtime vigil for Palestinian refugees at its headquarters. Microsoft said at the time that it ended the employment of some people "in accordance with internal policy" but declined to give details.

A group of workers has been raising concerns within the company for months about Microsoft

providing services to the Israeli military through its Azure cloud computing platform. Some employees at the company have also spoken out in support of Israel and said those supporting Palestinians have made them feel unsafe. The AP's investigation included exclusive details drawn from internal company data and documents, including that the usage of AI models by the Israeli military through Azure increased nearly 200 times after the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas militants.

The AP's report was shared and discussed among Microsoft employees on social media and within the company's internal systems. In a community forum designated for employees to raise concerns with senior leadership, an employee shared links to the AP report.

More than a dozen others questioned whether the company was violating its stated principles to defend human rights and not to let its AI models be used to harm people, according to screenshots reviewed by the AP.

Abdo Mohamed, a researcher and data scientist who was one of the Microsoft workers fired over the October vigil, said the company is prioritizing profits over its own human rights commitments. "The demands are clear," said Mohamed, who works with a group of Microsoft workers called No Azure for Apartheid. "Satya Nadella and Microsoft executives need to answer to their workers by dropping contracts with the Israeli military." (AP)

Hamas to turn over bodies of four Israeli hostages in exchange for release of hundreds of prisoners

CAIRO, Feb 26: Hamas will return the bodies of four dead Israeli hostages on Thursday in exchange for Israel's release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, the group said, just days before the first phase of the ceasefire between the warring parties was to expire.

Israel has delayed the release of some 600 Palestinian prisoners since Saturday to protest what it says is the cruel treatment of hostages during their release by Hamas.

The militant group has said the delay is a "serious violation" of their ceasefire and that talks on a second phase are not possible until the Palestinians are freed.

Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou told The Associated Press on Wednesday that Hamas would hand over the bodies of four Israelis the next day.

In exchange, Israel would release the Palestinian prisoners, as well as an unspecified number of women and minors detained since the militant group's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the conflict.

An Israeli official confirmed that the bodies of four hostages were expected to be turned over but provided no further details. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

Israel and Hamas had already said on Tuesday that an agreement had been reached to return the bodies of the hostages, but no date had been announced.

Hamas has released hostages, and the bodies of four dead hostages, in large public ceremonies during which the Israelis were paraded and forced to wave to large crowds.

Israel, along with the Red Cross and UN officials, have said the ceremonies were humiliating to the hostages, and Israel last weekend delayed the scheduled prisoner release in protest.

The deadlock over the exchange had threatened to collapse the ceasefire when the current six-week first phase of the deal expires this weekend.

The latest agreement would complete both sides' obligations of the first phase of the ceasefire — during which Hamas is returning 33 hostages, including eight bodies — in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

It also could clear the way for an expected visit this week by the White House's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, to the region.

Witkoff has said he wants the sides to move into negotiations on the second phase, during which all remaining hostages held by Hamas are to be released and an end to the war is to be negotiated. The Phase 2 talks were supposed to begin weeks ago, but never did.

The ceasefire, brokered by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, ended 15 months of heavy fighting that erupted after Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack that killed some 1,200 people in Israel and took about 250 people hostage.

Israel's military offensive has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to Palestinian health officials, displaced an estimated 90 per cent of Gaza's population and decimated the territory's infrastructure and health system.

The Hamas-run Health Ministry does not differentiate between civilian and militant deaths, but it says that over half of the dead have been women and children. (AP)

Confluence of tradition, technology: Harvard professors highlight experiences, insights from Maha Kumbh

NEW YORK, Feb 26: Top professors from the prestigious Harvard University highlighted the coexistence of tradition and technology and the intersection of commerce and spirituality at Maha Kumbh. They emphasised lessons and opportunities from the world's largest religious gathering, which inches towards closure on Wednesday.

The Consulate General of India in New York organised a special discussion on Monday titled 'Insights from the World's Largest Spiritual Gathering - Maha Kumbh' featuring the Jorge Paulo Lemann Professor at Harvard Business School Tarun Khanna, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at the Harvard Divinity School Diana Eck, and Assistant Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School Tiona Zuzul.

The professors shared their insights and experiences from on-ground research conducted during the Kumbh Mela in 2013 and various aspects of this year's pilgrimage, from spirituality and engineering to administration and the combination of tradition, technology, and economics. Khanna, addressing the gathering at the special event hosted by the Consul General of India in New York Binaya Pradhan, underlined the aspects of scale, sanitation and technology at the Kumbh Mela.

"I, personally as a scholar, am fascinated by the coexistence of tradition and technology because that's how society is developed. We keep some things core to us, that's a tradition that stays" and adds layers of technology to it,



Khanna said.

Khanna said the Kumbh Mela is a "fascinating place" to see how technology gets absorbed into religion and "it's been neat to see layers of technology" implemented at the Kumbh. He also pointed out that the 2025 Kumbh is called the 'Swachh Kumbh' and said it is "incredibly clean".

Khanna also lauded the digitisation of the "lost and found" services in the Maha Kumbh this year, describing it as "super interesting" because "it speaks directly to this idea of tradition and technology".

Eck in her presentation underscored that while the Kumbh Mela is a "great pilgrimage", "what astonished us more than anything was just the astonishing fact that this city is built in such a short time, and it has a whole range of things associated with it", including engineering teams, electricity substations, building an urban environment, health services and small businesses.

Eck highlighted the temporary tents built with four to five materi-



als for the Kumbh by skilled builders in a matter of days.

"The Kumbh Mela is a good example of the ability to create simple structures with simple materials and do it quickly. There is a lot that various places in the world can learn from this," she said, citing the example of the need for temporary encampments for vast refugee populations. "That kind of skill, I don't think is going to be outgrown in the future," she said. Eck also lauded the technological innovation at Kumbh, describing it as "extraordinary".

Zuzul, who had travelled to India for the first time in 2013 for Kumbh as part of Eck's research team, highlighted the evolution of businesses and economic opportunities as well as logistical challenges and solutions that the Kumbh presents. Zuzul said she hopes to return to India for the next Kumbh in around 2037.

"I'm really excited to understand how this intersection of commerce and spirituality will evolve. It is important for the government,

and larger and local businesses to think about what kind of Kumbh we want to create. What sorts of commercial opportunities do we need to provide, and what does that mean for the spiritual essence of the religious gathering," she said.

Khanna suggested the organisers could spend a bit more time passing on the learnings from one Kumbh to the next, not just in 6-12 year intervals but year by year.

In response to a question on what the organisers did well this year and issues that can be fixed for the future, Zuzul said: "Something that really impressed me this year was just the thought that went into creating the infrastructure to allow for a successful and orderly Kumbh, whether it's the number of toilets that were built or the Artificial Intelligence cameras that could count the number of people present in any given place."

"I think changing human behaviour is something that takes a very long time, and often can't just be done through these sorts of mechanisms." "I suspect that what we'll see in future years more attempts to influence how people behave in this space in a more emergent way," she said.

The Maha Kumbh Mela commenced in Prayagraj at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati on January 13 this year and will conclude on Mahashivratri on Wednesday.

The Uttar Pradesh government has said that an unprecedented 600 million devotees at the Maha Kumbh Mela so far this year have taken a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam, the confluence of the three holy rivers. (PTI)

Arunachal has potential to generate 50,000 mw of hydropower: Dhankhar

‘When action is taken, we witness remarkable progress’

ITANAGAR, Feb 26: Arunachal Pradesh has the potential to generate 50,000 mw of hydropower, vice-president Jagdeep Dhankhar said on Wednesday, maintaining that the state holds the key to India's energy future.

Dhankhar, who is on a daylong visit to the state, attended the Nyokum Yullo festival of the Nyishi tribe at Boasimla in Kamle district.

Addressing a function there, he underscored the importance of festivals in preserving the cultural heritage of the tribal communities.

Dhankhar hailed India as the fastest-growing country in the world, citing remarkable strides in economic growth, infrastructure, and social welfare. Speaking on Arunachal Pradesh's vast hydropower capabilities, he said the sector holds an investment potential of ₹ 5 lakh crore.

“Decades ago, the government of India introduced the ‘Look East’ policy. Prime Minister Narendra

Modi transformed this into the ‘Act East’ policy, emphasising that mere observation is not enough, decisive action is necessary,” Dhankhar pointed out.

“When action is taken, we witness remarkable progress. Whether it's air travel, airports, railway connectivity, road networks, or even 4G network, these developments reflect Arunachal Pradesh's advancement,” he added.

The vice-president underscored that these achievements reaffirm India's unparalleled strength and urged citizens to uphold a spirit of nationalism. “Under no circumstances can we compromise on national interest, our dedication to the nation, or our commitment to serving it,” he asserted.

Highlighting India's cultural unity, Dhankhar remarked, “There is no country like India. As you celebrate Nyokum Yullo today, festivals like Holi, Baisakhi, Lohri, Bihu, Pongal, and Navanna will also be celebrated across the na-



tion. Regardless of where we are, our traditions and thoughts remain connected.” The vice-president also noted a significant milestone in India's history - the official recognition of the Buddhist community as a minority.

He pointed out that, for the first time, a Buddhist leader from Arunachal Pradesh - Kiren Rijiju, has been appointed as a cabinet minister.

“This historic development has sent a strong message to the world,” he added.

Praising Rijiju, Dhankhar described him as a senior and influential leader who has been elected to the Lok Sabha four times.

“Rijiju ji, you envisioned the Frontier Highway, and your dream will become a reality. I have seen the vision you hold for Arunachal Pradesh and the transformative changes you have spearheaded,” he said. The vice-president further emphasised that Rijiju's continued role in leadership reflects the state's ongoing progress.

“India today is a strong and resilient nation and no one can cast an evil eye upon us. Our Prime Minister stands among the world's most prominent leaders, and you are fortunate that the leader you trust (Rijiju) has also earned the trust of the PM,” Dhankhar added.

Accompanied by Parliamentary Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju, Dhankhar inaugurated a multipurpose indoor hall in Boasimla.

He also felicitated Kabak Yano, the first woman from the Nyishi community to conquer Mt Everest.

He enthusiastically joined the Rikham Pada dance, a tradition of the community. (PTI)

Kuki group criticises Manipur Guv for meeting Meitei outfit Arambai Tenggol

IMPHAL, Feb 26: Kuki Organisation for Human Rights (KOHUR) criticised Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla for meeting Meitei outfit Arambai Tenggol, calling it an armed extremist group responsible for mass violence.

At the meeting on Tuesday, Bhalla sought Arambai Tenggol's cooperation in restoring peace and normalcy in the strife-torn state. The discussions also covered surrendering weapons under specific terms and conditions, officials said.

“KOHUR strongly condemns Manipur governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla for holding a meeting with Ko-

rounganba Khuman and Robin Mangang, the leaders of Arambai Tenggol, an armed extremist group responsible for mass violence, ethnic persecution and destabilisation in Manipur,” the Kuki group said in a statement. It said the Kuki-Zo community will “not remain silent” while those responsible for their persecution are treated as political stakeholders.

Following the meeting with Bhalla, Arambai Tenggol's PRO Robin Mangang said, “The governor requested us to give up arms. We have some terms and conditions and when those are fulfilled, we will surrender the weapons.” (PTI)

Highway connecting all districts of Arunachal to be completed soon: Rijiju

ITANAGAR, Feb 26: Union minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday said that the Trans-Arunachal Highway, which will connect all 26 district headquarters of the state, is nearing completion.

The Union parliamentary affairs and minority affairs minister was addressing a programme on the occasion of Nyokum Yullo, a festival of the Nyishi tribe, at Boasimla in Kamle district. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar was also present at the event.

“The Trans-Arunachal Highway, which is nearing completion, will

seamlessly connect all district headquarters of the state, enhancing accessibility and boosting development,” Rijiju said.

Underscoring the Centre's commitment to Arunachal Pradesh, the minister said that the government has sanctioned the ₹ 42,000 crore Frontier Highway project, a landmark initiative and the first of its kind in India at such a large scale.

Rijiju last week said that the Arunachal Frontier Highway, which will connect 12 districts along the India-China boundary, will be a “game changer” for the

border areas of the northeastern state. He credited this ambitious project to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Rijiju said that history will remember the visit of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar to Boasimla, a small town situated along the national highway.

“The arrival of the second citizen of the country in Boasimla is a moment of immense pride for the people of Arunachal Pradesh. It is an honour to have the Vice President among us as we celebrate Nyokum Yullo,” he said. (PTI)

Nagaland Mahila Cong condemns assault on nursing intern

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 26: The Nagaland Pradesh Mahila Congress Committee (NPMCC) has expressed deep shock and outrage at the assault on a female nursing intern at Dimapur district hospital on February 24.

“Such a heinous incident, taking place in a healthcare institution meant to provide care and safety, is unacceptable and must be condemned in the strongest terms,” NPMCC vice president Sentila Imchen said in a statement on Wednesday.

Extending support to the victim and her family, the NPMCC said it stands with civil society organisations, student bodies and women's groups demanding justice in the case.

It urged the law enforcement authorities to take swift action

against the perpetrator(s) of the crime, saying this incident exposed serious security failures.

The Mahila Congress further appealed to the authorities to implement stricter security measures in hospitals and other public institutions to ensure the safety of all individuals, especially women.

On February 24, a female nursing intern from the School of Nursing under Dimapur district hospital was assaulted inside the dental OPD room by some miscreant(s). The incident sparked huge outrage with civil society organisations staging protest at the hospital on Tuesday, demanding immediate action against the perpetrators.

Describing the incident as “alarming violation of safety within a public healthcare facility”, the protesters demanded swift justice.

NABARD projects ₹ 2,106 cr credit potential for Nagaland in priority sector

KOHIIMA, Feb 26: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) projected a credit potential of Rs 2,106.34 crore for 2025-26 under priority sector activities in Nagaland.

The projection was made in the State Focus Paper (SFP) released by Advisor for Agriculture Mhathung Yanthan during a seminar organised by NABARD here on Tuesday.

The SFP stated that of the total projection, ₹ 712 is for agriculture, ₹ 968 crore for MSME and ₹ 425 crore for other sectors.

The paper outlines a comprehensive assessment of the state's credit potential for priority sector activities, which include agriculture, rural development, and infrastructure projects to help guide financial institutions in channelling credit effectively, said NABARD General Manager Pauliankai Bulte.

He said banks should focus on extending credit to Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). Bulte stressed the importance of supporting Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), including those identified for computerisation under a central project.

He also noted the need to fast-track the saturation of Kisan Credit Cards (KCCs), with a particular emphasis on animal husbandry and fisheries.

“The state needs to focus on agriculture, including expanding irrigation facilities, horticulture facilities, and horticulture and food processing which can revolutionise its economy,” he said.

In his address, Yanthan praised the state's achievement of exceeding the Ground Level Credit (GLC) target for the priority sector in the previous financial year.

He urged the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) to take proactive measures to establish brick-and-mortar bank branches in the 22 unbanked rural development blocks of the state. (PTI)

Deputy CM Chowna Mein attends silver jubilee Nyokum Yullo celebration in Yangte

HT Correspondent
YANGTE, Feb 26: Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein attended the Silver Jubilee Nyokum Yullo Celebration in Yangte on Wednesday, commemorating 25 years of the Central Nyokum Yullo Celebration in the Yangte Circle of Kra Daadi District.

The event was a vibrant reflection of age-old traditions, fostering unity and pride among the local people.

Extending his congratulations to the people of Yangte, the Deputy Chief Minister emphasised the importance of preserving their cultural identity.

“Nyokum Yullo is more than a festival; it is a living legacy, an ancestral treasure passed down through generations. It reminds us of the importance of safeguarding our heritage, which defines who we are,” he stated.

“As Arunachalees, we must continue to take immense pride in our roots, for they embody the spirit

of being Arunachalee,” he added.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to promoting tribal languages, customs, and traditions, he assured continued support for the preservation and promotion of the state's rich cultural heritage for future generations to thrive.

He also announced plans to sanction funds for the construction of a cultural podium and open hall at the Nyokum Yullo Ground in Yangte.

On the occasion, the deputy chief minister released a festival souvenir titled ‘Ane Yangte Mor-Pale’, published by the celebration committee to commemorate the Silver Jubilee Nyokum Yullo Celebration in Yangte Circle.

The event was attended by several distinguished guests, including Minister of Urban Development Affairs, Land Management, and Civil Aviation, Balo Raja; Deputy Commissioner of Kra Daadi, Charu Nili; and ZPC Charu Menia, among others.

‘One Nation, One Election’ will strengthen democracy, save resources: Tripura CM

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Feb 26: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday said that One Nation, One Election will significantly help in strengthening democracy, boosting voter turnout and engagement, and also provide economic benefits.

Addressing a discussion session on One Nation, One Election at Rabindra Shatabarshiki Bhawan, Saha said that ever since PM Modi came to power, businessmen have received respect, which he also observed during his recent visit to Assam.

“During the Left Front rule, we observed that businessmen were treated as enemies of society. Today, we called the businessmen to create awareness among them about One Nation, One Election. Whenever an election takes place, schools have to be used for the process, leading to their closure. One Nation, One Election is beneficial as we need to cast our vote only once in five years, which is a relief. But if elections are held every year, common people will suffer,” he added. He further stated that if One Nation, One Election is implemented, the voter turnout percentage will also rise.

“It will also help from a financial perspective and strengthen democracy. This is the need of the hour. PM Modi has been advocating for it, and in 2024, the matter was also raised in Parliament, leading to the formation of a committee. Conducting elections multiple times in a year requires huge funds. During any election, the first target is teachers, who are deputed for various election-related duties. If elections are held only once in five years, teachers and other employees can work properly without interruptions. Moreover, during elections, the Model Code of Conduct is enforced, which prevents the government from making decisions in the Cabinet or signing important files, creating obstacles,” said Saha.

The Governor also highlighted the diverse tourism opportunities which have positioned the sector as a vibrant avenue for entrepreneurship and partnerships.

Discussing the state's hydropower potential, the Governor stated that Arunachal Pradesh has a capacity of 58,000 MW, nearly 40% of India's total hydropower potential.

“Several projects are operational or under construction, including the Dibang Multipurpose Hydro Project (2880 MW), one of India's largest. Once fully commissioned, these projects are expected to generate over ₹10,000 crore in an annual revenue,” he added.

The Governor praised the tribal communities for their commitment to environmental conservation, underscoring Arunachal Pradesh's status as a Green State. He shared government initiatives that balance development with sustainability, including streamlined land acquisition policies and a single-window clearance system for businesses.

87 more firearms surrendered in Manipur's seven districts

IMPHAL, Feb 26: A total of 87 firearms and ammunition were surrendered before the security forces in seven districts of restive Manipur, police said on Wednesday.

The highest number of weapons were surrendered in the Imphal West district. Among them were 12 carbine machine guns with magazines, two .303 rifles with magazines, two SLR rifles with magazines, four 12-bore single-barrel guns and an IED.

In the Jiribam district, among the weapons surrendered were five

12-bore double-barrel guns, one 9 mm carbine with magazine, and a grenade.

In Kangpokpi district, an AK-47 rifle with two magazines, a .303 rifle, a Smith & Wesson revolver, a .22 pistol with magazine, a single-barrel rifle, and grenades were among the items surrendered.

Firearms were also surrendered in Bishnupur, Thoubal, Imphal East, and Churachandpur districts on Tuesday.

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla had on February 20 urged warring groups to voluntarily surrender

weapons robbed from security forces and other illegally held arms within seven days, assuring that no punitive action would be taken.

Manipur chief secretary PK Singh on Sunday said the forces would take action after the expiry of the period. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The Centre had imposed President's rule in the state on February 13 after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned. (PTI)

KT Parnaik praised the tribal communities for their commitment to environmental conservation Arunchal Guv highlights state's tourism potential as core economic driver

HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, Feb 26: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt. General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd.), has highlighted the state's immense potential as a major tourist destination, emphasising its unparalleled natural beauty as one of the core drivers of its economy.

The Governor said while participating in the prestigious ET Now Business Conclave & Awards 2025 in New Delhi on Tuesday.

“Arunachal Pradesh is a land of unparalleled natural beauty, making tourism one of its core economic drivers,” an official statement quoted Governor as saying.

The Governor also highlighted the ease-of-doing-business initiatives undertaken by the Arunachal Pradesh Government, adding, “Investment opportunities in the state and emphasised its unique advantages for businesses.”

The Governor further said that Arunachal Pradesh remains the only



state in the region unaffected by terrorism, enabling aggressive developmental initiatives. Additionally, he also highlighted key infrastructure advancements, including the expansion of road networks to the First Villages and the provision of 4G connectivity.

As per the statement, the Governor also spoke about Kiwi and said that

state produces largest quantity of Kiwi in India, which is planned to be exported.

Later, he emphasised the strong nationalistic spirit of the people and the widespread use of Hindi and English, facilitating seamless communication for businesses.

Commenting on the tourism, the

NO. AFB/DTC/179/2024-25/2363, Dated Kokrajhar the 25th February/2025

PRESS NOTICE
Notice Inviting Bids (NIB)
Tender No. FSHRY/BTC/2024-25/PMMSY/I

The District Fishery Development Officer, Baksa, hereby Invites bids through e-tendering process only from the Government Registered Fish Seed Producer/Grower/Suppliers, Fish Feed Manufacturers and/or its Authorized Dealers for the supply.

Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-
District Fishery Dev. Officer
Baksa

IPR/BTC/C/2024-25/1551

E-AUCTION FOR 38 NOS CATERING STALL ASSETS OVER LUMDING DIVISION		
E-Auction is invited for 38 Nos. Catering Stall (General Minor Unit & Special Minor Unit) Assets Over Lumding Division Auction Catalogue No. CATER-LMG-02-25. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Auction Start Date & Time (All Lots): At 10:00 hrs. on 10-03-2025. Days: 1826.		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	Catg-LMG-NHLG-GMU-10-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on General Minor Units, Tea Stall (NHLGTS-3), of New Halflong Railway Station at Other Platform.
AA/2	Catg-LMG-BHRB-GMU-119-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on General Minor Unit tea stall No. BHRBTS-1 at platform-1 of Bhaibari Railway station.
AA/3	Catg-LMG-JID-GMU-9-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on General Minor Units, Tea Stall (JIDTS-6), of JAGIROAD Railway Station at Other Platform.
AA/4	Catg-LMG-HKD-GMU-15-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on General Minor Units (GMU), Tea Stall (HKDTS-3), of Hailakandi Railway Station at PF-1.
AA/5	Catg-LMG-DMR-GMU-19-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on General Minor Units, Tea Stall (DMRTS-4), of Dharmanagar Railway Station at Other Platform.
AA/6	Catg-LMG-NHLG-GMU-12-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on General Minor Units, Tea Stall (NHLGTS-6), of New Halflong Railway Station at Other Platform.
AA/7	Catg-LMG-UDPU-GMU-115-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on General Minor Unit (GMU) tea stall No. UDPUTS-1 at Platform-1 of Udaipur Railway station.
AA/8	Catg-LMG-JRNA-GMU-58-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on General Minor Unit (GMU) tea stall No. JRNATS-1 at platform-1 of Jirania Railway station.
AA/9	Catg-LMG-LKA-GMU-3-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on General Minor Units (GMU), Tea Stall (LKATS-8), of LANKA Railway Station at other platform.
AA/10	Catg-LMG-BXP-GMU-103-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on General Minor Unit (GMU) tea stall No. BXPTS-3 at Platform-1 of Barpathar Railway station.
AA/11	Catg-LMG-NHLG-GMU-11-23-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on General Minor Units, Tea Stall (NHLGTS-4), of New Halflong Railway Station at Other Platform.
AA/12	Catg-LMG-MBG-GMU-26-23-2 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on General Minor Units (GMU), Tea Stall (MBGTS-2), of Maibang Railway Station at PF-1.
AB/1	Catg-LMG-JID-SMU-78-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. JIDTS-4 at Other Platform of Jagiroad Railway station.
AB/2	Catg-LMG-HKD-SMU-90-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. HKDTS-1 at platform-1 of Hailakandi Railway station.
AB/3	Catg-LMG-DMR-SMU-95-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit tea stall No. DMRTS-3 at Other Platform of Dharmanagar Railway station.
AB/4	Catg-LMG-JID-SMU-75-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. JIDTS-1 at platform-1 of Jagiroad Railway station.
AB/5	Catg-LMG-BPB-SMU-142-24-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service at Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. BPBTS-8 at platform 2 of Badarpur Railway station.
AB/6	Catg-LMG-NHLG-SMU-82-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit tea stall No. NHLGTS-5 at Other Platform of New Halflong Railway station.
AB/7	Catg-LMG-KWM-SMU-62-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. KWMTS-1 at platform-1 of Kamrup Railway station.
AB/8	Catg-LMG-JMK-SMU-132-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service tea stall No. JMKTS-2 at PF-1 of Jamunamukh Railway Station.
AB/9	Catg-LMG-BXP-SMU-130-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service (SMU tea stall No. BXPTS-2) at PF-1 of Barpathar Railway Station.
AB/10	Catg-LMG-GHY-SMU-126-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering stall (Tea stall) (GHYTS-19) at PF 4/5 between pillars No 15 & 16 at Guwahati Railway station.
AB/11	Catg-LMG-GHY-SMU-127-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering stall (Tea stall) (GHYTS-21) at PF 6/7 between pillars No 2 & 3 at Guwahati Railway station.
AB/12	Catg-LMG-CPK-SMU-66-24-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit tea stall No. CPKTS-5 at Old Platform-1 of Chaparmukh Railway station.
AB/13	Catg-LMG-CPK-SMU-65-24-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit tea stall No. CPKTS-6 at Old Platform-1 of Chaparmukh Railway station.
AB/14	Catg-LMG-LKA-SMU-55-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. LKATS-9 at Other Platform of Lanka Railway station.
AB/15	Catg-LMG-LKA-SMU-60-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. LKATS-6 at Other Platform of Lanka Railway station.
AB/16	Catg-LMG-LKA-SMU-46-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. LKATS-4 at platform-1 of Lanka Railway station.
AB/17	Catg-LMG-CPK-SMU-63-24-2 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit tea stall No. CPKTS-1 at new platform-1 of Chaparmukh Railway station.
AB/18	Catg-LMG-AGTL-SMU-40-23-2 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of Catering Services at (SMU) No. AGTLTS-6 at PF-2, between pillar 9 & 10 earmarked for ST-WOMEN category
AB/19	Catg-LMG-MBG-SMU-32-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on Special Minor Units (SMU), Tea Stall (MBGTS-1), of Maibang Railway Station at PF-1.
AB/20	Catg-LMG-KUGT-SMU-97-24-2 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. KUGTTS-2 at platform-2 of Kumarghat Railway station.
AB/21	Catg-LMG-GHY-SMU-124-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering stall (Tea stall) (GHYTS-9) at PF 6/7 between pillars No 3 & 4 at Guwahati Railway station.
AB/22	Catg-LMG-BXP-SMU-129-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service (SMU tea stall No. BXPTS-1) at PF-1 of Barpathar Railway Station.
AB/23	Catg-LMG-SZR-SMU-45-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. SZRTS-3 at platform-1 of Sarupathar Railway station.
AB/24	Catg-LMG-MBG-SMU-33-23-2 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering services on Special Minor Units (SMU), Tea Stall (MBGTS-3), of Maibang Railway Station at PF-1.
AB/25	Catg-LMG-JMK-SMU-131-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service (SMU tea stall No. JMKTS-1) at PF-1 of Jamunamukh Railway Station.
AB/26	Catg-LMG-HKD-SMU-91-23-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	Provision of catering service on Special Minor Unit (SMU) tea stall No. HKDTS-4 at platform-1 of Hailakandi Railway station.
Closing date & time : At 16:40 hrs. on 10-03-2025. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Successive lots closing interval 10 minutes. Lot wise closing time can be viewed in e-Auction module of IREPS. Note : Prospective bidder are requested to visit e-Auction leasing module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in for more details.		
Sr. DCM, Lumding		
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY Serving Customers With A Smile		

'TN govt provided security during the last journey of 1998 bomb blast accused and mastermind'

No reduction in Parliamentary seats due to delimitation: Shah

COIMBATORE (Tamil Nadu), Feb 26: Union Home Minister Amit Shah 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.

Shah, who was addressing BJP members after inaugurating a party office here, also rejected Stalin's claims of "injustice" to the state in the allocation of central funds, saying the Narendra Modi government has provided ₹ 5,08,337 crore to the state during the 2014-24 period.

The Union Home 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 the 39 Lok Sabha seats due to delimitation and has convened an all-party meeting on March 5 to discuss the matter.

"No southern state including Tamil Nadu would see a reduction in the Parliamentary representation when delimitation will be done on a pro rata basis...And I want to reassure the public of South India that Modi ji has kept your interest

in mind to make sure that not even one seat is reduced pro rata. Whatever increase is there, Southern states will get a fair share, there is no reason to doubt this," Shah asserted. The Modi government has made it clear in the Lok Sabha that no southern state will lose even one seat after delimitation and that the interest of the people of the southern states will be ensured in the matter, he asserted.

Accusing the Tamil Nadu government of "corruption and anti-national activities", Shah said the people in the state are anguished over several issues and "the CM and his son (Udhayanidhi) have taken up some issue to divert public attention." At the event, which was attended by state party chief Annamalai, Union minister L Murugan, and BJP National Secretary Arvind Menon among others, Shah also asserted that in 2026, Tamil Nadu would witness the formation of an NDA government, signaling the new era.

Lashing out at the ruling DMK dispensation on the law and order situation in the state, the Union Home Minister said, "the anti-national tendency is at an all-time high in Tamil Nadu". The state has



the "worst law and order situation in the country", he said.

"Tamil Nadu government provided security during the last journey of 1998 bomb blast accused and mastermind (SA Basha)," he said and also alleged that the drug mafia enjoyed a free hand in selling drugs in the state and that illegal mining mafia was making politics corrupt here.

"All the leaders of DMK have got Master's degree in corruption --One leader is involved in a cash-for-job scam, another in a money laundering case, third in a disproportionate wealth case, fourth in a

coal scam, and the fifth was involved in ₹ 6,000 crore CRIDP scam. It seems the DMK has selected the corrupt through the party's members drive," he charged at the event.

Daring the Chief Minister to speak the truth on fund allocation, the Home Minister said: "Answer my questions before the people. I say with statistics that the Modi government gave ₹ 5,08,337 crore to Tamil Nadu as against a mere ₹ 1.52 lakh crore by the then UPA regime (from 2004-2014). You are saying the Modi government is doing injustice. But the injustice

was done to the state during the UPA regime when you were part of the government then."

In addition, the Centre provided ₹ 1.43 lakh crore to Tamil Nadu to develop its infrastructure, he said. Shah deplored the lack of safety for girl students in the university and expressed concern that college students were getting killed for opposing the sale of illicit liquor.

He exuded confidence the NDA will come to power in Tamil Nadu next year after the Assembly elections and that the win would be bigger than the saffron bloc's Maharashtra and Haryana victories.

At the event, Shah also virtually inaugurated the party offices at Tiruvannamalai and Ramanathapuram. Responding to Shah, senior DMK leader and Lok Sabha member A Raja asked what was the basis for pro rata.

"The problem is pro rata. There is no problem as regards how many seats in the numerical sense. Pro rata on what basis, on population or the existing constituency of MP or MLAs," he asked while addressing a press conference at the DMK headquarters Anna Arivalayam in Chennai.

He asked if Tamil Nadu was

"being penalised" for following the government's advice on population control.

While the Parliamentary seats in Tamil Nadu may not reduce as claimed by the Centre, those in some other states may go up as a result of the delimitation, Raja said.

"This could affect Tamil Nadu. Our voice will be stifled in key matters like NEET or jallikattu if there is voting," he said.

Raja said: "We will withdraw the (March 5) all-party meeting if they declare that the pro rata is not based on population but on the numerical strength of the parliamentary constituency."

In his speech, Shah said Modi has fostered a spirit of healthy competition among all states.

After independence, Modi contributed the most to the Tamil language, culture, and dignity of Tamil Nadu, and by placing the sacred Sengol (scepter) in the Parliament House, he has honoured Tamil culture in the temple of Indian democracy," he added.

Shah later attended the Mahashivratri celebrations, organised by Sadhguru's Isha Yoga Center. (PTI)

Ahead of assembly polls, Nitish inducts seven new ministers, all from BJP

PATNA, Feb 26: With less than a year left for assembly polls, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday inducted seven new faces into his council of ministers, all from alliance partner BJP.

The expansion, which could be the last before the elections are announced, raises the total number of ministers to 36, the maximum permissible in the state with a 243-strong assembly.

Governor Arif Mohammad Khan administered the oath of office to the new ministers who all are members of the assembly. The state also has a legislative council.

The development took place on a day state BJP president Dilip Jaiswal, the former minister for revenue and landforms, gave up his cabinet berth citing the party's policy of "one person, one post".

The new ministers include Jibesh Kumar, who was a member of the state Cabinet till August 2022, when the chief minister abruptly quit the NDA, accusing the BJP of trying to "break" his JD(U).

Jibesh Kumar, who returns to the state cabinet with just two days left for the commencement of the budget session, told reporters: "I am ready to discharge the responsibility to the best of my ability".

Other inductees are Sanjay Sarsogi, a fifth-term MLA from Darbhanga, and Sunil Kumar, who represents Bihar Sharif, in the CM's pocket borough Nalanda, for as many times, thrice on a JD(U) ticket before crossing over to the BJP in 2015.

"I look forward to discharging the new responsibility. Earlier, I used to pose questions to the government. Now, I shall be expected to reply to queries from fellow members," said Sarsogi.

Another former JD(U) face was Raju Kumar Singh, the MLA from Sahebganj in Muzaffarpur, who had won the seat in 2020 on a ticket of Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP), floated by former Bollywood set designer Mukesh Sahni.

The VIP had won altogether three seats but all the MLAs joined BJP two years ago after Sahni burnt his bridges with the saffron party, losing his cabinet berth in the bargain.

Singh came out with a guarded response when he was asked whether the ministerial berth could be seen as a "reward" for switching loyalty towards the BJP.

He said, "It is the party's prerogative to decide what responsibility should be given to whom. I shall try to live up to the expectations of the party as well as the people of Bihar".

Another notable face was Krishna Kumar Mantu, the MLA from Amnour in Saran district, who was recently in the news for organising a "Kurmi Chetna Rally" in Patna, with a view to reaching out to the powerful OBC community to which the JD(U) supremo belongs. (PTI)

Centre should clarify its stand on Mekedatu: Karnataka Deputy CM

BENGALURU, Feb 26: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Wednesday asked the Centre to spell out its stand on the Mekedatu balancing reservoir across the Cauvery River in the state.

Shivakumar, who holds the Water Resources portfolio, said he raised the issue of Mekedatu with Union Minister C R Patil and his deputy, V Somanna, during his visit to Delhi on Tuesday.

The meeting focused on discussing and securing approvals for several pending irrigation projects.

"I asked the Centre, 'What is your stand on the Mekedatu issue?' We may be pushing for it, or they may be opposing it, or they may say no—but they must clarify their position," Shivakumar told reporters. The Deputy Chief Minister said Patil is in a position to ensure justice and should explain the feasibility of the proposal.

"We presented a proposal for the Mekedatu balancing reservoir because we don't want any further delays. We asked the Union Minister for a clear statement on the Centre's stance," he said.

Shivakumar emphasised that Karnataka wants the Centre to inform the Supreme Court about its position on the Mekedatu issue so that both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu can benefit from it.

The Deputy CM pointed out that the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu -- an ally of his party Congress, was opposing the project due to political reasons.

"They (Tamil Nadu) fear that we will create problems for them if the Mekedatu reservoir is built, which is not the case," he added.

Neighbouring Tamil Nadu has strongly opposed the project, citing concerns that it could negatively impact the state's water supply. The project aims to provide 4.75 TMC of drinking water to Bengaluru and nearby areas while generating 400 MW of power.

The estimated cost of the project, as per 2019 rates, is ₹ 9,000 crore. Shivakumar also highlighted an ongoing dispute concerning the Pennar River.

"We have requested discussions on the issue because last year, 300 TMC of Pennar River water flowed directly into the sea without being utilised. The

year before that, over 400 TMC was wasted," he said.

Explaining the context of his meeting with Patil, Shivakumar noted that he and Rural Development & Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge had recently attended the Second All-India State Ministers' Conference on Water Vision-2047 in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

At the conference, he had presented multiple proposals.

According to him, Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta gave a PowerPoint presentation outlining Karnataka's pending irrigation projects, outstanding payments, and commitments made by the Centre.

Shivakumar said Patil allotted him time on Tuesday to discuss key issues related to the irrigation department. He also raised concerns regarding the Tungbhadra Dam, stating that due to 30 TMC of silt accumulation, Karnataka is incurring significant losses. "We have proposed constructing the Navale Dam on the Tungbhadra River. Our technical team has submitted a proposal. I have already spoken to the Ministers from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and officials from both states held a separate meeting. We also brought this to the attention of the Union Water Resources Minister, C R Patil. He assured us that if we are in agreement, the Centre will also approve it," Shivakumar said.

Additionally, he mentioned that he had spoken with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu over the phone and informed him that he would meet him on March 1 along with his team. He also discussed the project with Telangana's Irrigation Minister. "I cannot disclose the second alternative at this stage. Without first sharing the details with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and securing their approval, I cannot discuss it publicly," he said.

Shivakumar noted that multiple proposals exist for de-silting the Tungbhadra Dam, but the challenge lies in disposing of 25-30 TMC of silt, which requires substantial financial resources.

Karnataka's technical team has suggested postponing the de-silting efforts and instead prioritising the optimal use of available water. (PTI)

AAP fields Rajya Sabha MP in assembly bypoll, oppn claims Kejriwal will enter Upper House

CHANDIGARH, Feb 26: AAP on Wednesday named Rajya Sabha member Sanjeev Arora as its candidate for the Ludhiana West assembly bypoll, drawing claims from opposition parties in Punjab that party supremo Arvind Kejriwal would enter the Upper House in his place.

Arora will have to resign from the Rajya Sabha if he wins the bypoll, the date for which is yet to be announced. The passing of AAP's Gurpreet Bassi Gogi, who died of a gunshot injury after his licensed weapon accidentally discharged last month, led to the Ludhiana West seat falling vacant. Kejriwal faced defeat from his New Delhi constituency as the BJP swept AAP in the Delhi Assembly polls earlier this month. An AAP spokesperson, however, dismissed the opposition parties' claims.

Arora's name as the Ludhiana West bypoll candidate was announced by AAP national general secretary Sandeep Pathak in a post on X. A Ludhiana-based industrialist who also runs the Krishna Pran Breast Cancer Charitable Trust, the 61-year-old has been a member of the Rajya Sabha since 2022. Arora said he was grateful to the party leadership for fielding him. "Humbled and grateful to the leadership AAP for reposing faith in me to contest the Ludhiana West bye-elections. As someone deeply connected to my hometown, I look forward to serving my people with dedication and sincerity," he said



in a post on X. AAP Punjab president Aman Arora said, "Sanjeev Arora is a dedicated leader with a proven track record of serving the people of Ludhiana. He embodies the values of AAP and is committed to carrying forward the vision of late MLA Gurpreet Singh Gogi for Ludhiana West." Following the announcement, Congress MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira claimed that Kejriwal would replace Arora in the Upper House.

"If Rajya Sabha MP Sanjeev Arora is nominated as AAP candidate for the Ludhiana West bypoll, I am sure Arvind Kejriwal will take his Rajya Sabha membership!" Khaira said in a post on X. Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia also claimed that "power hungry" Kejriwal was seeking a Rajya Sabha nomination from Punjab.

In a statement here, Majithia said Arora had been nominated as the party candidate for Ludhiana West constituency "solely to pave the way" for Kejriwal's entry into the Rajya Sabha.

AAP's "game plan" was to "use the government's might" to get Arora elected to the Assembly so

that the Rajya Sabha seat gets vacated, he said, adding, "Kejriwal wants to get twin benefits, including a government bungalow in his name in the national capital as well as the perks and power of an MP."

The SAD leader said it was "most shameful" to see Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann "completely surrendering at the feet of the AAP high command in Delhi" in the last three years.

"Earlier the treasury of Punjab was looted to preach for AAP and the failed Kejriwal model throughout the country. Now the AAP convenor is seeking a nomination to the Rajya Sabha from Punjab," Majithia alleged. Punjab BJP general secretary Anil Sarin lashed out at the AAP, saying that the nomination of Sanjeev Arora for the Ludhiana West Assembly bypoll and Arvind Kejriwal "getting ready to enter the Rajya Sabha" from Punjab shows AAP's "bankruptcy." AAP's Punjab spokesperson Neel Garg, however, dubbed the claims as rumours.

"The bypoll date has not been announced yet. They (opposition parties) have started spreading rumours. There is no truth in it. Who goes to the Rajya Sabha will be decided when the bypoll result comes. The best candidate will be sent to the Rajya Sabha," Garg told reporters. Asked who would replace Sanjeev Arora as Rajya Sabha member, Punjab Assembly Speaker Kultar Singh Sandhwan said AAP will decide about it. (PTI)

Congress demands scope of probe into 'liquor scam'

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: The Delhi unit of Congress on Wednesday called for the formation of the Public Accounts Committee soon so that the CAG report on the previous AAP government's excise policy can be investigated, and demanded that the scope of the probe be widened to include the alleged involvement of BJP leaders in the matter.

The opposition party also demanded that the remaining 13 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports on the AAP government's performance be tabled as well and discussed in the public domain.

The CAG report on the 2021-22 liquor policy was tabled by the new Chief Minister Rekha Gupta of the BJP on the very second day of the first session of the newly elected Delhi Assembly on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference at the Congress' 24, Akbar Road headquarters, Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said the party had given a written complaint to investigating agencies on the liquor policy and had included "evidence" of BJP's "involvement" in the matter.

He also asked why all 14 CAG reports were not presented in the House on Tuesday. The Delhi Assembly session has been extended till March 3.

"We want the CAG report to be investigated by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). In such a situation, PAC should be formed as soon as possible, so that this report can be investigated and those who were involved in the loot should be punished," Yadav said.

Although the PAC is chaired by an opposition leader, in

Delhi, the government has been leading it, therefore these reports should also be brought for public discussion, Yadav said.

Yadav said there are some important questions related to the role of some big BJP leaders and the then Lieutenant Governor, which were ignored in the CAG report, he alleged.

"Why and who took the decision to change three excise directors within one year? New brands of liquor were promoted in Delhi. This should be investigated. The then governor had given permission to implement the liquor policy of the Kejriwal government. Why has no investigation been done on this till date?" Yadav said.

There is a need to investigate how licenses were given to open liquor shops in violation of the master plan, he further said. (PTI)

India must seize global supply chain disruption as opportunity: Amitabh Kant

'The good news is that environmental consciousness is increasing'

ALWAR (RAJASTHAN), Feb 26: Former Niti Aayog CEO and India's G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant said on Wednesday that while geopolitical instability has fractured global trade, India must capitalize on this "vacuum" to accelerate clean-tech manufacturing and economic growth.

Addressing the Centre for Science and Environment's annual Anil Agarwal Dialogue here, he said India has the potential to dominate sectors like battery manufacturing, electric two-wheeler and three-wheeler production, and other sustainable industries.

"You have a war going on for over 1,000 days in the heart of Europe. So, the period of stability which was created after World War 2 has come to an end. And you have a breakdown of global supply chains across the world," Kant said.

"But whatever is happening, I personally am of the view that this is a huge, huge opportunity for India, because there is a vacuum," he said.

He said that when Donald Trump exited the Paris Agreement (for the first time in 2016), China stepped up and now controls 80 per cent of the world's critical minerals. A similar

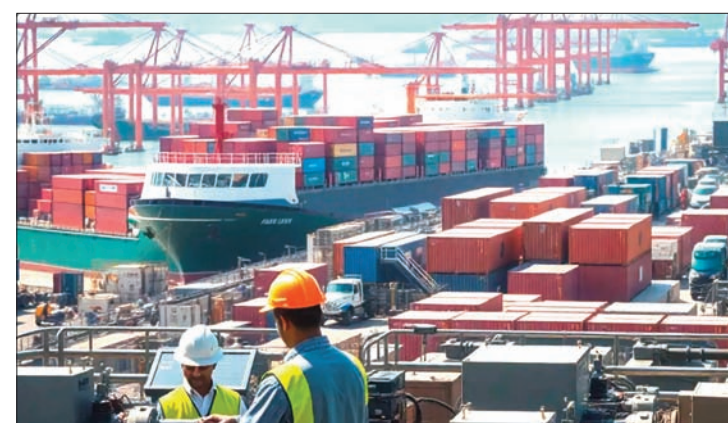
vacuum is emerging, and India must take the lead in clean-tech manufacturing, Kant said.

"It's a huge opportunity for India to do battery manufacturing. If you do not do this, we will become a colony importing goods from China and our imports in all these clean tech manufacturing will become huge, much more than what we do in terms of oil," he cautioned.

Kant, along with CSE's Director General Sunita Narain and former deputy chairperson of the erstwhile Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia, launched the State of Environment - 2025 report.

Narain said there is both good and bad news as we move ahead in 2025. "The good news is that environmental consciousness is increasing. The 2025 Delhi Assembly elections showed that voters were concerned about issues such as clean air, a clean Yamuna, and garbage on the streets. Governments are introducing environmental programmes; farmers care about their soil and water and industries seek resource security without conflicts."

"On the 'bad news' front, we are burdened with programmes that lack ambition, institutions that remain



weak and an approach to environmental management that is costly and non-inclusive," she said. Kant expressed concern over the poor state of municipal governance in Indian cities, which he said has exacerbated pollution and mismanagement.

"If 42 of the cities in India are amongst the 50 worst polluting cities in the world, then there is a huge failure of municipal governance. It has nothing to do with finance. It has nothing to do with the central government," he asserted.

Kant also said that water and elec-

tricity in India should be priced properly to prevent wastage.

"I entirely agree that water needs to be priced because India, with 17 per cent of the world's population, has just 4 per cent of water. Secondly, 90 per cent of water is being consumed by agriculture. That means rice and sugar cane is consuming all your water. And we are actually exporting virtual water in the name of basmati rice," he said.

He added that free electricity has encouraged excessive groundwater extraction. Those who consume less should pay less, and those who use

more must pay significantly more. This is how Singapore transformed itself, Kant said, citing its shift from a per capita income of USD 600 in 1965 to USD 90,000 today through governance and economic reforms.

Citing an example from Nagpur, Kant said that even poor women in the city's poorest slum areas expressed their willingness to pay for water after receiving a piped water supply. "People want to pay for water; it's the politicians and administrators who do not want to charge for it," he said. Kant also criticized populist policies that offer free services without ensuring sustainability.

"Everybody has got used to free doles and the Kejriwal system of governance of giving free doles and buying out everybody. And everybody must realize, including women, that if you keep getting free doles, you will make the country go bust," he said.

He urged a shift towards efficiency and accountability at all levels of government. "I am a very strong believer that the failure of India is not about finance. It is a failure of good governance at all levels. That must be the hallmark of India," he said. (PTI)

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E-auction for parking contract at following Railway station over Lumding Division for the period of 03 (Three) years. Description: Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three Wheelers and Four Wheelers. Auction Catalogue No.: PARK-LMG-01-25; Auction Start Date & Time (All Lots): 11:00 hrs. on 10-03-2025; Auction Close Date & Time: 12:00 hrs. on 10-03-2025; Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee; Trips/Days: 1096.		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Location
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AA/2	PARKING-LMG-BXJ-MX-121-25-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Bokajan
AA/3	PARKING-LMG-SZR-MX-122-25-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Sarupathar
AA/4	PARKING-LMG-BXP-MX-123-25-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Barpathar
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Imposing life ban on convicted lawmakers solely in Parliament's domain: Centre to SC

Centre said as a matter of judicial review, the court could declare the provisions to be unconstitutional

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: The Centre has opposed in the Supreme Court a plea seeking life ban on convicted politicians, saying imposing such a disqualification was solely within the domain of Parliament.

In an affidavit filed in court, the Centre said the prayer in a plea, seeking the same, amounted to re-writing of the statute or directing Parliament to frame a law in a particular manner which was wholly beyond the powers of judicial review.

"The question whether a lifetime ban would be appropriate or not is a question that is solely within the domain of the parliament," the affidavit said.

By confining the operation of penalty to an appropriate length of time, deterrence was ensured while undue harshness was avoided, it added.

There was, said the Centre, nothing inherently unconstitutional in limiting the effect of penalties by time and it was a settled principle of law that penalties were limited either by time or by quantum.

"It is submitted that issues raised by the petitioner have wide ranging ramifications and clearly fall within the legislative policy of Parliament and the contours of judicial review would be suitably altered in such regard," the affidavit

said. The plea in the top court filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay seeks a life ban on convicted politicians aside from the expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs in the country.

In its affidavit, the Centre underlined the apex court had consistently held that the legislative choice over one option or the other couldn't be questioned in courts over its efficacy or otherwise.

Under Section 8 (1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the period of disqualification was six years from the date of conviction or in case of imprisonment, six years from the date of release, it added.

"The disqualifications made under the impugned sections are limited by time as a matter of parliamentary policy and it would not be appropriate to substitute the petitioner's understanding of the issue and impose a lifetime ban," it said.

The Centre said as a matter of judicial review, the court could declare the provisions to be unconstitutional, however, the relief sought by the petitioner effectively sought to read "life-long" instead of "six years" in all subsections of Section 8 of the Act.

It said lifetime disqualification was the maximum that could be imposed under the provisions and



such a discretion was "certainly within the power of Parliament".

"However, it is one thing to say that a power exists and another to say that it must necessarily be exercised in every case," the Centre argued.

The affidavit said the impugned laws were "constitutionally sound" and "did not suffer from the vice of excess delegation" aside from being intra vires the powers of Parliament.

While imposing any penalty, it said, Parliament considers the principles of proportionality and reasonableness as for instance, the entirety of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, or penal law provide for imprisonment or fines up to certain limits and the rationale

behind it was that the punitive measures would co-relate with the gravity of offence.

There were numerous penal laws that prescribe imposing restrictions on the exercise of rights and freedoms, which in most cases are time-specific, it said.

The Centre said the petition failed to make the crucial distinction between basis of disqualification and effects of disqualification.

"It is true that the basis of disqualification is conviction for an offence and that this basis remains unchanged so long as the conviction stands. The effect of such conviction lasts for a fixed period of time. As stated above, there is nothing inherently unconstitutional in limiting the effect of

penalties by time," it said.

The affidavit said the petitioner's reliance on Articles 102 and 191 of the Constitution was totally misplaced.

Articles 102 and 191 of the Constitution deals with disqualifications for membership of either house of parliament, legislative assembly or legislative council.

The Centre said Clause (e) of Articles 102 and 191 were enabling provisions that confer on Parliament the power to make laws governing disqualification and it was in exercise of this power that the 1951 Act was enacted. "The Constitution has left the field open to Parliament to enact such further law governing disqualifications as it deems fit. Parliament has power both to determine the grounds for disqualification and the duration of disqualification," it said.

The Centre said the grounds for disqualification in the articles included holding of an office of profit, unsoundness of mind, insolvency and not being a citizen of India. "It is submitted that these are not permanent disqualifications," it added.

The apex court on February 10 sought responses of the Centre and the Election Commission on the challenge to constitutional validity of Sections 8 and 9 of Representation of People Act. (PTI)

India's approach to Africa based on mutually-beneficial ties, unlike 'extractive' models: EAM

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: India's approach towards Africa has been guided by a deep-rooted commitment to build mutually-beneficial partnerships, unlike "extractive" models of engagement, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday, amid China's relentless attempts to expand influence in the continent.

India and Japan, with their complementary strengths, are well-positioned to support Africa's development in a sustainable and inclusive manner, he said.

The external affairs minister was delivering a lecture at the Japan-India-Africa Business Forum.

"India's approach to Africa has always been guided by a deep-rooted commitment to building long-term, mutually-beneficial partnerships," he said.

"Unlike extractive models of engagement, India believes in capacity-building, skill development and technology transfer, ensuring that African countries not only benefit from investments but also develop self-sustaining growth ecosystems," he added.

India is Africa's fourth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching nearly USD 100 billion and growing steadily, Jaishankar noted. India has also made significant commitment to Africa's connectivity and infrastructure development, with more than USD

12 billion in concessional credit and over 200 completed projects spread across the continent in areas such as railways, power generation, agriculture, and water supply, he said. Jaishankar said India's development projects sectors such as power plants, transmission lines, cement, sugar and textile factories, technology parks and railway infrastructure generated local employment and changed lives in Africa.

India's deep and longstanding engagement with Africa can make it a natural bridge, whether geographically or in the industrial value chain, he argued.

"With India set for continued rapid economic growth, it serves as an ideal hub for Japanese companies seeking to expand into Africa and the Middle East," he said.

"Japanese investments, India's solid industrial base and digital capacities and Africa's talent and consumption can come together to create beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders," he added.

Jaishankar is of the view that India and Japan can also collaborate to strengthen resilient supply chains for African countries, particularly in critical and emerging sectors. "The growth and prosperity of Africa will not only benefit its people but also contribute to broader global stability and economic progress," he said. (PTI)

Landowner can't be deprived of land indefinitely: SC

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: The Supreme Court has recently said a landowner couldn't be deprived of the use of the land indefinitely.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan made the observation while setting aside an order of the Bombay High Court.

"The landowner cannot be deprived of the use of the land for years together. Once an embargo has been put on a landowner not to use the land in a particular manner, the said restriction cannot be kept open-ended for indefinite period," it said.

The bench, while referring to Section 127 of the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act, 1966, said it did not make any sense to keep the plot reserved in a development plan for the last 33 years.

Not only did the authority not allow the original owners to use the land, but was also not permitting the purchasers to utilise the land now, the court said.

"The statute has provided a period of ten years to acquire the land under Section 126 of the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act, 1966. Additional one year is granted to the landowner to serve a notice for acquisition prior to the amendment by Maharashtra Act 42 of 2015. Such timeline is sacrosanct and has to be adhered to by the state or by the authorities under the state," the bench said.

The top court was hearing a case in which the owners of a vacant plot had submitted a Land Development Plan for the development of 2.47 hectare.

The plan was sanctioned and the remaining area was shown to be reserved for a private school in a revised development plan under the Act, in 1993. (PTI)

4 killed in car accident in UP's Pratapgarh

PRATAPGARH (UP), Feb 26: Four people were killed and five others injured after a car rammed into a house near Baburaha turn on the Ayodhya-Prayagraj highway in Rajgarh village here, police said.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (City) Shiv Narayan Baish stated that the accident occurred around 2:30 am when a car went out of control and crashed into a house, injuring nine people, including the occupants of the vehicle and the house's residents.

All of them were admitted to the hospital, where four -- Raju Singh (25) of Chainpur Madhaura, Bihar; Abhishek Kumar Singh (24) of Chhapra, Bihar; Saurabh (26) of Raigarh, Jharkhand; and the driver, Abhishek Ojha (30) -- succumbed to their injuries. (PTI)

Badlapur case: Court keeps in abeyance findings indicting cops for 'encounter' of accused

MUMBAI, Feb 26: In a partial relief to five policemen indicted for the custodial death of an accused in Badlapur school sexual assault case, a sessions court has "kept in abeyance" findings of a magistrate's inquiry report questioning the legitimacy of the alleged encounter.

Additional sessions judge D R Deshpande, in the order on February 21, however, said the probe being carried out by the state Crime Investigation Department (CID) into the custodial death shall proceed as it was being done independent of the magistrate's report.

The accused, Akshay Shinde, was arrested in August 2024 for allegedly sexually assaulting two minor girls inside the toilet of a school in Badlapur area of Maharashtra's Thane district. He was an attendant at the school.

On September 23 last year, Shinde was killed in the alleged police shootout while being taken from Talaja prison in Navi Mumbai for questioning in connection with a case lodged against him by his wife.

Police claimed he snatched the gun of one of the cops in the police van, opened fire, and was killed in retaliatory firing.

He was shot at by senior police inspector Sanjay Shinde. Assistant police inspector Nilesh More, the two constables and a police driver were also present in the van at the time of the shootout.

The magistrate had in his report indicted senior PI Sanjay Shinde of the Thane Crime Branch, assistant PI Nilesh More, head constables Abhijeet More and Harish Tawade and constable Satish Khatal.

He held them responsible for the death of the accused while in custody, and raised doubts on their claims of opening fire at him in self-defence.

The report said the policemen, despite being in a position to control the situation, failed to do so and the use of such force was not justified.

It also said there was substance in the allegations made by parents of the ac-

cused that it was a fake encounter.

The court in its order said pending final hearing of the policemen's revision application, findings of the magistrate's inquiry report regarding two paragraphs "need to be kept in abeyance".

"The effect and operation of the findings of the magistrate, particularly the concluding paragraphs 81 and 82, is kept in abeyance till the next day," the court said.

Paragraph 81 questioned whether the use of force was justified and emphasised the policemen were in a position where they could have easily handled the situation.

Paragraph 82 said there were grounds of suspicion against the policemen, and the allegations made by parents of the deceased accused that it was a fake encounter find substance if forensic reports are considered.

The five policemen were escorting the accused from the Talaja prison to Kalyan for questioning and they claimed that he grabbed a pistol of one of the security personnel and opened fire. The police then shot him in retaliation.

As per law, a magisterial inquiry is initiated in cases where an accused dies in police or judicial custody.

The five police personnel earlier this month filed a revision application before the Thane sessions court against the findings made in the magistrate's inquiry report. The policemen in their application claimed the magistrate overstepped his jurisdiction in holding them responsible for the death of the accused.

The application said the magistrate's inquiry is only to ascertain the cause of death in cases of custodial deaths and to not indict anyone.

They sought quashing of the "unwarranted" findings of the magistrate and to stay the effect and operation of the same.

Special public prosecutor Ajay Misar submitted to the court that the state CID was investigating the matter independent of the magistrate inquiry. (PTI)

Bihar: SHG Plus model helping rural women build homes, educate children, secure futures

MUZAFFARPUR, Feb 26: Kiran Kumari of Bihar's Muzaffarpur remembers a time when borrowing money at exorbitant rates was the norm for her. Now, a unique community loan system designed to empower rural women has not only provided her with an escape from the debt trap but also a way to secure her family's future.

Women in Bihar who once struggled to make ends meet are now growing strawberries, building homes and investing in their children's education through SHG Plus -- an evolution of the traditional self-help group (SHG) model that is designed to empower rural women through financial inclusion, transparency and collective strength.

The system's evolution was dreamed up by the women themselves. The model was developed with help from the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme India.

"We used to borrow money from lenders at 60 per cent interest. It's only 2 per cent under SHG Plus," Kiran Kumari says. "Now, we don't need to borrow from outside."

In the villages of Muzaffarpur, Kiran Kumari's journey is not unique.

Savita Devi, a member of the Nari Swayam Shakti SHG Plus in Pachal Mubarak, is one of the hundreds of women who have taken loans from her collective.

"I never thought I would grow strawberries. With the loan I got through SHG Plus, I decided to give it a try. If it's profitable, I'll expand my farming," she says.

Alongside the traditional crops, the fields of Muzaffarpur are now adorned by strawberries, solar panels and pucca homes built with savings from SHG Plus.

Unlike traditional SHGs, the SHG Plus model includes mandatory annual share-outs, detailed record-keeping, and an inclusive leadership structure. These features have not only boosted the members' financial confidence but also fostered a sense of ownership and independence.

At its core, SHG Plus operates on a simple model. Women pool their weekly savings, with each member contributing as little as Rs 20 per share -- 'mohar'.

This corpus is then used to provide small loans to members at minimal interest.

Launched in a Muzaffarpur village, it soon spread to other SHGs, assuming the SHG Plus name. The model operates in several Bihar districts, financially empowering women.

What sets the SHG Plus model apart is its emphasis on transparency and accountability.

"We hold meetings every week and all accounts are handled openly," says Kiran Kumari, a member of the



Kiran Shakti SHG Plus in Harpur Mukund.

"We decide everything together -- the loan amount, interest rate, even how to use the profits," she adds.

Record-keeping includes pictorial representations, making it accessible even to semi-literate members.

"We save money through the 'mohar' system. Earlier, it was ₹ 20 per week, now it's ₹ 30. We're saving more now," Kiran Kumari.

For many women, SHG Plus has provided a pathway out of the perennial debt trap.

It has also enabled them to be ambitious and invest in income-generating activities -- a risk many said they would not have taken with traditional loan schemes due to their high rates of interest.

Shruti Singh used her share-out money to install a solar-powered borewell.

"I spent ₹ 1.35 lakh to start a business and made a yearly profit of ₹ 17,000," she says, beaming.

SHG Plus' impact extends beyond financial gains. For Bena Devi, it provided her with a stepping stone to building a better life and gave her a say in her own home. "Now, I am also a decision-maker at home. What was thought to be a forte of men has now become our business as well. With the share-out money, I built a house, spent on my child's education, and even invested in gold," she says.

Share-out is the money accumulated through the weekly contributions that is then given out as loans to members. The loan amount has to be returned within three months and the money collected as interest is then distributed evenly among the remaining members.

Sameena Khan used her money to pay for her treatment while Pratibha Kumari invested in her children's education. Aga Khan Rural Support Programme India team leader Mukesh Chandra attributes the success of SHG Plus to its focus on capacity building and financial discipline.

"The programme not only empowers women economically but also strengthens their decision-making abilities," he says. (PTI)

The Uttar Pradesh government said the total number of visitors to the fair exceeds the population of all countries in the world except India and China Maha Kumbh's final 'snan' underway on Mahashivratri, 81 lakh devotees take dip

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, Feb 26: Amid chants of 'Har Har Mahadev', a multitude of pilgrims from across the country on Wednesday took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam on Mahashivratri as the 45-day Maha Kumbh inched towards its closure. Maha Kumbh, a mega religious gathering that takes place once in 12 years, began on January 13 (Poush Purnima) and saw grand processions of Naga Sadhus and three Amrit Snans. As per official figures, over 65 crore devotees have so far visited this year's Kumbh in Prayagraj.

According to government data, by 2 am on Wednesday, over 11.66 lakh devotees immersed themselves in the Sangam on Mahashivratri, which marks the last day of the Kumbh. The number surged to 25.64 lakh in the next two hours and 41.11 lakh by 6 am. By 10 am, 81.09 lakh people had taken the final 'snan' at the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath began monitoring the arrangements at the Kumbh Mela at 4 am from Gorakhpur with senior government officials.

In a post on X, the CM said, "Hearty congratulations to all the revered saints, Kalpvasis and devotees who have come to take a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam today on the holy bathing festival of Mahashivratri dedicated to the worship of Lord Bholenath in Maha Kumbh-2025, Prayagraj....Har Har Mahadev!"

The state government arranged for showering

of petals over devotees from a helicopter at the Kumbh. Twenty quintals of flower petals were showered on the devotees in five rounds.

Being the last auspicious 'snan' of the Maha Kumbh, a large number of devotees had begun to gather on the banks of the Sangam from close to midnight, and while some camped and waited patiently to take the dip at the 'Brahma Muhurt', scores of them performed the bathing rituals well before the appointed time.

Billed as the world's largest spiritual gathering on earth, the mega religious festival on its last day attracted pilgrims from all four corners of the country. Rajvir Singh Jhala (20), a BBA student from Rajkot took the holy dip right at the Sangam nose, as did his mother and other family members who arrived in Prayagraj from Gujarat in a bus on Wednesday night. "Lord Shiva for me means 'Shunyata', one must feel that he or she is nothing in front of him. Besides, one must have goodness inside. If one has dirt inside, washing oneself in holy Sangam will not even cleanse any sin," Jhala told PTI right after his 'snan'.

As pilgrims milled around and took the holy dip at various ghats at or near the Sangam, security personnel kept a vigilant eye, not allowing crowding at any place for long duration, as they sought to manage the sea of pilgrims pouring into the mela grounds. Pilgrims also came from West Bengal, Karnataka, Bihar, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, covering literally the length and breadth



of the country.

A group of devotees also came all the way from Nepal to witness the Maha Kumbh on its closing day and take the holy dip on Mahashivratri.

Pinki Devi from Kolkata who performed the bathing rituals around 3.30 am was ecstatic that she could take the dip on the auspicious day. Chants of 'Har Har Mahadev' or 'Jai Mahakal'

rang throughout the Mela ground. Mahashivratri commemorates the divine union of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati and holds special significance in the context of the Kumbh Mela.

According to Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva played a crucial role in the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), which led to the emergence of the Amrit Kumbh (nectar pitcher), the

very essence of the Kumbh Mela. The day draws large crowds of devotees to the sacred confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati, considered holy by Hindus. The Uttar Pradesh government said the total number of visitors to the fair exceeds the population of all countries in the world except India and China, both of which have populations exceeding a billion.

The Maha Kumbh has witnessed six special bathing dates -- Poush Purnima on January 13, Makar Sankranti on January 14, Mauni Amavasya on January 29, Basant Panchami on February 3, Maghi Purnima on February 12, and Mahashivratri on February 26 -- including three 'Amrit Snan'. Given the scale of the event and the sheer volume of attendees, authorities have enforced a "no vehicle zone" in the mela area and Prayagraj besides implementing strict crowd control measures and logistical support to facilitate a seamless culmination of Maha Kumbh 2025. A stampede on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya last month led to the deaths of at least 30 people and left 60 injured, as per the government. Overseeing preparations on the ground, DIG (Kumbh) Vaibhav Krishna said expansive police deployment has been made in the Mela area. "We are prepared particularly to handle a two-pronged situation, one is the rush of devotees at the ghats, including the Sangam, and the other is crowd management at five main 'shivalayas' in the mela area where devotees will offer sacred water to Lord Shiva," Krishna told PTI on Wednesday. (PTI)

Preity Zinta visits Maha Kumbh Mela, takes holy dip



NEW DELHI, Feb 26: Actor Preity Zinta visited Maha Kumbh Mela for the third time and said her experience has been magical, heartwarming and a bit sad. Zinta shared a video post on her X handle on Wednesday featuring her visit to the festival where she took the holy dip at Triveni Sangam.

The actor expressed her experience in the caption. "This was my third time at the Kumbh Mela & it was magical, heartwarming & a bit sad. Magical because no matter how hard I try, I cannot explain how I felt. Heartwarming because I went with my mom & it meant the world to her. Sad, because I wanted to be liberated from the various cycles of life & death only to realise the duality of life & attachment. Am I ready to let go of my family, my children & the people I love? No! I'm not," she wrote.

"It's deeply moving & humbling when it dawns on you, that the strings of attachment are strong & mighty & no matter what your attachment is, eventually your spiritual journey & the journey ahead is solo."

"I came back with the notion that - we are not human beings having a spiritual experience but spiritual beings having a human experience. Beyond this I don't know, but I'm confident, my curiosity will definitely pave the way towards all the answers I seek... till then, har har mahadev," she concluded.

Maha Kumbh Mela commenced on January 13 and concludes on Wednesday. Millions attended the festival over the last month including several celebrities like Akshay Kumar, Vicky Kaushal, Katrina Kaif, Raveena Tandon and others. (PTI)

Growing audience for Oscar-nominated films in India: PVR INOX executive director Sanjeev Bijli

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: The audience response to Oscar-nominated films in India has been consistently growing over the years and access to these films for theatrical release has improved significantly, says Sanjeev Bijli, executive director of PVR INOX Ltd.

Ahead of the 97th Academy Awards, the multiplex chain brought back its annual Oscars Film Festival, which showcases a stellar lineup of Oscar-nominated and award-winning films on the big screen over the course of three weeks in 22 cities and across 54 cinemas.

"We've been doing it every year now for a long time, and the audience reaction has always been very good. As a cinema company, we remain committed to bringing all kinds of films. Over the years, the availability of these films has also become easier," Bijli told PTI.

The film gala, which commenced on February 21, is screening films like 'Dune: Part Two', 'Wicked', 'Inside Out 2', 'The Brutalist' and 'Emilia Pérez'. Bijli highlighted the role of PVR INOX Pictures' distribution division, which has played a key role in acquiring award-worthy films at international festivals.

He commended that other players have also contributed to bringing independent films to the country, making the experience more accessible and widespread.

"Earlier, it used to be tough... but now it has become a lot more meaningful and wholesome because all of us have been fed with so much information about these movies since November last year and throughout the award season... We kind of consume the news and tidbits about these awards on newspapers and social media now. By the time we do the festival, everyone is very keen to watch these movies."

These movies have become so newsy that it really wets the appetite of the consumers to come and watch them at the cinemas," he added. He gave the example of "Conclave", the papal mystery thriller from director Edward Berger. The movie is nominated for eight Academy Awards, including best picture, best actor for Ralph Fiennes and best supporting actress for Isabella Rossellini.

"Conclave", which we distributed, gathered so much momentum over the last three-four months.

"We've released it recently and it's doing great business. We remain very positive and sanguine that all the other films that we lined up at the festival, which are all nominated, will receive good response," Bijli added.

Bijli also believes that the demographic profile of audiences watching international films in India has diversified over the years. "I think it's all kinds of people now. So there's no age profile as such. We're seeing that people of all age groups would like to come and watch these movies," he said, while also acknowledging that the base is currently limited to a few cities.

"It's a limited festival because at the end of the day, these are English language films. And in this year's lineup, there's also 'Emilia Pérez', which is in foreign language. Even last year, they had a foreign language, which was 'Anatomy of a Fall', which did very well. I think it's a very discerning customer who has appreciation for this kind of cinema and who comes to watch these films. And, of course, this year we don't even have 'Oppenheimer' and 'Barbie', which are big studio films because last year was a Hollywood strike," he said.

He noted that most of the films that are nominated at the 2025 Academy Awards are indie projects. "There are hardly any studio films except for maybe 'Dune 2'. So these films being independent films are probably even more niche than last year. But still I think there is an audience for these films," he added. (PTI)

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Allahbadia told cops he committed 'mistake' by making controversial remarks: Officials

MUMBAI, Feb 26: Podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia, whose crass remarks on a YouTube show kicked up a row, has said in his statement before the Maharashtra Cyber that he committed a "mistake" by making controversial comments, officials said.

The Maharashtra Cyber and the Mumbai police are investigating Allahbadia's controversial remarks made on comedian Samay Raina's YouTube show "India's Got Latent".

Allahbadia made crude comments about parents and sex, leading to widespread backlash and multiple FIRs.

On Monday, Allahbadia and Ashish Chanchlani, also a YouTuber, appeared separately before the Maharashtra Cyber to record their statements in the case of obscenity it has registered against them and others, an official said.

"In his statement, Allahbadia admitted that he made a mistake by making controversial comments on the YouTube show, for which he is being criticised," he said.

The social media influencer also admitted that he made a mistake by using specific words in his comments during the show, the official said.

Allahbadia also told the officials that Samay Raina was his friend and he had gone to the show only for the latter, the official said, adding he also claimed that he did not charge anything to attend the show.

The Maharashtra Cyber on Tuesday recorded the statement of social media influencer Apoorva Makhija in connection with the "India's Got Latent" controversy, an official said.

Makhija is among the persons named in the obscenity case registered with the Maharashtra Cyber.

The authorities have also summoned actor Rakhi Sawant on February 27, who had appeared in the show as a guest, the official said.

The Maharashtra Cyber is yet to record the statement of Samay Raina, the official said.

The Assam police are also investigating an obscenity case against Allahbadia and others. (PTI)



Seagram's RS BoomBox arrives in Guwahati with spell-binding performances by Armaan Malik, Nikhita Gandhi, Ikka and DJ Yogii

GUWAHATI, Feb 26: A dynamic showcase of music and youth culture, embodying the spirit of Living It Large, is set to take place on March 1, 2025, at the Saru Sajai Stadium Complex in Guwahati. Royal Stag BoomBox - The Original Sound of Generation Large arrives in Guwahati, Assam, with an immersive musical journey that blends the timeless charm of Bollywood melodies with the pulsating energy of hip-hop. This unique festival goes beyond music, transforming into a vibrant playground where youth culture thrives through gaming, art, and cutting-edge pop culture experiences.



Prajakta Koli marries Vrishank Khanal in intimate wedding ceremony

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: Social media personality and actor Prajakta Koli has tied the knot with her long-time boyfriend Vrishank Khanal. Koli, 31 and Khanal 35, dated for several years before getting engaged in 2023. The couple got married in an intimate wedding on Tuesday.

The "Mismatched" star shared a series of pictures from the wedding ceremony on her Instagram handle. "25.2.25," she wrote in the caption.

Koli opted for a custom-designed golden lehenga adorned with floral embroidery from designer Anita Dongre. Khanal wore a white kurta from the same designer.

Koli was most recently seen in the third season of the Netflix series "Mismatched 3", co-starring Rohit Saraf. She has also featured in movies such as "Jugjugg Jeeyo" and "Neeyat". (PTI)



Faith an important part of 'Suzhal' season one and two: Director duo Gayatri and Pushkar

MUMBAI, Feb 26: When husband-wife director duo Pushkar and Gayatri embarked on their journey to create "Suzhal: The Vortex", they had no idea that an unplanned visit to a religious festival would spark the genesis of their widely-loved Tamil series that marries faith with crime.

The duo, also known for "Vikram Vedha", are back with the second season of the show, which will see the return of its lead characters - Nandini (Aishwarya Rajesh) and Sakkarai (Kathir).

The second part will pick up from the climax of season one, with Nandini staring at an uncertain future in prison, while her friend and sub-inspector Sakkarai reaches a mystifying village with a sinister history. An unexpected murder casts a dark shadow on the village and its natives.

In both seasons crime happens during different religious festivals. "Crime thrillers are a popular genre for long-form, and there have been

a bunch of good shows in this space. One thing we were particular about is that, it (our show) has to stand out, it has to be unique in a certain way. Somewhere that also brought in that festival angle and the myth and the reality being parallel," Gayatri told PTI in an interview.

Pushkar said that the genre has grown and changed significantly, citing the example of shows like "The Wire", "Broadchurch", "The Killing", and "Mare of Easttown". "...These are what you would call the universe of crime thrillers."

As writers, it is important to be aware of what is happening in the world or you will get very quickly outdated. A crime thriller which was written in the 80s and 90s will sound very wrong now because the way we look at the world has changed. So, as writers and filmmakers, the one job you have to do is watch a lot of stuff."

The journey to "Suzhal: The Vor-

tex" began in 2015, but both Pushkar and Gayatri didn't feel content with the multiple drafts that they had written until they first attended the Mayana Kollai festival in 2017.

"On our way back from an appearance in a college, we came across this tiny festival. We'd been brought up there, but never heard of this. Our driver was telling us the mythology behind it and all, and somewhere it just kind of clicked for us," Gayatri said.

"We are looking at it more from a cultural rather than a religious perspective. Faith to us is an important part of 'Suzhal' season one and two, and it's not just god per se or this god or that god, it could be faith in yourself or faith in your teacher, or an actor whom you idolize," she said.

Pushkar said it took them some time to reach the point where they felt they had a compelling story to tell.

"We took it to Amazon Prime and

they said let us put this into development but by that time all the episodes were completely fleshed out," Pushkar added.

The interplay between faith and crime continues in the second season as well, which is set against the backdrop of a new festival, Ash-takaali. The show will be out on February 28 on Prime Video.

"In season 2, in the first episode, there's a conversation between Sakkarai and Chellapa (Nandini's lawyer and also an activist), which addresses the question of faith. We need to believe in something to have that sense of society, community, and all that," Pushkar said.

Currently, Pushkar and Gayatri are working on a feature film script that diverges from their usual crime and dark-comedy genres, they are also brainstorming ideas for a third season of "Suzhal: The Vortex". "Suzhal: The Vortex" is produced under the banner of Wall-watcher Films, and is directed by Brama and Sarjun KM. (PTI)





Indian senior women's team goes down to Korea in Pink Ladies Cup

SHARJAH, Feb 26: The Indian senior women's team went down to Korea 0-3 in their concluding Pink Ladies Cup match at the Al Hamriya Sports Club Stadium here on Wednesday.

The Koreans, placed 20th in the FIFA rankings, led 2-0 at half time. While Choi Yoojung (8') and Choi Dayeong (27') put Korea Republic in the lead in the first half, Mun Eunju rounded off the tally in the 81st minute.

In the Pink Ladies Cup, India played three matches winning the opener against Jordan, before losing to Russia and Korea.

As expected, the Koreans proved too hot to handle and camped them-

selves in the Indian half right from the word go. Credit to Crispin Chettri's girls for closing the gaps early. It took the sting out of Korean attacks to some extent, but wasn't enough to keep their rivals at bay for a long time.

Relentless pressure forced the Indian defenders to commit a few infringements near their area and one of them resulted in the first goal in the eighth minute. Choi Yoojung and skipper Lee Youngju were the livewires of the Korean attacks and the former struck the first blow.

The direct free kick India conceded was on the edge of the box with a clear view of the frame. Choi Yoojung hammered the free kick

brilliantly providing the right trajectory that made the ball find the net with a smoothness for which Shreya Hooda had no answer.

Overall, Shreya was an alert customer, always on her toes as she had to negotiate with too many onslaughts from all angles. She did her job well, including saving a penalty in the 66th minute, but she could do little when Choi Dayeong scored the second goal in the 27th minute.

The Indian defenders allowed the ball to stay in the Indian box for too long and paid the penalty. Dayeong tapped the ball in from an almost handshaking distance.

The Indian attacks were far and

few. In the first half, the only time the Korean goalkeeper was tested was when she collected a Lynda Kom hopeful shot with a rather casual approach. India earned a few corners though none of them produced anything fruitful.

In the second half, India looked better organised and took the ball to the other side more often than before. Their attempts to use the wings were commendable at times but were blocked by the Korean defenders.

On the other end, the Koreans found Indian defenders a tough nut to crack, though Mun Eunju managed to increase the margin in the 81st minute. (PTI)

Another amateur Saanvi takes lead in 4th leg of Hero WPGT

MUMBAI, Feb 26: Vietnam-bound amateur Saanvi Somu played a bogey-free second round of two-under 68 to move into the lead in the fourth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour at the Bombay Presidency Golf Club here on Wednesday. The 16-year-old Saanvi has finished runner-up multiple times on the Hero WPGT, the latest of which was the first leg this season.

After Mannat Brar was at the top a day earlier, Saanvi became the second amateur to take the spotlight this week.

Saanvi, who will be in the Indian team at next week's Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship, shot 73 in the first round.

In the second round, she parred the first 11 holes before she found her first birdie on the Par-4 12th hole. That was followed by five steady pars and a birdie on the Par-5 18th for a 68.

At one-over 141, Saanvi is one ahead of the experienced Vani Kapoor who added an even par 70 to her first round of 72.

Vani, who will soon be playing on the international circuit, had three birdies and three bogeys in her



first 11 holes, and parred the last seven.

Another amateur Anuradha Chaudhuri shot even par 70 to get into a three-way tie with Vani and Seher Atwal (72-70).

Lavanya Jadon, who began the day with a bogey, did well to pick four birdies between the fifth and the 14th as she shot even par 70 and was placed Tied-fifth alongside Jasmine Shekar, a two-time winner in 2024.

Jasmine had rounds of 72-71 to be 3-over 143.

On a tight leader board which has a dozen players within four shots of each other, Gaurika Bishnoi (75-69) was sole seventh.

Brar (68-77) was tied eighth alongside Hitaashree Bakshi (72-73), winner of the 2024 Hero Order of Merit, Shweta Mansingh (70-75), Disha Kavery (74-71) and Kriti Chowhan (70-75). They were all 5-over 145 each.

Ridhima Dilawari (74-72) was T-13 with Ananya Datar and Durga Nittur.

Sneha Singh, winner of the last two events, had another off-day as she followed her first round 73 with a 74 and was T-16.

At seven-over 147, she is six behind but a low final round can give her an outside chance of a hat-trick of wins after having won the last two legs. (PTI)

Liverpool manager Arne Slot handed 2-match touchline ban for confronting match officials



LONDON, Feb 26: Liverpool manager Arne Slot was handed a two-match touchline suspension on Wednesday for his conduct toward match officials after the Merseyside derby against Everton.

Slot admitted to a charge that he "acted in an improper manner and/or used insulting and/or abusive words and/or behavior towards both the match referee and an assistant referee" after the 2-2 draw at Goodison Park on Feb. 12, the Football Association said.

The FA said Slot has also been charged 70,000 pounds (\$90,000). Slot was shown a red card for his post-match conduct and has since said he regretted his actions.

Liverpool's next two domestic games are against Newcastle on Wednesday and Southampton on March 8, both in the Premier League and at Anfield.

Liverpool leads the league by 11 points. (AP)

Messi strikes early, Inter Miami beats Sporting KC 3-1

FORT LAUDERDALE, Feb 26: Lionel Messi opened the scoring with a masterful strike in the 19th minute, and Inter Miami beat Sporting Kansas City 3-1 on Tuesday night in the second leg of the CONCACAF Champions Cup's first round.

Luis Suárez and Tadeo Allende also scored as Inter Miami advanced with a 4-1 aggregate to face Jamaica Premier League champion Cavalier FC in the round of 16 on March 6. Messi also scored in Miami's 1-0 win at Kansas City in the first leg last Wednesday.

Memo Rodríguez scored for Kansas City — the team's first goal of 2025.

Miami scored on all three of its first-half shots despite Kansas City getting the majority of opportunities early, with six shots and three on goal.

Messi slipped a through ball to Suárez, then controlled Suárez's pass off his chest and rifled it past John Pulskamp into the bottom right corner. Messi also started Miami's second scoring opportunity with a perfectly placed ball into the path of Jordi Alba, who found Allende for the finish in the 45th minute.

Two minutes later, a misplayed touch by Kansas City's Jacob Davis led to Suárez's difficult goal that he bounced past Pulskamp.

"There is this level of quality that guys like Messi, Suarez (bring)," Kansas City coach Peter Vermes said. "They know the moments in the game. They just know them. They operate at such a different level than other players, and they've done it at all leagues and levels. ... If you let them get ahead of you, the game can open up because with one chance they can break you." (AP)

Lewis Hamilton starts F1 preseason testing for Ferrari

SAKHIR (BAHRAIN), Feb 26: Lewis Hamilton has started Formula 1 preseason testing for Ferrari in the next step in his bid to win an eighth F1 title with his new team.

The 40-year-old British driver left Mercedes to join Ferrari this season after spending 12 years and winning six of his seven world titles with the Silver Arrows.

After Hamilton drove out of the garage Wednesday in the red car No. 44 at the circuit in Bahrain, F1's social media posted the message: "Lewis Hamilton, Ferrari driver" followed by a heart emoji.

Hamilton joined the team last month and will line up in the 2025 season alongside Charles Leclerc, who has been at Ferrari since 2019.

Each team is allowed one car on track at a time during preseason testing, and Wednesday's morning ses-

sion saw Hamilton joined by Andrea Kimi Antonelli, the 18-year-old Italian rookie who has taken over his old seat at Mercedes.

Among the other drivers on track were Liam Lawson, who's partnering champion Max Verstappen at Red Bull this season, McLaren driver Oscar Piastri and two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin.

Two factors mean preseason testing could be less useful in predicting the teams' race pace this year.

The weather so far Wednesday has been windy and unusually cool for Bahrain, unlike a typical F1 race weekend.

Bahrain also isn't hosting the opening race of the season, like it did last year. The first race is the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 16. (AP)



With 2036 Olympic bid in mind, committee formed to revise norms for assistance to NSFs

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: The sports ministry has constituted a six-member committee to revise the norms for providing financial assistance to National Sports Federations (NSFs) keeping in mind the "emerging challenges" facing India and the country's bid to host the 2036 Olympics.

The committee would be headed by joint secretary (sports) Kunal, and includes executive director (Teams) Ritu Pathik, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) CEO N S Johal, former TOPS CEO commodore (Retd) PK Garg, and president of Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF) Sahdev Yadav.

Yadav is also the treasurer of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

In a note marked to all members of the committee, Tarun Pareek, the under secretary in the sports ministry, said, "The undersigned is directed to say that the norms of providing financial assistance to National Sports Federations (NSFs) under the Scheme of Assistance to NSFs were revised by the Ministry vide letter dated 28.2.2022.

"...a new Olympic Cycle has started which necessitated the need for review of the norms in view of the evolving circumstances, which demand a comprehensive review to address the emerging challenges and India's aspiration to host 2036 Olympic Games," read the circular which is in PTI's possession.



"Accordingly, it has been decided to constitute a committee consisting of the following to suggest the revised norms of scale of assistance for various components under the Scheme of Assistance to NSFs."

Last November, India submitted a 'Letter of Intent' to host the 2036 Olympic and Paralympic Games, to the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Future Host Commission, taking the first concrete step in an ambitious plan after months of informal dialogue with the IOC.

Under the Scheme of Assistance to NSFs, the national sports federations are assisted for several purposes such as organising tournaments inside the country, participation in international tournaments organised abroad, purchase of equipment, organising coaching etc.

Among other things, the NSFs also take care of the requirements for customised training of top level and promising sportspersons.

In the latest annual budget, the NSF's will be entitled to a Rs 400 crore assistance from the ministry,

which is a marginal increase from the Rs 340 crore allocated last year.

The specifics of the committee's mandate are not mentioned in the ministry circular.

But its formation comes a few weeks after a top ministry source told PTI that a graded system of funding was being mulled. Under this system only those NSFs which comply with the good governance norms of the draft national sports bill will be entitled to their full share of the ministry grant.

"If you are fully compliant with the good governance provisions

than you get your entire share but if it is not the case then there could be cuts when such a system comes into effect. But it is only an idea under consideration as of now," a source in the sports ministry had told PTI.

"The implementation can greatly improve transparency and performance of the NSFs," he had insisted.

Though not entirely funded by the ministry, the NSFs are financially supported by it in not just the organisation of competitions but also the conduct of training camps (both at home and abroad), salaries of coaches and other support staff, besides the allowances and grants given to athletes for individual training.

The draft sports bill, which is expected to be tabled in the Parliament soon, proposes the establishment of Ethics Commissions and Dispute Resolution Commissions to ensure transparency in governance.

It also advocates the constitution of a Sports Regulatory Board for granting recognition to NSFs and ensuring compliance with the highest governance, financial, and ethical standards.

The regulatory board is currently a bone of contention between the ministry and Indian Olympic Association President PT Usha.

Usha has insisted that it undermines IOA and could be perceived as government interference by the IOC. (PTI)

PCB advises Fakhar Zaman against hasty ODI retirement decision

KARACHI, Feb 26: Pakistan

Cricket Board has advised Fakhar Zaman to reconsider any hasty plans of retirement from ODI cricket after reports emerged that the experienced opener was contemplating quitting the format following his injury-enforced exclusion from the Champions Trophy.

According to sources, Fakhar, who was sidelined from the ICC event after sustaining an injury in the opening game against New Zealand, is contemplating retiring from ODIs to focus on T20 cricket.

"He is basically upset and down because of his recent fit-

T20 formats.

Fakhar, who has not played Test cricket for Pakistan since early 2019, is primarily regarded as a white-ball specialist.

"He has had some constant health issues which have affected him physically and mentally and he has also had to deal with a chronic knee problem since 2022. He feels best to just focus on the T20 format," the source added.

But a reliable source in the PCB said Fakhar had been conveyed that he should not take any decision in haste.

"He has been advised to take a break and first get completely fit and healthy before he makes any decision."

"Fakhar has been told after that he can take a decision on his ODI career but to do nothing in frustration or haste," he added.

Fakhar was notably excluded from the PCB's central contracts list for the 2024/25 season and faced a show cause notice from the board last year when he



ness and health issues," a source close to the batsman said.

The left-handed opener, who made his return to the national squad after a lengthy absence following the 2023 World Cup, has been grappling with multiple fitness setbacks.

It is understood that Fakhar wishes to retire from 50-over cricket in order to prolong his career and focus exclusively on

tweeted on Babar Azam's selection issues.

With the tour to New Zealand scheduled for March-April and the Pakistan Super League (PSL) approaching, Fakhar is racing against time to regain full fitness.

Fakhar, who turns 35 in April, has played 86 ODIs, scoring 11 hundreds and 92 T20 Internationals and three Tests. (PTI)

With chaos at the top, Pakistan's struggles on the pitch seem inevitable Knocked out of tournament, beleaguered Pakistan to play for pride against Bangladesh

RAWALPINDI, Feb 26: Their dreams of defending the Champions Trophy title at home shattered, an under-fire Pakistan team will seek to play for pride when it faces an equally insipid Bangladesh in a dead rubber here on Thursday.

With the tournament offering very little margin for error, Pakistan crumbled to suffer heavy defeats to New Zealand and arch-rivals India, which left them on the brink of elimination before the Kiwis confirmed it with their win over Bangladesh.

Disgruntled fans are now calling for sweeping changes in the country's cricket structure starting from the very top of the pyramid, days after the first global tournament in Pakistan in 29 years got underway.

This marks the third straight time Pakistan has bowed out in the group stages of a global white-ball tournament, following early exits in the 2024 T20 World Cup and 2023 ODI World Cup.

At a time when teams have embraced a fearless, aggressive approach, Pakistan seemed to be stuck in the past. Their top order remains passive, playing out deliveries in hope rather than intent, waiting until the 35th over to accelerate.

Their struggles were glaring, as they showed no urgency, playing a staggering 161 dot balls against New Zealand in Rawalpindi and 147 against India in Dubai.

Poor shot selection, substandard fielding, and untimely injuries have only deepened Pakistan's woes. The loss of game-changing opener Fakhar Zaman to injury left a huge void at the top, and his replacement, Imam-ul-Haq, failed to make an impact.

Meanwhile, star batter Babar Azam and captain Mohammad Rizwan have also fallen short of expectations, offering little resistance when it mattered the most.

Pakistan has historically relied on its formidable pace attack to win matches, but frontline quicks Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah, and Haris Rauf have looked rusty and ineffective, failing to provide the firepower they once promised.

Beyond the field, Pakistan's perpetual instability has been a major factor in their



downward spiral.

A system plagued by constant upheaval has seen the team cycle through countless selectors, eight different coaches, including World Cup-winning South African Gary Kirsten, and four captains in just three years.

With chaos at the top, Pakistan's struggles on the pitch seem inevitable.

On the spin-friendly tracks of Dubai and Karachi, Pakistan bafflingly named only one specialist spinner in Abrar Ahmed, leaving their bowling unit toothless. Like Pakistan, last edition's semifinalists Bangladesh have also been knocked out of the tournament after successive defeats to India and New Zealand.

Their batting lineup, barring glimpses of resilience from Towhid Hridoy, captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, and Jaker Ali, has largely failed to fire.

Despite thriving on spin-friendly conditions at home, the Bangla Tigers have struggled against slower bowlers, a weakness thoroughly exposed in this campaign. Bangladesh's inability to capitalise

on key moments, particularly their sloppy fielding, has cost them dearly.

Dropped catches in both matches have only added to their woes. However, up against an off-colour Pakistan, Bangladesh could sense an opportunity to finish their campaign on a high and salvage some pride.

Teams:

Pakistan: Mohammad Rizwan (captain), Salman Ali Agha (vice captain), Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Kamran Ghulam, Saud Shakeel, Tayyab Tahir, Faheem Ashraf, Khushdil Shah, Usman Khan, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hasnain, Naseem Shah, Shaheen Shah Afridi.

Bangladesh: Nazmul Hossain Shanto (captain), Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid, Hasan, Tawhid Hridoy, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), MD Mahmud Ullah, Jaker Ali Anik, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Parvez Hossain Emon, Nasum Ahmed, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Nahid Rana.

Match starts at 2.30 pm IST. (PTI)

RCB look to put Super Over loss behind against Gujarat Giants

BENGALURU, Feb 26: Smarting from their dramatic Super Over loss in the Women's Premier League, Royal Challengers Bengaluru will aim to get back on track when they take on bottom-placed Gujarat Giants here on Thursday. The defending champions started strong with two commanding wins, but consecutive defeats against Mumbai Indians and UP Warriorz have halted their momentum. With Delhi Capitals surging to the top of the table after their victory on Tuesday, RCB will be desperate to return to winning ways.

Meanwhile, Gujarat Giants continue to languish at the bottom of the points table, having managed just one win in four outings.

Their latest defeat to Delhi Capitals was particularly dismal, as they barely scraped past the 100-run mark.

The loss to UP Warriorz will sting Smriti Mandhana and Co. the most, as they were in control for much of the game but failed to defend 42 runs in the last three overs, leading to a Super Over, where they could muster only four runs.

"Disappointing to be on the losing side today. We did a lot of things right with both bat and ball, but things faltered towards the end. We will take that in our stride and come back stronger," Mandhana said after the match.

Mandhana herself has struggled for form, registering just one big knock in four innings. Off-spin remains her Achilles' heel, having been dismissed by it 11 times in the WPL -- more than any other batter.

On the bright side, England's Danni Wyatt-Hodge has been a steady presence at the top, while Australian veteran Ellyse Perry has been in sensational touch, notching three half-centuries, including an unbeaten 90 in



the previous game. Perry, who had been nursing a hip injury, returned to bowl two overs in the last match, providing a major boost to RCB's balance.

However, RCB's bowling unit has been far from impressive. Their pacers, Renuka Singh and Kim Garth, have struggled with consistency, often erring on either side of the ideal length.

Meanwhile, their spinners Georgia Wareham, Ekta Bisht, and Kanika Ahuja have failed to exert control in the crucial middle overs.

Gujarat Giants' batting woes continue to haunt them. The side tried reshuffling their inconsistent top order in the last match -- bringing in Harleen Deol as an opener and replacing the struggling Laura Wolvaardt with Phoebe Litchfield -- but the move failed to pay off.

Adding to their troubles, captain Ashleigh Gardner, who was their standout performer in the early games, has endured a lean patch with both bat and

ball. The team has leaned heavily on its overseas contingent, and if they are to turn their fortunes around, their Indian players will need to step up.

Teams:

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Smriti Mandhana (c), Kanika Ahuja, Ekta Bisht, Charlie Dean, Kim Garth, Richa Ghosh (wk), Heather Graham, VJ Joshi, Sabbineni Meghana, Nzhath Parveen, Jagravi Pawar, Ellyse Perry, Raghvi Bist, Sneha Rana, Prema Rawat, Renuka Singh, Georgia Wareham, Danni Wyatt-Hodge.

Gujarat Giants: Ashleigh Gardner (c), Bharti Fulmali, Laura Wolvaardt, Phoebe Litchfield, Simran Shaikh, Danielle Gibson, Dayalan Hemalatha, Deandra Dottin, Harleen Deol, Sayali Satghare, Tanuja Kanwar, Beth Mooney (wk), Kashvee Gautam, Mannat Kashyap, Meghna Singh, Prakashika Naik, Priya Mishra, Shabnam Shakil.

Match starts 7:30pm. (PTI)

Gill consolidates top spot in ICC ODI rankings, Kohli reenters top five

DUBAI, Feb 26: India opener Shubman Gill on Wednesday consolidated his position atop the ICC ODI Batting Rankings after playing a big role in his team's qualification for the semifinals of the Champions Trophy. Gill, who scored a match-winning 101 not out against Bangladesh and 46 against Pakistan in Group A matches played in Dubai this past week, has gained 21 rating points and moved up to 817 rating points, increasing the gap with second-placed Babar Azam from 23 to 47 points.

Virat Kohli's unbeaten 100 against Pakistan has helped him overtake Daryl Mitchell of New Zealand to fifth position while KL Rahul has moved up two places to 15th position after notching

an unbeaten 41 against Bangladesh.

New Zealand batters Will Young (up eight places to 14th) and Tom Latham (up 11 places to 30th) have moved up after scoring centuries against Pakistan while Rachin Ravindra's ton against Bangladesh has lifted him 18 places to 24th. Glenn Phillips is another Kiwi batter to gain, up 12 places to 28th position. Australia duo of Alex Carey (up four places to 50th) and Josh Inglis (up 18 places to 81st), plus Bangladesh's Towhid Hridoy (up 18 places to 64th) and Jaker Ali (up 64 places to 94th) have also moved up in the latest weekly rankings update that considers performances till Tuesday. (PTI)



কৃষি আৰু কৃষক কল্যাণ মন্ডপালয়
ভাৰত চৰকাৰ

“প্রধানমন্ত্রী ফচল বীমা যোজনাৰ বতৰৰ অনিশ্চয়তাৰ সৈতে জড়িত ক্ষতিৰ শংকা কম কৰি পৰিশ্ৰমী কৃষক ভাই-ভনীৰ আৰ্থিক হিত ৰক্ষা কৰাত একেৰাহে গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা পালন কৰি আহিছে। এই কৃষক হিতৈষী বীমাৰ লাভ কোটি কোটি কৃষকে পাব ধৰিছে।”

- নৰেন্দ্ৰ মোদী, প্রধানমন্ত্রী





শস্য এতিয়া সুৰক্ষাৰ লগত মোৰ পলিচী মোৰ হাতত

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মোৰ হাতত**

মহা অভিযান
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