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Opposition calls tax relief 'sugar rush'; BJP says it is 'booster shot' for economy

LS witnesses heated debate on budget

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: The treasury and opposition benches sparred on Monday in the Lok Sabha over the Union Budget with the opposition members saying it offered a mere "sugar rush" in tax relief without any long-term benefits, while the ruling side defended it as "booster shot" for the economy.

Participating in the debate on the Union Budget in the Lower House, opposition members expressed concern on issues like the depreciating rupee value, rising government debt and farmers' plight. They said that the budget was "election-centric" and ignored the interests of a vast majority of the population.

DMK's Dayanidhi Maran said preference has been given to the corporates and not the common man. He claimed that prices of es-

sential commodities were going up which was hurting the interests of the poor and the middle classes.

The DMK leader also accused the Modi government of coming out with budgets in successive years that have focused on poll-bound states keeping in mind political gains. Taking a swipe at the finance minister, he said whenever the opposition flags the falling value of the rupee, Nirmala Sitharaman always responds by saying the rupee is not getting weaker but the USD is emerging stronger.

Referring to the outcome of the Delhi Assembly polls, he said the tax benefit proposed in the Union Budget for the middle class helped the BJP. But, Maran said, that less than three crore people will actually benefit in the country.

He said the tax relief for the



middle class was like an "economic sugar rush" which was untenable in the long run. Dubbing the budgetary provision as "unjust", he said it does not take care

of the interests of people.

The debate on the Union Budget began on Friday. Congress MP Manish Tewari claimed that in the past one decade, government debts have soared which has created problems for future generations. He described the debt on the government as "inter-generational debt".

The Congress leader claimed that while the common man continues to face problems due to the government's economic policies, the agriculture sector too was in bad shape. He wondered why MN-REGA man days were increasing if the farm sector was prospering.

During the course of their speeches, Maran and Tewari questioned the absence of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The Chair said the minister of state for Finance was present and the FM herself was in the Rajya Sabha.

Maran claimed that since the FM was not personally present, his party would boycott her reply to the debate. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Two held for collecting money on job promises



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 10: Two fraudsters who have been duping people on the pretext of false promises of giving government jobs to the aspirants in the state were arrested by police in Guwahati.

The two alleged fraudsters were identified as Shamim Ahmed and Nabajit Barman, who collected a handful of money from the job seekers in the last few months, an official source said on Monday.

According to a senior police official, Barman and Ahmed were operating a forum for people with disabilities and had deceitfully promised them (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Talk to China to halt Brahmaputra dam project in Tibet: BJP member Saikia



NEW DELHI, Feb 10: BJP member Dilip Saikia on Monday urged the government to hold bilateral talks with China to halt the construction of a massive dam on river Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet which could put Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in danger.

Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha, Saikia said that the dam, described as the largest in the world, would put downstream regions such as northeastern India and Bangladesh in danger.

He said the site of the dam is an earthquake prone region and is called the 'ring of fire'.

The dam will put in danger the people and communities in the downstream region, including Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

Last year, China approved plans to build a dam over the Brahmaputra River called Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet close to the Indian border.

As per the plan, the massive dam will be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh.

The project, estimated to cost around USD 137 billion, is located in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur frequently. Saikia said the dam will be able to store huge amounts of water which can be used to cause floods or drought in the downstream region. (PTI)

1984 anti-Sikh riots: Prosecution must be done seriously, not for sake of it, says SC

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: The Supreme Court on Monday quizzed Delhi Police for not filing appeals against acquittals in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots cases and said prosecution should be carried out "seriously and not just for the sake of it".

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan told additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, representing Delhi Police, that special leave petitions against the acquittals must be filed and fought with sincerity.

"In number of cases you have not challenged the order passed by the Delhi High Court. Frankly speaking, filing SLPs doesn't serve purpose unless it is filed and prosecuted seriously. You tell us, in matters which were filed earlier, were any senior lawyers engaged to argue the matter? It has to be done seriously not just for the sake of it. It must be done earnestly and sincerely.



We are not saying that the outcome must be in a particular manner," it said.

Senior advocate HS Phoolka, representing petitioner S Gurlad Singh Kahlon, submitted the appeals filed by the police were just a formality.

"There was a judgement by the Delhi High Court that there was cover up and the

state did not prosecute properly," Phoolka said and sought permission to place the judgements on record.

During the hearing, the ASG said letters were written to file appeals in six cases of acquittal.

The bench has posted the hearing on February 17.

It was hearing a PIL filed by former Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhndak Committee member Kahlon, on whose plea the top court in 2018 constituted an SIT led by justice Dhiraj to probe 199 cases where investigations stood closed.

Delhi witnessed large-scale violence and killings of persons from the Sikh community following former PM Indira Gandhi's assassination by her bodyguards in 1984 and the cases stemming from the incident have seen some major twists and turns 40 years on. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India, France have shared interest focused on friendship: Macron

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Ahead of his bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in France, President Emmanuel Macron has said that the two countries have a "shared interest" focused on friendship.

Prime Minister Modi on Monday embarked on a two-nation tour that will first take him to France and then the US.

During his three-day visit to France starting Monday, Modi will co-chair the AI Action Summit with Macron in Paris, hold bilateral talks with him, and address business leaders.

In a video interview with India's Firstpost and French news network France 2 in Paris, Macron shared his thoughts on artificial intelligence (AI) and its global impact, India-France ties, and his views on the

US. During the interaction, the French president highlighted India's strength in technology and education, a statement said.

"India is a training superpower -- one million engineers a year, more than the US and Europe combined," he was quoted as saying in the statement.

"We have shared interest focused on friendship," the French president said.

In response to a query, he said, "We want to train our talent so that they can go abroad, but they should also be at home."

At the beginning of the interview, Macron greeted the people of India in Hindi, saying, 'Bharat ke logon ko mera namaste', and ended it by saying 'Bahut shukriya' (many thanks). At a special briefing in Delhi (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Assam Police registers FIR against Ranveer Allahbadia for controversial comments

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 10: An FIR registered against popular podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia and four other social media influencers in Guwahati for 'controversial jokes' at the India's Got Latent show hosted by another popular YouTuber Samay Raina, said Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday.

Popularly known for his YouTube channel BeerBiceps, Allahbadia made the controversial remarks while attending a recent episode of the show where he was present as a guest along with other popular content creators Ashish Chanchlani, Jaspreet Singh, and Apoorva Mukhija.

Assam Police also named Samay Raina, Ashish Chanchlani, Jaspreet Singh, and Apoorva Mukhija in the FIR.

"Today @GuwahatiPol has registered an FIR against certain Youtubers and social Influencers,

namely 1. Shri Ashish Chanchlani 2. Shri Jaspreet Singh 3. Shri Apoorva Mukhija 4. Shri Ranveer Allahbadia 5. Shri Samay Raina and others for promoting obscenity and engaging in sexually explicit and vulgar discourses in a show titled 'India's Got Latent' Guwahati Crime Branch has registered a case vide Cyber PS case no 03/2025 under sections - 79/95/294/296 of BNS 2023 read with Sec 67 of IT Act, 2000, read with Section 4/7 of Cinematograph Act 1952 read with Section 4/6 of Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986. Investigation is currently underway," wrote Sarma on micro-blogging site X.

While interacting with a contestant on India's Got Latent, Ranveer asked, "Would you rather watch your parents have sex for the rest of your life or join in once to make it stop?"

Other content creators Ashish Chanchlani, Jaspreet Singh, Apoorva

Mukhija along with Samay Raina were seen enjoying on this controversial question.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis too reacted on the controversial remarks and said that things have been said and presented in a wrong way.

"I have come to know about it. I have not seen it yet. Things have been said and presented in a wrong way. Everyone has freedom of speech, but our freedom ends when we encroach upon the freedom of others," Fadnavis stated.

He called for an action and said, "In our society, we have made some rules, and if someone violates them, it is absolutely wrong and action should be taken against them."

Meanwhile, facing backlash for his comments, Ranveer Allahbadia issued an apology statement.

Notably, Ranveer is widely known for his YouTube channel BeerBiceps, where he (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NIMAS team completes first-ever 1,040 km Brahmaputra rafting expedition

GUWAHATI, Feb 10: A team from the National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sports (NIMAS), Dibrang, has successfully completed the first-ever rafting expedition along the entire 1,040 km stretch of the Brahmaputra River, an official release said on Monday.

The expedition, led by NIMAS director Col. Ranveer Singh Jamwal, began at Gelling village in Arunachal Pradesh and concluded at Hatingimari in Assam. The journey was undertaken with sponsorship from the ministry of defence.

The expedition took a total of 28 days, involving 25 days of intense rafting and three days for equipment maintenance. The team navigated through some of the most challenging stretches of the Brahmaputra, including dangerous Class 4 and 5 rapids in Arunachal Pradesh, such as Ninging, Palsi, Tooth Fairy, and Kodak.

In the Assam leg, the team dealt with massive currents, unpredictable river dynamics, and vast stretches of the river, which presented a unique challenge in maintaining their course.

The team consisted of nine rafters and 14 administrative and support staff and also included local rafters from Arunachal Pradesh and Assam who joined the team to navigate the river's challenging sections.

During the expedition, the team interacted with local



communities living along the river, including indigenous tribes such as the Mema, Adi, Mishung, and Bodo.

These exchanges provided valuable insights into the region's rich cultural heritage and its close connection to the Brahmaputra River, the release added.

The success of this journey highlights the potential of adventure tourism in India, particularly in the northeastern region and also showcases the resilience and determination of the team, which overcame significant challenges to accomplish a feat never before attempted, the release added.

NIMAS is dedicated to promoting adventure sports and training people across various disciplines. (PTI)

HIV infections could jump over 6 times if US support dropped, not replaced: UNAIDS chief



LONDON, Feb 10: The head of the UN AIDS agency said on Monday the number of new HIV infections could jump more than six times by 2029 if American support of the biggest AIDS programme is dropped, warning that millions of people could die and more resistant strains of the disease could emerge.

In an interview with The Associated Press, UNAIDS executive director Winnie Byanyima said HIV infections have been falling in recent years, with just 1.3 million new cases recorded in 2023, a 60 per cent decline since the virus peaked in 1995.

But since President Donald Trump's announcement the US would freeze all foreign assistance for 90 days, Byanyima said officials estimate that by 2029, there could be 8.7 million people newly infected with HIV, 6.3 million AIDS-related deaths and an additional 3.4 million children made orphans.

"We will see a surge in this disease," Byanyima said, speaking from Uganda. "This will cost lives if the American government doesn't change its mind and maintain its

leadership," she said, adding that it was not her place to criticise any government's policy.

Byanyima pleaded with the Trump administration not to abruptly cut off funding, which she said has resulted in "panic, fear and confusion" in many of the African countries hardest hit by AIDS.

In one Kenyan county, she said 550 HIV workers were immediately laid off, while thousands of others in Ethiopia were terminated, leaving health officials unable to track the epidemic.

She noted that the loss of US funding to HIV programmes in some countries was catastrophic, with external funding, mostly from the US, accounting for about 90 per cent of their programmes. Nearly USD 400 million goes to countries like Uganda, Mozambique and Tanzania, she said. "We can work with (the Americans) on how to decrease their contribution if they wish to decrease it," she said. Byanyima described the American withdrawal from global HIV efforts as the second biggest crisis the field has ever faced — after the years-long delay it took for poor countries to get the lifesaving antiretrovirals long available in rich countries.

Byanyima also said the loss of American support in efforts to combat HIV was coming at another critical time, with the arrival of what she called "a magical prevention tool" known as lenacapavir, a twice-yearly shot that was shown to offer complete protection against HIV in women, and which worked nearly as well for men. Widespread use of that shot, in addition to other interventions to stop HIV, could help end the disease as a public health problem in the next five years, Byanyima said. She also noted that lenacapavir, sold as Sunlenca, was developed by the American company Gilead. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Our collective commitment and determination will help transform lives' India committed to eliminating Lymphatic Filariasis by 2027: Nadda

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: The government is committed to making India Lymphatic Filariasis-free by 2027, Union Health Minister J P Nadda said on Monday while seeking active community involvement to achieve the goal.

Nadda was speaking at the launch of the nationwide Mass Drug Administration (MDA) campaign for Lymphatic Filariasis (LF) elimination through a video conference with state health ministers and senior officers of 13 identified LF endemic states.

The campaign covers 111 endemic districts across 13 states with door-to-door administration of filaria prevention medications.

Noting that Lymphatic Filariasis incapacitates people and deteriorates their quality of life, Nadda called for the implementation of a five-pronged strategy to ensure the disease is eliminated much ahead of the Sustainable Development Goal of 2030.

"From February 10 onward, these medicines will be made available free of cost to a population of over 17.5 crore across endemic districts. It is imperative that residents in these areas consume the medicines, protecting themselves and their families from this debilitating disease," he said. Highlighting the importance of achieving high coverage, he underlined, "the endemic districts must ensure that over 90 per cent of the



eligible population consume anti-filaria medicines. Our collective commitment and determination will help transform lives and ensure a future free from Lymphatic Filariasis."

He urged the states and UTs to monitor the campaign at a state level to ensure early diagnosis of affected people and also sought personal involvement of the political and administrative leadership at the identified state/district levels for the same.

The Union minister emphasised the importance of adopting a whole-of-government approach by engaging various ministries and departments to support campaign activities. He highlighted that this integrated approach, coupled with high-level advocacy across allied ministries,

would foster intersectoral convergence.

Nadda also said that efforts are underway to integrate MMDP services fully in Ayushman Arogya Mandir (AAM) facilities for access to better self-care and added that approximately 50 per cent lymphodema cases receive Morbidity Management and Disability Prevention (MMDP) kits annually. He stated that under NHM, there is provision for hydrocelectomy surgeries and PMJAY scheme also has option of hydrocelectomy for beneficiaries.

Close to 50 per cent hydrocele surgeries were conducted in endemic states in 2024, he added.

He highlighted that through these efforts, Arogya Mandirs would help in reducing the burden of LF, allowing affected individuals to lead healthier lives and promoting the vision of a disease-free India.

"India has and will continue to remain steadfast in its commitment to eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis. Our resolve is to achieve that target by 2027", he said while noting it is a last minute challenge. LF, commonly known as "Hathi Paon," is a parasitic disease transmitted by infected mosquitoes. It can lead to physical disabilities such as lymphoedema (swelling of the limbs) and hydrocele (scrotal swelling) and impose long-term burdens on affected individuals and families. (PTI)

'The US tariff threats continued to impact the market sentiment'

Sensex, Nifty fall for 4th day amid fresh US tariff concerns, foreign fund outflows

MUMBAI, Feb 10: Stock markets closed with losses for the fourth consecutive day on Monday with the benchmark Sensex falling by 548 points as fresh US tariff threats shook investor confidence and triggered selling in bluechip banking, metal and oil shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 548.39 points or 0.70 per cent to settle at a week's low of 77,311.80. Intra-day, it tanked 753.3 points or 0.96 per cent to 77,106.89.

The NSE Nifty declined 178.35 points or 0.76 per cent to 23,381.60 dragged by losses in Trent, Tata Steel and Power Grid.

"The US tariff threats continued to impact the market sentiment. Domestic yield is inching higher as investors stay cautious on riskier assets and navigate their investments to safe haven assets like gold," Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From the 30-share Sensex pack, Power Grid, Tata Steel,



Zomato, Titan, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC and Tata Motors were among the major laggards. Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharti Airtel, HCL Tech, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank and Tata Consultancy Services were the gainers.

Sensex has dropped 1,272 points or 1.63 per cent while Nifty tanked

357 points or 1.51 per cent on the four-day decline since February 5.

"Indian benchmark indices witnessed a significant decline today following a statement by US President Donald Trump, who announced plans to impose new tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports into the US, along with additional reciprocal tariffs," Ameya

Ranadive chartered market technician, CFTe, Sr Technical Analyst, StoxBox, said. The BSE smallcap gauge dropped 2.25 per cent and midcap index tanked 2.06 per cent.

All BSE sectoral indices ended lower. Realty tumbled the most by 2.69 per cent, followed by metal (2.63 per cent), consumer durables (2.61 per cent), utilities (2.49 per cent) and consumer discretionary (1.94 per cent). As many as 3,032 stocks declined while 1,070 advanced and 123 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, Seoul settled lower while Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the positive territory. European markets were trading higher. US markets ended lower on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 470.39 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.04 per cent to USD 75.44 a barrel. (PTI)

India open to buying energy from all sources, gas prices to come down in 2026: Hardeep Singh Puri

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Union Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Monday said that India is open to energy imports from all sources at the lowest rates and domestic oil marketing firms are looking for more gas which is expected to cost less in 2026.

Addressing a presser on Indian Energy Week 2025 beginning on Tuesday, Puri allayed fears of impact on energy supplies to India from Russia after US sanctions. "Today we have a situation that we have (increased) from 27 suppliers to 39 suppliers. We added Argentina among others. We are open to import from all sources."

"We issued tenders at the importation. Those tenders are open to any supplier. We buy from the cheapest source possible."

He also informed that domestic (oil marketing firms) companies are looking for more gas.

"We also expect the prices of gas (natural gas) to come down. My reading of the international market is that in 2026 you will begin to see a major increase in the availability of natural gas. We may get more gas from Qatar. Our companies are looking for more gas."

Puri stated that the LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) is more or less saturated in the country and the idea is to take piped natural gas to every house as it is 30 per cent cheaper.

A top official said that Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and GAIL are considering the purchase of LNG (liquefied natural gas) and crude oil from the US.

The top official also stated that domestic firms may sign long-term contracts and may look to invest in the US (energy projects).

This assumes significance in view of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US later this week where discussion on energy is likely on the agenda.

During the presser, Puri also said, "I will be surprised if sourcing of energy from the US does not figure in the discussions (of PM and Trump)." He said, "With President (Trump) saying he wants to see global prices of energy to come down, he wants more and more energy to come to the market. For countries like India it is a positive development."

During the India Energy Week 2025, energy buyers will hold meetings with producers in the national capital.

Puri said that IEW'25 is set to be even larger, more diverse, and more impactful than the previous two editions. Covering over 1 lakh square metres, IEW'25 will be the second-largest energy event globally in terms of ministerial and CEO participation, exhibition space, and the number of sessions. (PTI)

Berger Paints to focus on sustainable growth, open to acquisitions: Chairman

KOLKATA, Feb 10: Berger Paints Ltd chairman Rishma Kaur on Monday said that the company will continue to build on its century-old legacy of trust and innovation while focusing on "sustainable" growth and strategic expansion. Kaur said the company is maintaining a cautious approach towards any acquisitions.

When asked why the company did not bid for Akzo Nobel's paints business which is up for sale in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the Berger Paints chairman told PTI that "Under the current circumstances, it does not align with our strategy. Therefore, we have not placed any bid so far."

She said, "We have our plans, whether competition is high or low. We will deal with it in a structured manner. If a good acquisition opportunity arises, we will evaluate it based on the price-benefit equation. However, we have the capability to grow organically, and that remains our priority. We have acquired companies in the past and will continue to consider acquisitions if they align with our strategic goals."

Berger Paints is among India's



leading paint manufacturers and has been focusing on strengthening its market position through innovation, branding, and supply chain efficiencies while evaluating strategic acquisitions when necessary, the chairman said.

"Our vision has always been to maintain the trust we have developed over the years. With 100 years behind us, our focus remains on innovation, customer orientation, service excellence, supply chain efficiency, network expansion,

and branding. Growth is important, but it must be sustainable," Kaur said.

Amid rising competition and ongoing consolidation in the paint industry, Kaur said Berger Paints has well-defined strategies in place to navigate market dynamics.

Kaur emphasised that Berger Paints is not focused on chasing volume numbers or engaging in a race to be the largest player in the industry. "We don't have any such ego that we must be number one or

Rupee settles flat at 87.50 against USD after inching close to 88-level in intra-day trade

MUMBAI, Feb 10: The rupee on Monday plunged 45 paise and moved closer to the 88 per US dollar-level, weighed down by the strength of the American currency tariff concerns, but settled on a flat note at 87.50 (provisional) on suspected RBI intervention.

The American currency gained in the overseas market after US President Donald Trump's plans to impose 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, along with reciprocal tariffs targeting countries taxing US exports.

The move has added jitters over the global trade war with China's reciprocal duties coming into effect, they said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.94 and touched an all-time intraday low of 87.95 against the American currency during the session.

The local unit, however, pared the initial losses and finally settled on a flat note at 87.50 (provisional), unchanged over its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee recovered 9 paise from its all-time low level to close at 87.50 against the US dollar. The rupee touched an all-time low closing level of 87.59 against the greenback on February 6.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.14 per cent higher at 108.18. "The Indian rupee touched fresh record lows in early trades on weak domestic markets and a strong US dollar index. However, the rupee recovered early losses on supposed intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)," said Anuj Choudhary -- research analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

"Traders may take cues from inflation data from the US and India this week. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 87.25 to 87.80," Choudhary said.

Meanwhile, Brent crude, the global oil bench-



mark, rose 0.98 per cent to USD 75.39 per barrel in futures trade. Reserve Bank governor Sanjay Malhotra on Saturday said the market forces decide the value of rupee with respect to the US dollar and the central bank is not worried about day-to-day movement of the currency value.

Addressing the media after the meeting of finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman with the Reserve Bank board, Malhotra said the central bank focuses on the value of the rupee in the medium to long term.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee is trading with a negative bias as foreign banks went on a dollar-buying spree and importers scrambled to secure dollars, as they feared further depreciation amidst global uncertainty.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 548.39 points, or 0.70 per cent, to settle at a week's low of 77,311.80, while the Nifty declined 178.35 points, or 0.76 per cent, to 23,381.60 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 470.39 crore in the capital markets on a net basis on Friday, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, India's forex reserves rose USD 1.05 billion to USD 630.607 billion for the week ended January 31, the RBI said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had increased by USD 5.574 billion to USD 629.557 billion. (PTI)

Saregama posts 20.8pc rise in net profit in Q3FY25

KOLKATA, Feb 10: Saregama India Ltd on Monday reported a 20.8-per cent year-on-year rise in consolidated net profit to ₹ 63.24 crore for the quarter ended December 2024, driven by robust revenue growth in the music and events segments. Revenue from operations jumped 137 per cent on-year to ₹ 483.43 crore in the reporting quarter, the company informed the bourses.

Earnings per share (EPS) rose to ₹ 3.24 from ₹ 2.72 in the year-ago period. The music segment slipped from being the largest revenue contributor, registering ₹ 163.02 crore, while the events vertical witnessed phenomenal growth, generating ₹ 278.89 crore in revenue for the period under review. The events business revenue in the December quarter of last year was just ₹ 10 crore.

The video segment reported a loss of ₹ 8.94 crore, though it showed sequential improvement. The company said it will invest ₹ 1,000 crore between 2024-25 and 2026-27 in new content development. The board approved an interim dividend of ₹ 4.50 per equity share for the current fiscal. The stock closed 1.12 per cent down at Rs 523.50 per share on the NSE. (PTI)

number two. Our priority is to stick to our planned targets and budgets. As long as we meet our own growth objectives, we are satisfied," she asserted.

The company had earlier announced plans to double its turnover to ₹20,000 crore by 2030. Kaur reaffirmed this target while maintaining a cautious approach toward inorganic growth.

Meanwhile, Berger Paints managing director & CEO Abhijit Roy, on the occasion of the inauguration of the company's new headquarters in New Town, said that there has been a recovery in the value loss of about 11 per cent faced over the last few quarters. "The price cut impact of 5 per cent last year has been mitigated. The slowdown impact loss of 3 per cent will be recovered with a consumer-centric budget," he said. He further stated that the company is expanding despite rising competition and will invest ₹ 2,000 crore in three new projects in Panagarh (West Bengal), Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. These projects will help the company's installed capacity grow to 1.42 lakh tonne per month from the current 1.10 lakh tonne. (PTI)

Gold surges ₹ 2,430 to hit lifetime high of ₹ 88,500 per 10g amid Trump's tariff threats

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Gold prices zoomed by ₹ 2,430 to hit a lifetime high of ₹ 88,500 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday following firm global trends and a weak rupee, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal breached the record USD 2,900 an ounce level in spot markets globally after US President Donald Trump announced imposition of fresh 25 per cent tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports to the US.

Heavy buying by jewellers and retailers also boosted the prices.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at ₹ 86,070 per 10 grams last week.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity surged by ₹ 2,430 to hit a record high of ₹ 88,100 per 10 grams in the local markets.

Silver prices increased ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 97,500 per kg.

Investors are dumping riskier assets like stocks as they prefer safe haven amid global economic uncertainties, traders said.

In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery rallied ₹ 940 to hit a new lifetime high of ₹ 85,828 per 10 grams.

"Gold witnessed strong gains, surging above Rs 85,800 in MCX and hitting USD 2,900 in spot markets as Trump's new round of tariffs on metal products intensified trade war concerns.

"With no specific clarity on which countries are included or excluded, uncertainty in global trade has driven significant bullion buying," Jateen Trivedi, VP research analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

The subsequent contract for June delivery surged ₹ 1,015 or 1.18 per cent to hit a fresh peak of ₹ 86,636 per 10 grams.

Silver futures for March delivery climbed ₹ 632 to ₹ 95,965 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange



(MCX). Globally, Comex gold futures appreciated by USD 45.09 per ounce or 1.56 per cent to hit a record high of USD 2,932.69 per ounce. Meanwhile, spot gold in the global markets breached the psychological level of USD 2,900-mark.

"Gold climbed to a new record high on Monday as fund flow increased towards the safe haven asset in response to President Trump's latest declaration," Saamil Gandhi, senior analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Comex silver futures in the Asian market hours rose nearly 1 per cent to USD 32.76 per ounce.

According to a report by Dutch multinational ING Bank, gold has already hit a series of fresh record highs this year. Tariff concerns that risk higher inflation and slower economic growth are spurring demand for safe haven assets.

The precious metal prices will hit more record highs this year, with USD 3,000 per ounce now in sight, it said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

LS witnesses heated debate

BJP MP Anurag Thakur hailed the budget a "force multiplier". "Rahul Gandhi is calling the budget a 'band-aid budget'. I want to tell him that this is not a band-aid budget but a 'booster shot' budget. It is a force multiplier..." he said. The Hamirpur MP spoke about the measures taken by the government to enable start-ups in the country and alleged that Congress is busy with "its own start-up".

"How many times it has been launched..." he said, taking a dig at Congress leaders. NCP MP Supriya Sule welcomed the tax rebate but maintained that "all is not well". "I urge this government that all is not good, the economy is slowing down, you have given a good tax rebate I welcome that but at the same time, I am not sure that it is going to deliver superior results as the government is expecting.

"I request the government to introspect... just winning elections does not mean all is well," Sule said. TMC leader Kalyan Banerjee alleged that the budget was anti-people and destructive for the country's economy. He also opposed the proposal to increase the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit in the insurance sector. "The budget ignores the immediate challenges of growing unemployment, inflation and inequality," he said adding the income tax benefit will help only a limited number of people.

He also accused the Centre of neglecting West Bengal. "If you ignore us, the West Bengal people will give answers in 2026 (assembly elections)," he said. Aam Aadmi Party MP Gurmeet Singh Meht met Hayer accused the Central Government of ignoring Punjab's farmers. The Sangrur MP said that the government has miserably failed in areas like per capita income, GDP and the depreciating value of the rupee against the dollar. He pointed out that India lags significantly in per capita income.

"In India, the income of only a handful of people has increased, while the general population's income growth has been negligible. The condition of the common man is aptly described by the saying 'amdani athani, kharcha rupaiya'," he said. Mocking the income tax slab, he remarked that the vast majority of the country's population is entirely excluded from its benefits.

Commenting on the depreciating rupee value, Hayer sarcastically noted that BJP leaders used to say 10 years ago that the "rupee is in the ICU" but now under their rule, the rupee's condition against the dollar is at its weakest. Igra Choudhary (SP) said that the budget is only a headline-grabbing document as it has neglected, farmers, youth and poor.

"It is not an inclusive Budget," she said adding no steps have been taken to reduce unemployment. She demanded an increase of MPLAD funds from ₹ 5 crore to ₹ 25 crore. Congress MP Amrinder Singh Raja Warring said that the budget would only help the rich and was election-centric. He demanded an increase in wages under MNREGA to ₹ 600 and a legal guarantee of 200 days of wage employment. (PTI)

Two held for collecting

positions in state government offices in exchange for a large sum of money. "The two accused individuals used to give ₹ 3-4 lakhs to each applicant for a government post. Both of them were eventually arrested after we had been following them for a few days," the officer continued.

The police have brought them to Panbazar police station in the city and they have been questioned by the investigating team. A case was also registered against the duo under relevant sections.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has been arguing that government jobs were given in an absolutely transparent way since the BJP came to power in the state.

Sarma said that the state government has given more than 1.25 lakh jobs in the last three years and before the next assembly election, it will cross 1.7 lakh figure. The CM also mentioned that this handful of jobs were given in an absolutely transparent manner with zero complaint of malpractices.

"I am sure that no previous state government has a track record of giving these many jobs in a single tenure. Moreover, every appointment was transparent and no youths in the state now fear for any malpractice in the government recruitment process. There has not been even a single case in the Court challenging the recruitment drive," he added.

Sarma asserted that no other previous state government was able to conduct such huge recruitment drives and that too with zero complaint of malpractices.

1984 anti-Sikh riots: Prosecution

According to a report of the one-man Nanavati Commission, formed to probe the violence, there were 587 FIRs registered in Delhi in relation to the 1984 riots that witnessed 2,733 people being killed. Of the total, the police shut about 240 cases as "untraceable" and about 250 cases resulted in acquittals.

However, it was only in May 2023 that the central probe agency the CBI filed a chargesheet against Congress leader Jagdish Tytler for his alleged role in the killings of three people on November 1, 1984. The CBI alleged Tytler "incited, instigated and provoked the mob assembled at Pul Bangash Gurdwara Azad Market area in the national capital on November 1, 1984. The incident resulted in the burning down of the gurdwara and killing of Thakur Singh, Badal Singh and Guru Charan Singh. (PTI)

India, France have shared

on February 7, India's foreign secretary Vikram Misri had shared the broad itinerary of the prime minister's visit to France. Modi will attend a dinner hosted by Macron at the Élysée Palace in Paris on Monday, which is likely to be attended by a large number of CEOs from the tech domain along with other distinguished invitees to the summit. On February 11, the prime minister will co-chair the AI Action Summit, along with Macron.

He will also hold discussions in both restricted and delegation formats and address the India-France CEO's Forum, Misri told reporters. The two leaders are also scheduled to visit the Mazargues War Cemetery maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Marseille on Wednesday, and pay tributes to the sacrifices made by the Indian soldiers in World War I. Last year, India and France celebrated the 25th anniversary of their strategic partnership, covering an entire gamut of issues, from defence and security, civil nuclear matters, space to trade, economy and commerce. (PTI)

Assam Police registers FIR

hosts a variety of podcasts featuring prominent figures from Indian politics, Bollywood, business, and the spiritual world. Some of the politicians he has interviewed include Smriti Irani, S Jaishankar, Nitin Gadkari, and others. He has also hosted a few Bollywood celebrities.

HIV infections could jump

International aid, Byanyima said, "helped an American company to innovate, to come up with something that will pay them millions and millions, but at the same time prevent new infections in the rest of the world." The freeze in American funding, she said, didn't make economic sense.

"We appeal to the US government to review this, to understand that this is mutually beneficial," she said, noting that foreign assistance makes up less than 1 per cent of the overall US budget. "Why would you need to be so disruptive for that 1 per cent?"

Byanyima said that so far, no other countries or donors have stepped up to fill the void that will be left by the loss of American aid, but that she plans to visit numerous European capitals to speak with global leaders.

"People are going to die because lifesaving tools have been taken away from them," she said. "I have not yet heard of any European country committing to step in, but I know they are listening and trying to see where they can come in because they care about rights, about humanity." (AP)

Protest staged against transfer of district admin employee

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 10: The Nagaon district unit of the All Assam District Administration Employees' Association staged a protest boycotting their respective duties here on Monday.

The protest was called against the transfer of Gautam Bhuyan, a senior administrative assistant from Majuli district.

The association alleged that Bhuyan's transfer to Jorhat district was made without following proper procedures.

The association's district unit, led by its president Simanta Hazarika and secretary Bipul Chandra Bora, organised a strike from 4 pm to 5 pm and staged a demonstration in front of the District Commissioner's office due to which the official work have been sharply affected during the day here.

Morigaon's Shikhi Kakati wins multiple national awards

HT Correspondent
MORIGAO, Feb 10: Shikhi Kakati, a third-standard student of Mahendra Kandali Academy in Morigaon, has made a mark at the national level by receiving multiple prestigious awards.

She was honoured with the Indian Legacy Award, presented by the WELRED Foundation, a West Bengal-based non-profit organisation.

Additionally, she received the Rastra Seva Samman and the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam 'Bharatiya Ratna Award', jointly presented by The Fair Vision Foundation and Worthy Wellness Foundation of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, under the Government of India.

The awards were conferred upon Shikhi on February 8 and 9, 2025, in recognition of her outstanding artistic achievements. The young talent, daughter of poet Mantu Kr Nath and Jnumoni Kakati of Ward No 5, Morigaon, began her artistic journey at the age of five and has consistently excelled in cultural performances.

Currently, she is learning Satriya dance and acting at Morigaon Sankari Sangeet Vidyalaya while also honing her acting skills with the premier drama group Sashipat, Morigaon.

APCC strategises 'Door to Door Congress' for upcoming panchayat elections

The programme is part of the party's strategy to regain its strength in the state



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Feb 10: The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) has launched a new programme called "Door to Door Congress" ahead of the upcoming panchayat elections.

The programme aims to reconnect the party at the grassroots level.

Makum pathar Mandal Congress Committee on Monday organised a "Door to Door Congress" programme at the residence of Manoj Borgohain

president of Makum Pathar Mandal Congress where Bhupen Kumar Borah president of APCC officially launched it and upon his arrival, party workers welcomed him with a grand bike rally, Bihu and Jhumur dance.

The programme was attended by various senior and prominent congress leaders such as Durga Bhumij former Doomsday MLA and general secretary of APCC, Raju Sahu former Chabua MLA and APCC vice president, Balika lahon

Pegu APCC vice president, Pranjal Ghatowar general secretary (i/c) APCC, Prasenjit Choudhary APCC secretary, Avinash Gogoi secretary (i/c) APCC, Amit Gogoi, secretary APCC, Dilip Moran vice president of APCC, Ramanna Baruah, general secretary (Administration), Jayanta Kalita, president of Tinsukia district congress committee, Nabin Gogoi, vice president APCC, Tara Prasad Dehingia president of Margherita Block Congress Committee, Mitali Baruah, president of Margherita Block Mahila Congress Committee, Avisek Beldar president of Margherita Assembly Youth Congress, Pranjal Chetia, chairman of social media and digital platform Margherita Block Congress Committee, Abhijit Baruah, president of Margherita NSUI with more than 500 grassroots level congress workers from 83 no Margherita Constituency were present.

Bhupen Kumar Borah in his speech said that "Door to Door Congress" programme has been officially launched from Margherita today onwards as we have come to listen what people think and what they want".

The programme is part of the party's strategy to regain its strength in the state as the APCC has been working to revamp its organisation and connect with the people of Assam through "Door to Door Congress" programme which is expected to play a crucial role in this effort in the upcoming panchayat election.

While it's difficult to predict the outcome of this programme, it's clear that the APCC is committed to regain its strength in the state.

However the success of this programme depends on various factors, including the party's ability to connect with the people and addressing their concerns.

Ex MCLA Makhan Swargiary joins UPPL



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 10: Former MCLA of Bodoland Territorial Council and senior BPF leader, Makhan Swargiary formally joined the ruling UPPL party at a party meeting held at the Belguri under Salbari subdivision in Baksa district on Monday.

Swargiary, represented the Mathanguri constituency twice from 2005 to 2015 in BTC Legislative Assembly.

He joined the UPPL party, along with more than 3000 supporters and well wishers in the presence of UPPL general secretary, Raju Kumar Narzary, vice president, Afjal Haque Sarkar, BTC executive members, Dhananjay Basumatry, Rakesh Brahma, ex Assam minister Chandan Brahma, ex BTC deputy chief, Kampa Borgoyary and several other senior party leaders.

With the joining of Swargiary and several party supporters, the opposition BPF party faced a jolt to its position as several senior party leaders had left the party.

Sources also claimed that the Mushalpur district committee, BPF president and ex-MLA Hitesh Basumatry is joining the UPPL party on February 14 in Mushalpur.

Notably, the ruling UPPL party is now gaining up its popularity among the common masses, and accordingly people cutting across the communities are coming forward to extend support to the UPPL party.

UPPL general secretary, Raju Kumar Narzary stated that UPPL party welcomed several new members, especially from BPF party, including ex MCLA Swargiary at Mathanguri constituency on Monday. He said that Peoples have faith on UPPL party, and subsequently coming forward to join the party.

"Today, UPPL party has received a good response from the society as UPPL led BTR government is rendering relentless services towards the welfare and uplift of the citizens. We are committed to work for all round development of the peoples", Narzary added.

Advantage Assam 2.0 Summit 2025 held in Sonitpur

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 10: A one-day district-level workshop on "Advantage Assam 2.0 - Investment and Infrastructure Summit 2025" was held on Monday (February 10) at the Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office, Sonitpur.

The event was jointly organised by the Sonitpur and Biswanath District Administrations, along with the District Industries and Commerce Centres (DICC) of Sonitpur and Biswanath.

As part of the workshop, Morgan Meston, general manager of DICC, Sonitpur, delivered a multimedia presentation highlighting the central theme and key aspects of the summit.

This was followed by district-specific sectoral presentations by relevant departments, outlining investment opportunities in key sectors such as agriculture, IT, tourism, NABARD-supported projects, animal husbandry, and others.

With the active participation of around 200 participants from Sonitpur and around 100 participants of Biswanath comprising industrialists, entrepreneurs, SHG & FPC members, representatives from North Assam Chamber of Commerce, the deliberations were successful.

During the workshop, entrepreneurs from various sectors across Sonitpur and Biswanath shared



their challenges and sought government support to improve business-related infrastructure and facilities. Addressing the gathering, minister Pijush Hazarika encouraged entrepreneurs to stay connected with relevant government departments to access necessary benefits and support. He also assured them that their

concerns would be addressed effectively.

Guardian minister of Sonitpur district, Pijush Hazarika attended the event as the chief guest.

The workshop was also graced by the presence of MLA of Tezpur LAC, Prithiraj Rava, MLA of Barchalla LAC, Ganesh Kumar Limbu, MLA of Rangapara LAC, Krishna Kamal Tanti, district commissioner of Sonitpur, Ankur Bharali, district commissioner of Biswanath, Munindra Nath Ngatey, vice chairperson of AMTRON, Ritu Baran Sarmah, and district development commissioner of Sonitpur, Lakhinandan Saharia, along with senior officials from both district administrations.

Nagaon GNDG Commerce College annual college week underway

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 10: The annual college week of Nagaon Gopinath Dev Goswami Commerce College, one of the leading educational institutions in Central Assam is underway.

The programme was initiated on Wednesday last with the hoisting of the ceremonial flag, followed by a cultural procession attended by over two hundred students. The programme was officially inaugurated by Dr Mriganka Saikia, the principal of the college.

The students participated in a procession reflecting the culture of different people living in

Assam, including Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali South speakers etc as well. It also showcased various people living in harmony, evil elege, one of the leading educational institutions in Central Assam is underway.

The students, an invaluable part of the procession, provided unique dimensions to the rally.

The students from the NCC, National Sewa Scheme (NSS), principals, teachers and office staff of the college also participated in the procession.

It's pertinent to mention here that the annual college week will come to an end today.

Garubandha Model Hospital inaugurated in Sonitpur

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 10: Garubandha Model Hospital constructed under National Health Mission with a budget of Rs 5.98 crore at Garubandha area, under Barchala LAC and Missamari PS in Sonitpur district was formally inaugurated on Monday, by the state health minister Ashok Singhal in presence of local MLA, Ganesh Kumar Limbu.

"Under the visionary leadership of chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarmah the state health sector is witnessing a sea change. BJP government both in state and center is being able to materialize all the developmental activities under the leadership of Narendra Modi and Himanta Biswa Sarmah", said Singhal at a public meeting organised in connection with the ceremonial opening.

The major facilities to be available in the model hospital are- eight OPD rooms, family welfare clinic, CSSD, cold chain room, 2 bedded Aseptic Labour room with baby corner, dirty utility, 3 bedded stabilisation (NSU) room, baby feeding room, one bedded septic delivery room, main OT with sterile store, sterilisation room, nurses duty room, pharmacy and store, 4 bedded emergency ward, Minor O.T, examination and treatment area, nurses

and doctors duty room, X-Ray room with dark room, ultrasound room, laboratory with sample collection room, medical store, 6 bedded female general ward (2nos) , 6 bedded male general ward (2nos), 4 nos of paying cabins, kitchen and pantry, trolley wash area, doctors duty room and nurses duty room, nurses station, 2 bedded isolation ward alongwith residential accommodation like doctor's quarter, nurse's quarter.

Notably, the new Model hospital will be able to cater healthcare service to nearly 1,05,000 people under the four Panchayats including Garubandha, Missamari, Jagabhuru, Bahbera and Chariduar and Belseri Tea Estate which will also cover Dighajuli NPHC, Dhankhana HWC, Bahbera HWC, Ramnathpur, HWC, Rikamari HWC, Dighajuli HWC and Belseri HWC.

Health Minister Singhal further said that it was a special day for the health sector in the region.

"As part of this ambitious journey, this model hospital will be able to cater to quality health care service to the people of the larger area in the northern belt of the district. We feel that it will reflect the picture of our obligation towards human life and society as well."

He said adding that, in 2019 when

chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarmah was health minister he laid the foundation stone of the MH with a dream to provide adequate health care service to the people of the area, and on that day, that dream has been turned into a reality.

In his speech the minister mentioned that earlier the area was under the Dhekiajuli constituency which always felt the need of such a solid infrastructure for the fulfillment of a better healthcare service to the people which was a call of the hour.

"That is fulfilled today, however though the area has now come under the Barchala LAC as per the delimitation process, yet as minister I have an obligation towards the people of the area," he said.

The minister also urged all concerned including medical staff to be dedicated towards serving the people.

"Just infrastructure is not enough, dedication in service matters a lot."

In the programme, local MLA, Ganesh Kumar Limbu, commissioner, Health and Family Welfare Department, P Ashok Babu, executive director, National Health Mission, Manoj Choudhury, DC, Sonitpur, Ankur Bharali among other noted personalities of the area were present.

National Deworming Day launched in Dima Hasao



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 10: Along with the rest of the state, National Deworming Day (NDD) was launched in Dima Hasao district at the office chamber of the Joint Director of Health Services, Haflong on Monday.

District Nodal Officer, Marina L Changsan highlighted the importance of addressing soil-transmitted helminthiasis, a prevalent public health issue caused by intestinal worms and that the main objective of NDD is to reduce the prevalence of Helminthiasis among children and adolescents, between the ages of 1-19 years through schools, VHNDs, AWCs in order to improve the health, nutrition status, access to quality education and quality of life, an official statement said.

She emphasised that regular deworming is crucial for preventing malnutrition and improving cognitive development in children. Dr Changsan also addressed the need for

community participation and awareness to make the deworming campaign a success.

She also appealed to the public to maintain cleanliness by using proper sanitary toilets, washing hands regularly with safe and clean water.

Further she requested all parents, ASHA workers, and stakeholders to work sincerely together to ensure the success of the deworming campaign.

Joint Director i/c, C Changsan expressed his gratitude to all the stakeholders involved in making the event a success.

"We are confident that this initiative will significantly improve the health and nutritional status of our children," the statement quoted him saying.

Deworming tablets will be administered to all school-going children in schools. Children who could not be dewormed on National Deworming Day due to absenteeism or sickness must be given the tablets during the mop-up round, which will continue till February 17.

ASHA and anganwadi workers will also administer deworming tablets in all anganwadi centers and through home visits to ensure that all children in the age group of 1-19 years are dewormed.

The launch event was attended by representatives from the Social Welfare Department, Education Department, ASHA workers, and medical officials, the statement concluded.

Four notorious cattle thieves arrested

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 10: In a significant breakthrough, Kaliabor sub-district police arrested four notorious cattle thieves within the last 24 hours from the Rupahihat police station area.

The arrests were made possible due to a tip-off from a reliable source amidst the alleged inactivity of the Rupahihat police administration.

A special police team led by SDO, Kaliabor Shyamanta Sarmah, a joint operation was conducted by Jakhlabandha police and Bagori police, resulting in the apprehension of three notorious cattle thieves on Saturday night here. According to sources, the arrested thieves have been identified as Nekibur Rahman and Mainul Haque from Gunamari and Rinku Ahmed from Saidoria area under Rupahihat police station here.

This is the second major breakthrough for Jakhlabandha police in recent days.

Meanwhile, another cattle thief identified as Babul Hussain, hailing from Pub Gehua Chalchali under the same Rupahihat police station, was also arrested last night by Kaliabor police on Sunday.

Medeline's 'Democracy in India: Origin and Development' released



HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 10: Medeline Terangi 'Democracy in India: Origin and Development' was released in the World Book Fair on February 8 in New Delhi.

Terangi's book was launched by Union Minister for education, Dharmendra Pradhan, under the PM YUVA mentorship programme 2.0, 2025.

The National Book Trust (NBT) at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi

organised the event having Tripura Governor, Indrasena Reddy Nallu as the guest of honour.

PM YUVA 2.0 Mentorship Scheme is a 6 month long mentorship scheme wherein the selected authors from across the country were awarded a scholarship of Rs 3 lakh along with a continued guidance through the entire process of writing a book in any of the 22 official Indian lan-

guages, including English. The theme of PM-YUVA 2.0 was 'Democracy'.

Candidates had to submit a manuscript of 10,000 words and a national jury selected forty two authors after a personal interview.

Three among the forty two authors were from Northeast.

Dr Bidhan S Laishram is Terangi's mentor guiding her in her assignment by the National Book Trust.

She also informed that her editor from NBT, Ms Carolyn Pao also guided her in her project. Terangi is the eldest daughter of Riswel Terang and Rita Phangchopi born in Hongkram, Karbi Anglong.

Her father works in the Special Branch, Kahilipara, Assam and relocated to Guwahati for the convenience of it.

She graduated from Cotton University with a Bachelor's degree in History and completed her Master's degree from Delhi University in June last year.

NTPC Bongaigaon extends support for Assam Govt's Arohan Scheme

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 10: Reinforcing its commitment to education and youth empowerment, NTPC Bongaigaon, under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, has extended its support for the Arohan Scheme, an initiative by the Government of Assam, by introducing a mentorship program for meritorious students in association with District Administration, Kokrajhar and Bardwi Shikha Ladies Club of the station.

As part of this initiative, NTPC Bongaigaon recently distributed educational kits to top-performing Class IX students (No 1 of the class) from 96 government schools across the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). While distributing the kits, Arindam Sinha, regional executive director (ER-II), addressed the students and emphasised the importance of perseverance, hard work, and knowledge in shaping a successful future. He encouraged them to dream big, stay committed to their goals, and utilise every opportunity to expand their learning horizons. Sinha further reaffirmed NTPC's dedication to promoting educational excellence and skill development among young minds, particularly in remote areas like BTR and North East India. Rupali Sinha, president, Vasudha Mahila Mandal, ER-II, in her address, highlighted the transformative power of education in shaping lives. She encouraged students, especially young girls, to pursue their aspirations with confidence and determination. She emphasised that initiatives like the Arohan Scheme, supported by NTPC, aim to bridge educational gaps and provide students with the right exposure and mentorship needed to succeed in life.

Earlier, the students also visited the Waste to Wealth Replica of NTPC Bongaigaon and a Selfie Point, where Bonthu Balaji, DGM (BMD), explained the mechanism of coal-to-power generation, enhancing their understanding of the energy sector. In the coming days, NTPC Bongaigaon will allocate mentors from its engineering, management, and medical professionals to guide students, offering their career insights and professional exposure. The Arohan Scheme, initiated by the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarmah, is a flagship mentor-mentee program designed to identify and nurture academically bright students from government schools.

Five day refresher training programme concludes at Manas NP

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 10: In a significant move to enhance wildlife protection efforts, 27 investigating officers from six forest divisions participated in an intensive five-day refresher training program, which concluded on Sunday at Bansbari Forest IB, Manas National Park.

The training aims to strengthen their expertise in investigations, evidence collection, and framing wildlife offense incorporating the latest amendments of Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and recently amended criminal laws and procedures.

The training was organised by the field directorate, Manas Tiger Reserve and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) to minimise the knowledge gaps among the investigating officers and to update them on relevant sections of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS) and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam, 2023 (BSA) and the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 as amended upto 2022.

The roots of this program date back to April 2011, when WTI first introduced a law enforcement training focused specifically at Manas Tiger Reserve, jointly with Assam Forest Department.

Over the years, the initiative has evolved into a comprehensive training series.

By December 2024, a total of 754 officers belonging to frontline forest staff participated in 30 batches of refresher, refresher and advanced training held in various parts of Manas Tiger Reserve that also included 10 days of special training in Kaziranga NP and Orang NP.

The training is a part of our continuous process to enhance the skills of our Investigating Officers in order to build their capacity and knowledge on the procedural changes as per the latest amendments including the relevant sections of criminal laws and procedures. We received several landmark judgements from the Hon'ble courts and the credit goes to WTI and IFAW for their continuous efforts jointly with us, said Dr C Ramesh, IFS, CCF, field director, Manas Tiger Reserve.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them — Walt Disney

Delhi results and future of INDIA bloc

The victory of the BJP in the Delhi assembly elections defeating the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convincingly is certainly a jolt to the opposition INDIA bloc, but it does not mean the end of AAP, or the final tolls for the INDIA bloc, as some commentators in the national media and the TV channels are projecting it to be. Those who have studied the mood of the Delhi electorate knew that in the 2025 elections, things would be much tougher for the AAP to retain power by defeating the BJP, as there was anti-incumbency after full two terms of Delhi's ruling party. The final clincher was the big income tax relief in the 2025-26 Union budget announced on February 1, four days before the polls, and the earlier announcement on the setting up of the eighth pay commission for the central government employees. The verdict favouring BJP was precipitated by the salaried middle classes of Delhi, who constitute majority of the 1.56 crore Delhi electorate. There were direct cash benefits to them. That certainly had an immediate impact on the polling day a few days later. But still, the voting figures show that the fight was not one-way; rather, it was a bitter battle. BJP got 45.56 per cent of the votes, while AAP secured 43.57 per cent, meaning a difference of only 2 per cent, though in seat terms, BJP got 48 and AAP only 22.

Further, taking both the INDIA bloc parties AAP and Congress votes together, the AAP-Congress combine got nearly 50 per cent of the votes and in terms of seats, 14 more seats would have come to the INDIA bloc kitty if there were an alliance. This means that INDIA bloc could have had a narrow victory by getting 36 out of the total of 70 seats, if there had been an alliance of the AAP and the Congress. Further, the AAP retained its base of Dalits, poor and Muslims, as the analysis of the constituency-wise voting patterns showed. The verdict was the result of a major middle class shift from AAP to BJP on the polling day, while the poor stood more or less by the AAP and the Congress.

So, the lesson is that both AAP and the Congress mishandled the alliance issue before the assembly polls. They should have worked out some understanding on seat-sharing before the assembly elections, taking into account the success of the BJP in the earlier assembly polls in Haryana and Maharashtra. Since this did not take place, the best thing for the AAP and the Congress now would be to assess the ground situation with objectivity and prepare for the next round to take on the BJP. AAP has conceded defeat and Arvind Kejriwal has promised to work as the responsible opposition. That is the perfect democratic approach in a vibrant parliamentary system. Now let us look at the emerging political situation. It is high time the INDIA bloc parties convene a meeting and decide on the new line of leadership. Rahul Gandhi remains the LoP and the Congress always remains the biggest constituent of the INDIA bloc.

Growing pressure on Dr. Yunus for early elections

When Sheikh Hasina came to power, the new generation (Gen Z) had not seen free, fair, and inclusive elections since 2008. Election observers described the parliament elections under her 15-year autocratic regime as fraud, and the poll results were cropped.

The international media had widely reported how elections in Bangladesh in 2014, 2018, and 2024 were held under the cover of darkness, keeping thousands of opposition leaders and members in prison.

The rights organizations repeatedly made loud noise, but Hasina ignored their calls to hold free and fair elections. Instead, she was beating African drums that the country belongs to her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was ordained as the architect of Bangladesh's independence signalling she has the right the govern with an iron hand.

Amid cheering crowds, she often boasted that her father had made the country independent and was known as Bangabandhu (Friend of Bangladesh). Otherwise, she explained, the nation would have been subjugated by Pakistan's military establishment, making them second-class citizens.

Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus took charge of an Interim Government backed by defiant student leaders and the military after they forced the Iron Lady (Hasina) to abdicate her power and flee to India, where she is living in exile.

The political parties except the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami have demanded an election at the soonest, indicating before the end of this year. Yunus charted a path to reforms to establish pluralism, democracy, and human rights, he announced in an address to the nation that several commissions suggested reforms to key state organs.

He conveyed to the political leaders that the elections would be held only after the reforms on Electoral System, Constitution, Public Administration, Judiciary, Financial Institutions, Media, Police Administration, and Anti-Corruption were made effective. The political parties and civil society welcomed his initiative.



When military dictator General Muhammad Ershad was ousted by students backed by the military in 1990, the mainstream opposition parties signed an election pledge prepared by the student leaders. The opposition leaders promised to implement the reforms in key state organs.

Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia, and the Left Alliance jointly signed a tripartite political commitment that they will implement the reforms after winning the elections. Unfortunately, both the Begums went to power again and again but they deliberately avoided implementing the pro-people pledge.

After decades of bad governance, poor accountability and transparency, Yunus is determined to see a new Bangladesh, which adheres to the principles of international covenants to put the country at a respectable height on the world stage.

The reforms are supposed to guarantee democracy, pluralism, accountability, transparency, independence of the judiciary, independent election commission, freedom of expression, press freedom, and human rights. He has reiterated that the elections will be held once the reforms have taken off the ground zero.

Most political scientists and think tanks believe that the political parties would agree not to disagree. Later the politicians, when elected, the painstakingly homework for reforms would be binned. For more than five decades the political parties that ruled the nation were intolerant and arrogant. At

times reacted very violently.

The politicians publicly flouted the rule of law, punished the journalists for exposing their corruption, and ignored the accountability of elected representatives of public offices. They often coerced police and judiciary to ensure that their blue-eyed boys were kept out of prison for extortion from traders and protection money from industrialists, while their rivals were severely punished and blocked from politics.

The visible challenges in front of Yunus are acting as a stumbling block in the accountability of bureaucracy, judiciary and law and order situation. The police are unable to restore lawlessness and control price hikes in kitchen markets.

There is no guarantee clause to be signed by politicians, that the reforms should be taken into cognizance in "good faith" by the "untamed" political parties. Yunus told in an interview with an editor of a Bangladesh newspaper that the leaders of the political parties when they held parleys with him were polite and humble.

However, when they spoke to the journalists, they gave a different statement which they did not put on the table of discussion with the Chief Adviser of the Interim Government. It is strange but it is a fact, he told the editor.

The recent spree of vandalism and demolition of the Bangabandhu Museum, the former residence of the first President of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 5 February. Students went

berserk in several cities and towns in the looting and arson of Awami League senior leaders, who were deemed icons of accomplices to autocratic Hasina's misrule.

The Chief Adviser in a tone of warning that certain groups are pushing the nation into anarchy and lawlessness. The inventor of micro-credit Prof Yunus calls on all citizens "to immediately restore complete law and order and to ensure there will be no further attacks on properties" associated with the family of the ousted Sheikh Hasina and politicians of the fascist Awami League party or against any citizen on any pretext.

He, however, said the outrage has sparked from her (Hasina) refuge in New Delhi, and from there she continues to mobilize her militants to hamper Bangladesh's recovery from years of abuse under her 15-year rule.

If any attempt is made to destabilize the country through any kind of provocative activities, law enforcement agencies will immediately take strict action against anyone acting to create chaos and anarchy, which includes the destruction of property. The government will bring the responsible individuals and groups to justice, he stated.

While the vandalism and looting, the law enforcement agencies were playing as silent spectators when the mobs were rioting. Several civil society, rights, and citizens groups strongly condemned the vandalism, arson, and looting of family members of Hasina and Awami League leaders.

Celebrated feminist Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, who lives in exile in India, has called the demolition of Sheikh Mujib's residence an act of "Islamic terrorists".

The Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman said "If the ongoing madness does not stop, Bangladesh will be heading towards civil war." While, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) said in a statement that they will hold talks with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus as soon as possible to express their concern over the country's "deteriorating" law and order situation, especially the demolition of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's resi-

dence in Dhaka.

They fear that these attacks and vandalism in the last two days could pose a serious threat to national stability and disrupt the upcoming national election, a BNP statement said. It is understood that on the issue of appalling law and order status, the political parties will press Yunus to hold elections in the coming winter.

Most political analysts argue that Yunus may not agree to their demand for an early election, unless the reforms get tacit approval from all political parties, except for the former ruling party Awami League. Most of the like-minded political parties, except the Islamist parties, are liping the same jargon as the BNP's political agenda of early election.

Will an election roadmap neutralize the political crisis? Writer and researcher on political history Mohiuddin Ahmad does not believe that the situation will improve; rather, it may worsen.

Most political parties have extended their support to the Interim Government led by Prof Yunus. However, they argue that in the last six months, the government has failed in various areas, including controlling the price of daily essentials and improving the law and order situation.

As a result, there are doubts about their ability to control any situation in the country. The last two days of vandalism have added to the crisis of confidence. Ahmad remarked that if the government announces an election roadmap, there will be a further crisis when local party leaders clash with rivals in electioneering.

The government and mainstream political parties should focus on the country's image and stability. Because if there is no stability, everything including democracy and elections will suffer, said political scientist Professor Mahbub Ullah to BBC Bangla Service.

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UK's counter-extremism remit to include Hindutva

By: Asad Mirza

With the new Labour government in the UK led by Keir Starmer taking over, it was expected that the government will undo some key policies of the earlier Conservative governments and have a relook at how the policies or programmes started by it, were given a fresh-up.

However, the last week of January witnessed confusion around the future direction of the UK government's counter-extremism strategy, as Home Office ministers were forced to reject the conclusions of a leaked internal review which called for a focus on "behaviours and activity of concern" rather than ideology.

An analysis of different parts of the report calling for the scope of counter-extremism work to be widened to cover a range of causes and activities including Hindutva (Hindu nationalism), Sikh extremism, extreme misogyny, and a fascination with violence, were published by Policy Exchange, a right-wing think tank. So far, the report has not been made public and only its analysis by Policy Exchange has gained traction.

Reportedly, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper did not agree with the recommendations of her own department's review and thus may order the focus of the policy to remain directed towards Islamist and far-right extremism.

UK introduced its Prevent policy in 2003 as part of an overall post 9/11 counter-terrorism approach called CONTEST, with the aim of preventing the radicalisation of individuals to terrorism.

Successful British governments have long grappled with legal definitions of extremism, which human rights groups have warned, pose a serious threat to freedom of speech and freedom of belief.

However, one wonders at the alacrity with which the Labour Government and Cooper reacted to the alleged inclusion of Hindutva – as an ideology responsible for stoking violence in the UK. The reason is not hard to fathom, post-Brexit, UK has been striving hard to finalise a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India, so far 15 rounds of bilateral talks have been held to finalise the agreement. For the Labour Government, signing the FTA with India is the top most priority, and it would not like to cause any upset and annoy the right-wing government in India, putting the signing of the FTA at risk.

Further, the Home Office review warns that "narrow definitions (of extremism) ... predicated on violence, or that have a requirement for an ideological dimension... exclude many damaging extremist beliefs and movements and associated harms that may warrant intervention."

The review nonetheless marks the first time that Hindutva has been discussed in detail in a major policy document. Examples of extremist beliefs which it cites include Hindutva, which the review notes played a "significant role" in inflaming tensions between Hindus and Muslims in Leicester in 2022, and "pro-Khalistan extremism", or calls for an independent Sikh state.

This is also the first time that a government document has linked Hindu nationalism to the Leicester riots, although a Daily Mail report in May 2023 quoted unnamed security sources as saying that the violence was stoked by activists linked to India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

According to the London-based institute Middle East Eye (MEE), Policy Exchange has been credited with shaping the direction towards counter-extremism taken by previous Conservative governments, and has been accused of promoting "hostility towards British Muslims", which it denies.

Policy Exchange has warned that the review's "playing down of ideology in general, and Islamism in particular" risked becoming a "major victory" for critics of the Prevent programme. According to Policy Exchange's report, the review says that a full counter-extremism strategy will be published next year.

Further, Policy Exchange recommends that responsibility for counter-extremism be shifted to the Home Office from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It also called for counter-extremism work to be delivered by a standalone team within the Prevent Directorate, which should be renamed the Prevent and Counter-Extremism Directorate.

It also calls for the creation of a Counter-Extremism Ministerial Board, attended by ministers, security officials and representatives from the MI5 and GCHQ intelligence agencies. Other members of the board, according to the Policy Exchange report, include the controversial Robin Simcox, head of the Commission for Countering Extremism.

The UK government's PREVENT programme has always remained

contentious, based on its remit shared by several ministries including DCLG, Home Office and the FCDO.

The UK-based Muslim organisations in the past had described Prevent as an undue intrusion in their working and treating the Muslim community as a pariah. While, on the other hand there was obviously no resource sharing or even lessons learned sharing between the different ministries.

A prudent decision earlier should have entrusted the work of building trust and relationship with the Muslim community, in the UK to the DCLG – a ministry which has deep rooted links with various communities in the UK, through a vast network of its counsellors and other professionals, who better understand the concerns and aspirations of different communities present in the UK, as they engage with them on a daily basis.

But instead, the lion's share of the work was given to the Home Office, which with its darkened lenses could not view or understand the problems faced by the Muslim community and their efforts towards better assimilation with-in the British society, but as one related to violence and terrorism-themed work only, linking everything with extremist Islamic ideologies being propagated from abroad.

Further, the FCDO in its own skewed way of working, focussed on bringing-in the saner elements from the Arab world, instead of India, to further its objective of portraying a positive image of the British Muslims supported through various government initiatives abroad, but failed to engage properly with those elements, which could have worked more effectively with the FCDO's and Home Office's overarching objectives, both within and outside the UK.

In the current circumstances, it would be prudent if the FCDO could try to rope-in the secular Hindu leaders, based in India, to address the concerns of the Hindu community in the UK, instead of letting the flashpoints simmering below the surface. Additionally, it would be prudent to rope-in the saner elements from India, as the genesis of Hindutva started in India and only India could help the British government and officials to tame this growing menace, pragmatically and prudently. *(The author is a New Delhi-based senior commentator on national, international, defence and strategic affairs, environmental issues, an interfaith practitioner, and a media consultant)*

PM Narendra Modi: Championing eco-conscious leadership

By: Dipak Kurmi

In the intricate tapestry of Indian civilization, the dichotomy between the self and the other has never existed. The Bharatiya belief system, deeply rooted in the principles of interconnectedness, posits that all forms of life originate from and return to a singular source. This philosophy, reflected in the concept of Pancha Bhuta—the five elements of nature—places humanity not above, but within the framework of nature. The Prashna Upanishad considers these elements—Pṛithvi (earth), Jal (water), Agni (fire), Vayu (air), and Akash (space)—as manifestations of divine energy. Hence, the Indian ethos inherently negates the binary between the internal and the external, fostering self-consciousness over external domination.

Contrastingly, Western thought has long perceived nature as the "other," a resource to be dominated and exploited. This worldview has led to the unchecked exploitation of natural resources, paving the way for the environmental crises we face today. The colonial education system introduced by Macaulay further eroded India's indigenous knowledge systems, relegating them to the realm of the unscientific and obsolete. The environmental degradation of the modern era is a direct consequence of this mindset—a worldview that disregards the sanctity of non-human life and prioritizes greed over sustainability.

At this critical juncture, the emergence of eco-conscious leadership under Prime Minister Narendra Modi signals a transformative shift in the global discourse on climate change. PM Modi's leadership, firmly anchored in the Indian civilizational ethos, integrates traditional wisdom with modern innovation to address environmental challenges. His vision emphasizes mindful utilization of natural resources and a return to eco-friendly practices that have sustained Indian civilization for centuries.

India's Climate Advocacy on the Global Stage

Under PM Modi's leadership, India has redefined its role in the global climate movement. His commitment to combating climate change is evident in India's proactive fulfillment of its Paris Agreement targets ahead of schedule. By integrating environmental concerns into bilateral, regional, and multilateral engagements, PM Modi has positioned climate crisis mitigation as a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. Initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, the One-Sun-One-World-One-Grid project, and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure exemplify India's leadership in fostering global partnerships for climate adaptation.

India's renewable energy expansion program, the largest in the world, aims to quintuple its capacity, setting a precedent for sustainable energy transitions. The country's per capita carbon footprint remains 60% lower than the global average, underscoring its adherence to traditional



sustainable practices. This success is amplified by PM Modi's Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) initiative, which seeks to inspire global citizens to adopt environmentally conscious lifestyles. Mission LiFE emphasizes collective action to safeguard nature, promoting practices like waste management, the ban on single-use plastics, and eco-friendly alternatives in daily life.

Traditional Wisdom Meets Modern Innovation

PM Modi's environmental philosophy is deeply rooted in the principles of interconnectedness, viewing humanity as an integral part of nature. This belief is reflected in programs like the Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati, which promotes organic farming practices to protect soil and water from chemical contamination. Initiatives such as the Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign further reinforce the bond between human actions and ecological preservation.

The Prime Minister's vision extends to the revival of ecosystems, as evidenced by the increased number of wetlands and Ramsar sites in India. The Amrit Dharohar Yojana and Mishū Yojana aim to rejuvenate mangrove ecosystems, while the Jal Jeevan Mission ensures water security for rural and urban communities alike. These initiatives are complemented by large-scale afforestation programs, transportation reforms, and the cleaning of villages, ponds, and rivers, all of which contribute to climate crisis mitigation.

Technological Disruption and Green Growth

India's approach to climate change under PM Modi is characterized by a seamless integration of tradition and technology. The National Hydrogen Energy Mission, aimed at achieving cost-competitive green hydrogen production, is a testament to this synergy. The hydrogen fuel cell bus and other emerging technologies like 2G ethanol, hydrogen valleys, and bio-based products demonstrate India's commitment to innovation in the fight against climate change.

PM Modi's five-pronged Panchamrit strategy underscores India's ambitious goals: increasing non-fossil energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030, meeting 50% of energy requirements through renewable sources, reducing carbon emissions by one billion tonnes, lowering the carbon intensity of the economy by 45%, and achieving Net Zero by 2070. These targets not only position India as a global leader in cli-

mate advocacy but also set a benchmark for sustainable development worldwide.

Green Economy and Youth Empowerment

The Green Skill Development Programme, launched under PM Modi, aims to equip India's youth with skills for sustainable employment in environmental conservation, renewable energy, and forestry. This initiative aligns with India's burgeoning start-up ecosystem, which focuses on climate technology and innovative solutions. By fostering green jobs and promoting eco-friendly entrepreneurship, PM Modi envisions a future where economic growth and environmental sustainability coexist harmoniously.

A Global Vision Rooted in Civilizational Values

PM Modi's environmental leadership transcends national boundaries, offering a model for global cooperation. His initiatives draw inspiration from India's ancient wisdom, which views the earth as a nurturing mother. The slogan One Earth, One Family, One Future encapsulates this vision, advocating for a unified global response to ecological challenges.

India's achievements under PM Modi, from the reduction of emissions through LED campaigns to the preservation of wetlands, demonstrate the transformative potential of blending traditional values with modern strategies. The clean air program, aimed at reducing particulate matter concentrations, and the massive renewable energy projects exemplify India's holistic approach to climate crisis mitigation.

Towards a Sustainable Future

As India charts its path to Viksit Bharat@2047, PM Modi's leadership serves as a beacon of hope for a sustainable and equitable future. His commitment to reviving ancient Indian wisdom while embracing technological advancements underscores the potential of a balanced approach to development. By aligning energy and environmental decision-making processes, PM Modi has set a precedent for integrating sustainability into the core of governance.

In essence, PM Modi has become a global ambassador for India's civilizational ethos, demonstrating that the principles of interconnectedness and respect for nature can address the world's most pressing challenges. His vision for a green, sustainable future reflects not just a political mandate but a philosophical commitment to humanity's shared destiny.

As Erwin Schrödinger once connected quantum physics with Vedic philosophy, PM Modi bridges the wisdom of ancient India with the demands of the modern world. His leadership embodies the essence of "Mother Earth," not as a mere planetary body, but as a life-giving force deserving of reverence and protection. Let us pledge to uphold this vision and work collectively to "Keep it Pure," ensuring a sustainable legacy for generations to come. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

Digestion: How the body breaks down food

By: **Tim Newman**

The human digestive system refers to the organs that take in food and break them down. Digestion describes the complex process that enables the nutrients in food to enter the body and its cells.

Food contains all of the nutrients a person's body needs for health, but large, complex compounds bind them. During digestion, the body breaks these compounds down into smaller parts. This enables them to enter cells, providing energy and other benefits.

This article explains how the body digests food from when it enters the mouth to when it exits the body. It also suggests some tips for healthy digestion and how to identify problems.

What is digestion?

The human gastrointestinal tract, also called the alimentary canal, is around 30 feet (9 meters) long in adults.

It consists of the following:

- the mouth, or oral cavity
- the esophagus
- the stomach
- the small intestine
- the large intestine, or colon
- the rectum

In addition, the following organs support digestion, for example, by chewing or adding enzymes and other secretions that enable the body to absorb nutrients:

- the teeth
- the tongue
- the salivary glands
- the liver
- the pancreas
- the gallbladder

Together, these organs provide mechanical processing, the secretion of enzymes and bile to help break down compounds, and the excretion of waste.

Some terms to describe these

functions include:

- ingestion, which includes chewing and swallowing
- the secretion of substances that enable food and nutrients to move through the body effectively
- propulsion, where muscles move the contents of the canal forward
- digestion, the breakdown of food, for example, through chewing and secretions
- the absorption of nutrients, which mainly occurs in the small intestine
- defecation and urination, the removal of waste products through the rectum and the bladder, respectively

The mouth

Digestion begins even before the food enters the mouth. When a person smells or thinks of food or eating, the salivary glands begin producing saliva.

Once the food is inside of the mouth:

- saliva moistens it.
- the teeth and tongue break it down mechanically.
- an enzyme in the saliva, salivary amylase, breaks it down into starch.

Chewing and amylase digestion will convert the food into a small, round blob, or bolus. This enables a person to swallow it easily.

The esophagus

After swallowing, the bolus enters the esophagus, where gravity and muscle contractions help move it down to the stomach through a process called peristalsis.

Peristalsis is the slow contraction of smooth muscles along and around the digestive system. As the bolus moves through the esophagus, these contractions push it toward the stomach.

What is esophageal achalasia, and how does it affect digestion?

The stomach

The bolus enters the stomach through a ring-like muscle called the lower esophageal sphincter. This

sphincter relaxes, allowing the bolus to enter the stomach.

In the stomach, the following processes occur:

The stomach stores the food temporarily.

Cells in the stomach secrete gastric juices. These include hydrochloric acid, which maintains the pH of the stomach between 1.5–2.0.

The stomach has three muscular layers that churn and mix its contents. These processes turn the food into a thick paste, known as chyme.

Hydrochloric acid is essential for:

- destroying microorganisms, such as bacteria
- breaking down proteins and plant fibers
- activating pepsin, an enzyme that helps digest proteins

The acid, however, can harm the stomach lining, so some cells produce mucus to protect the lining from damage.

The stomach does not absorb many nutrients from the chyme into the bloodstream, so the chyme enters the small intestine through the pyloric sphincter.

The small intestine

The small intestine is around 20 ft (6 m) long and absorbs around 90% of the nutrients from food into the bloodstream.

There are three sections:

• The duodenum: This receives chyme from the stomach and digestive enzymes from the liver and pancreas.

• The jejunum: Most of the chemical digestion and absorption occur here.

• The ileum: This contains the ileocecal valve, a sphincter through which food passes to the large intestine.

Once the food is fully broken down, the villi absorb the nutrients, which enter the bloodstream.

Villi are tiny, finger-like projections

that line the walls of the small intestine. Within the villi are tiny capillaries called lacteals. By increasing their surface area, the villi maximize their absorption of nutrients.

How do the intestines work?

The large intestine

Any unabsorbed food and nutrients now pass to the large intestine, or colon. The material is now feces.

The large intestine is around 6 ft (2 m) long and consists of the:

- cecum, a pouch through which food enters from the small intestine
- ascending colon
- transverse colon
- descending colon
- sigmoid colon

From the large intestine, the body absorbs water and electrolytes.

Food travels slowly through the colon to allow the body to absorb water, and trillions of gut bacteria break down any undigested food.

Next, peristalsis moves the feces toward the rectum.

The rectum

As the digested food moves into the rectum, nerves in the wall of the rectum known as stretch receptors detect when the chamber is full and stimulate the desire to defecate.

Defecation involves two types of muscle movement.

The first happens automatically, and a person cannot control it. This is a relaxation of the smooth muscles in the internal anal sphincter.

The second, a person can control and is a conscious relaxation of the skeletal muscles in the external anal sphincter. If a person wishes to delay defecation, they can avoid relaxing their muscles to move the feces back into the colon.

The longer feces stay in the colon, the more water the body will absorb. This can lead to dry, hard feces, constipation, and possibly impaction. For this reason, a person should defecate

as soon as is convenient.

A person should seek medical advice if they are unable to defecate for about 3 days or if they have abdominal or rectal pain or bleeding.

Healthy digestion tips

Ways of maintaining healthy digestion include:

- drinking plenty of water
- following a balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, fiber, and whole foods
- avoiding delays when using the bathroom when possible
- exercising regularly
- following food hygiene rules, such as handwashing and cooking meat, eggs, and fish well before eating them
- seeking medical help if a person's usual digestive or toilet habits change

When to see a doctor

A person should seek medical help if they notice any of the following symptoms:

- persistent or recurring constipation, gas, vomiting, or diarrhea
- severe pain in any part of their digestive system
- persistent or severe acid reflux or heartburn
- unexplained changes in their weight or appetite
- blood in their stool
- blood in their vomit
- difficulty swallowing or feeling that food is stuck in their throat
- changes in their bowel habits

Frequently asked questions

Here are some answers to questions people often ask about digestion.

What are the stages of the digestive system?

During digestion, food passes through the following stages:

- the mouth
- the esophagus
- the stomach
- the small intestine
- the large intestine, or colon

• the rectum

How does digestion work, step-by-step?

First, the teeth, tongue, and saliva turn food into a bolus, which is small and liquid enough to pass through the esophagus.

Next, the bolus enters the stomach, where muscular action, acids, and enzymes turn it into a paste called chyme. The chyme enters the small intestine.

Here, about 90% of absorption occurs. Nutrients enter the bloodstream through capillaries in villi. From there, the nutrients travel to various body cells. Any remaining food passes into the large intestine, or colon.

The body absorbs water as the food passes through to the rectum, ready for defecation.

How can I keep my digestion healthy?

Tips include:

- drinking plenty of water
- eating a varied diet with plenty of fresh vegetables and whole foods
- establishing regular bowel habits
- seeking medical help for any unexplained changes in digestion or bowel habits

Takeaway

The digestive system moves food through the body, breaking it down so nutrients can absorb into the bloodstream, where cells can use them for energy, tissue growth and repair, and other purposes.

Digestion involves multiple organs and systems, a range of chemicals, and peristalsis, automatic muscle movements, that move the food to the next stage.

Anyone who notices changes to their usual digestive processes should seek medical advice, as this may indicate a health condition that requires treatment. (Courtesy: *Medical News Today*)

Exam pressure and the tragedy of student suicide

By: **Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan**

The modern education system, designed to illuminate young minds, has paradoxically cast long shadows over countless students who struggle beneath the weight of relentless academic pressure. Examination halls have become arenas where futures are seemingly decided, where success is exalted, and failure is condemned. A single sheet of paper, filled with scores and ranks, often dictates not just a student's career trajectory but their very self-worth. In this unforgiving landscape, the growing specter of student suicides serves as a grim testament to a society that has made academic excellence the sole arbiter of value.

From the moment a child enters school, the battle begins. Learning, which should be a joyous process of discovery, is instead framed as a competition. The curriculum is structured not around knowledge but around perform-

ance metrics, compelling students to chase perfection in an ever-narrowing definition of success. Education ceases to be a journey and instead becomes a relentless sprint toward an elusive goal. In the corridors of academia, whispers of expectation grow into deafening roars, and failure—no matter how insignificant—is met with disappointment, shame, and social ostracization.



The home, ideally a sanctuary of comfort, often becomes an extension of this academic battlefield. Parents, burdened by their own ambitions or societal pressures, unknowingly weave a web of expectations around their children. Marks become a currency of pride, and report cards a measure of parental success. The tender assurance of unconditional love is often replaced by conditional acceptance, dependent on grades and rankings. In such an atmosphere, children internalize the belief that they are only as valuable as their academic achievements. The fear of failing to meet these expectations morphs into anxiety, suffocating them beneath the weight of disappointment—both real and imagined.

Schools, too, become complicit in reinforcing this ruthless pursuit of excellence. The emphasis on results, the glorification of high achievers, and the silent sidelining of those who struggle create an ecosystem of exclusion. Teachers, often under pressure to produce top-performing students, may inadvertently contribute to this climate of fear. A reprimand in class, a dismissive remark, or an unintentional comparison can strike deep wounds in a fragile psyche. The relentless cycle of examinations, assignments, and rankings transforms the classroom into a crucible where only the strongest emerge unscathed, leaving the rest to flounder under the burden of inadequacy.

Society at large, with its unforgiving gaze, ensures that failure is not just an academic set-

back but a mark of personal disgrace. Conversations about careers and success seldom acknowledge alternative pathways, reinforcing the illusion that only a certain type of intelligence is valuable. A student's artistic inclination, athletic prowess, or creative spark is often disregarded as mere hobbies, irrelevant in the grand pursuit of academic dominance. This tunnel vision crushes individuality, reducing students to mere numbers in a statistical race where deviation is neither encouraged nor tolerated.

What makes this crisis even more devastating is the silence surrounding it. Mental health, though increasingly acknowledged, still carries an air of taboo in many cultures. The struggle of a student drowning in anxiety is often dismissed as a phase, an excuse, or a sign of weakness. Conversations about depression, stress, or suicidal thoughts are met with either indifference or outright denial. The lack of accessible and empathetic support systems leaves students grappling with their emotions in isolation, pushing some toward irreversible decisions in moments of despair.

The rising incidence of student suicides is not merely a statistic but an indictment of a system that prioritizes performance over people. Each life lost is a poignant reminder of dreams unfulfilled, potential unrealized, and suffering unnoticed.

These tragedies do not emerge from mere academic struggles but from an entrenched societal mindset that equates self-worth with numerical achievements. Until this perception shifts, until success is redefined beyond grades and degrees, the cycle of pressure and despair will persist.

A transformation in the approach to education is not just necessary but imperative. Schools must cease to be factories that churn out high scorers and instead become places that nurture intellect, creativity, and emotional well-being. The introduction of mental health education, stress management workshops, and counseling services should be as fundamental as mathematics and science. Teachers should be trained to recognize distress signals in students and respond with sensitivity rather than reprimand.

Parents, too, must reevaluate their role in their children's academic journey. The greatest gift a child can receive is not pressure-laden expectations but unwavering support. Celebrating effort over outcome, encouraging diverse talents, and fostering an environment where failure is seen as a lesson rather than a verdict can alleviate much of the psychological burden students carry. Most importantly, society must collectively redefine success. The world is vast, and intelligence takes myriad forms—each valuable in its own right. It is time to dismantle the narrow corridors of conventional achievement and build a world where students are not trapped in the pursuit of perfection but are free to explore, fail, learn, and grow without fear. Education should be a path to enlightenment, not a road to despair. Only then can the shadows cast by exam pressure fade, allowing young minds to truly shine. (The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9954812261, 9864000260)

SPHEREx: NASA's new eye on the Universe

By: **Satyabrat Borah**

NASA's new space telescope, SPHEREx, is an exciting project that will help scientists learn more about the universe. It is designed to study the sky in a unique way, gathering information that will help answer some of the biggest questions about space. SPHEREx stands for Spectro-Photometer for the History of the Universe, Epoch of Reionization, and Ices Explorer. The telescope will scan the entire sky and collect data about galaxies, stars, and planets. Scientists hope that the information from SPHEREx will help them understand how the universe has evolved over time.

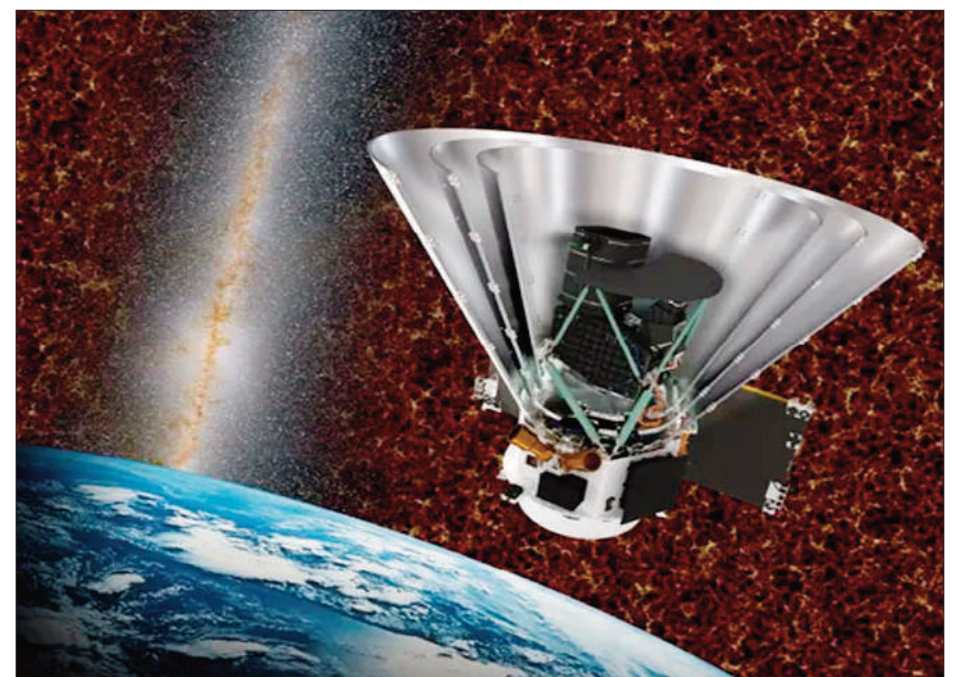
One of the main goals of SPHEREx is to study the early universe. Scientists believe that shortly after the Big Bang, the universe was very different from how it looks today. During this time, the first galaxies and stars were forming. By collecting light from billions of galaxies, SPHEREx will help scientists learn more about this early period. The telescope will look for patterns in the way galaxies are distributed across the universe. These patterns can tell scientists about the forces that shaped the universe when it was young. This information is important because it helps us understand how everything we see today came to exist.

SPHEREx will also help scientists learn more about the role of water and other important molecules in space. Water is a key ingredient for life, and scientists are interested in how it got to planets like Earth. SPHEREx will study the icy materials that exist in space, particularly in regions where stars and planets are forming. By looking at these areas, scientists can learn how water and other molecules travel through space and become part of planets. This could give us new clues about how life might exist on planets beyond our solar system.

One of the most exciting things about SPHEREx is that it will create a detailed map of the entire sky. Many telescopes focus on a small part of the sky, but SPHEREx will scan all of it. The telescope will do this multiple times, gathering a huge amount of data. Scientists will be able to use this map to study different types of objects in space, from distant galaxies to nearby asteroids. The information will be available to researchers around the world, allowing them to make new discoveries for many years to come.

SPHEREx will also help scientists study exoplanets, which are planets that orbit stars outside our solar system. Scientists have discovered thousands of exoplanets, but there is still a lot to learn about them. One of the main questions is whether any of these planets could support life. SPHEREx will look at the materials found around young stars where planets are forming. This will help scientists understand what kinds of planets might be common in the universe. By studying the light reflected from these planets, SPHEREx can also give clues about what their atmospheres might be like. If a planet has the right conditions, it could be a good candidate for further study in the search for alien life.

Another important goal of SPHEREx is to study cosmic inflation. This is a theory that suggests the universe expanded extremely fast in the first moments after the Big Bang. Scientists believe this rapid expansion left behind small patterns in the way galaxies are arranged today. SPHEREx will look for these patterns by studying the light from distant galaxies. If scientists can find evidence of cosmic infla-



tion, it will help confirm our understanding of how the universe began. This could be one of the most important discoveries in astronomy.

The telescope will use a special type of technology to collect data. Instead of taking regular pictures like a normal telescope, SPHEREx will break light into different colors, similar to how a prism splits light into a rainbow. This will allow scientists to study the properties of objects in space in great detail. By analyzing the colors of light, they can learn what different objects are made of and how they have changed over time. This method is called spectroscopy, and it is a powerful tool for studying the universe.

SPHEREx is a relatively small and lightweight telescope, which makes it easier and cheaper to launch compared to some other space telescopes. It is designed to work for at least two years, but scientists hope it will last even longer. The data it collects will be valuable for many different areas of astronomy. Because it is scanning the entire sky, it will also help other telescopes by identifying interesting targets for further study.

One of the reasons SPHEREx is important is that it will fill in gaps left by other telescopes. For example, telescopes like the Hubble Space Telescope and the James Webb Space Telescope take very detailed pictures of small parts of the sky. SPHEREx, on the other hand, will scan the entire sky and create a huge database of information. This means that scientists can use SPHEREx data to find interesting objects and then study them in more detail with other telescopes.

Another great thing about SPHEREx is that it will be able to study many different types of objects. It will look at distant galaxies, nearby stars, exoplanets, and even objects within our own solar system. This makes it a very versatile tool for astronomers. Because it collects data on a large scale, it will help answer a wide range of questions about the universe. Scientists are excited about the possibility of making unexpected discoveries with this telescope.

SPHEREx will also help in the search for life beyond Earth. Scientists are looking for planets that have the right conditions to support life. One way to do this is by studying the materials found in space. SPHEREx will look at the building blocks of planets and search for molecules that are important for life. By studying how these materials are distributed in the

galaxy, scientists can learn more about where life might be possible.

Another interesting thing about SPHEREx is that it will help scientists understand how galaxies evolve. Galaxies change over billions of years, and SPHEREx will provide data that shows how this process happens. By looking at the light from millions of galaxies, scientists can piece together a picture of how galaxies grow and change over time. This will help answer questions about how the Milky Way and other galaxies have developed.

The telescope will also study stars in different stages of their life cycle. Stars are born from clouds of gas and dust, and they go through many changes before they reach the end of their lives. SPHEREx will collect data on young stars, old stars, and everything in between. This information will help scientists understand how stars form and how they influence their surroundings.

SPHEREx is scheduled to launch in the coming years, and scientists are looking forward to the data it will provide. It will join other space telescopes in exploring the universe, but it will do so in a unique way. By scanning the entire sky and collecting data in many different wavelengths of light, SPHEREx will give scientists a new way to study space.

The discoveries made by SPHEREx could change our understanding of the universe. It might provide evidence for theories about the early universe, show us new details about galaxies, and help in the search for life beyond Earth. Because it will collect such a vast amount of data, scientists will be able to use it for many years, even after the mission officially ends.

SPHEREx is an example of how technology is helping us explore space in new ways. It will allow scientists to study space in ways that were not possible before. By combining its data with information from other telescopes, researchers will be able to make new discoveries and answer some of the biggest questions in astronomy.

This mission is an important step in our exploration of the universe. It will provide a new way to study the cosmos and give scientists valuable insights into how the universe works. With SPHEREx, we are taking another step toward understanding the mysteries of space and our place in it.

B'desh Foreign Affairs Advisor likely to meet EAM Jaishankar in Muscat: Report

DHAKA, Feb 10: Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain is likely to meet External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on the sidelines of the Indian Ocean Conference in Oman next week as part of efforts to prevent further strains in bilateral ties, according to a media report here on Monday.

The 8th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC 2025) is set to take place in Muscat on February 16-17. Organised by the New Delhi-based research institute India Foundation in collaboration with Oman's foreign ministry, the conference serves as a key platform for regional dialogue. Prothom Alo newspaper reported that the two leaders are scheduled to meet on the sidelines of the conference.

Diplomatic sources indicated on Sunday that Bangladesh may use this meeting to convey a message to prevent further strains in bilateral relations between the two countries.

Last month, the Indian foreign minister extended an invitation to Bangladesh's foreign adviser to participate in the conference, the report said.

If the planned meeting between Hossain and Jaishankar takes place, it will mark their second round of talks in five months.

Hossain and Jaishankar first met in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in September last year.

The close ties between India and Bangladesh came under severe strain after the ouster of Hasina, who was forced to leave the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest in August last year. Nobel Peace laureate Mohammad Yunus came to power days after Hasina fled to India.

The relations deteriorated further over attacks on Hindus and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das.

There had been a spate of incidents of violence against Hindus and other minorities, as well as attacks on temples in Bangladesh after her ouster that triggered strong concerns in New Delhi.

In December, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Dhaka. During his brief visit, he met with Bangladesh's foreign secretary Md Jasim Uddin. (PTI)

Opening statements set in trial of man accused of trying to kill Salman Rushdie

MAYVILLE (US), Feb 10: Lawyers are scheduled to deliver opening statements Monday at the trial of the man charged with trying to fatally stab author Salman Rushdie in front of a lecture audience in western New York.

Rushdie, 77, is expected to testify during the trial of Hadi Matar, bringing the writer face-to-face with his knife-wielding attacker for the first time in more than two years.

Rushdie, who wrote "Midnight's Children" and "Victory City," had been about to speak about keeping writers safe from harm in August 2022 when Matar ran toward him on the stage at the Chautauqua Institution Amphitheater.

Matar stabbed Rushdie more than a dozen times in the neck, stomach, chest, hand and right eye, leaving him partially blind and with permanent damage to one hand.

The India-born British-American author detailed the attack and his long, painful recovery in a memoir, "Knife: Meditations After and Attempted Murder," released last year.

Matar, 27, of Fairview, New Jersey, is charged with attempted murder and assault. He has pleaded not guilty. A jury was selected last week. Matar was in court through-

With Trump in White House, Iranians mark anniversary of 1979 Islamic Revolution

TEHRAN (IRAN), Feb 10: Tens of thousands of Iranians marked the anniversary of the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution, the first such rally since President Donald Trump returned to the White House and restarted his "maximum pressure" campaign targeting Tehran.

The annual commemoration of the end of the rule of the American-backed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the creation of Iran's Shiite theocracy comes this year as deep uncertainty lingers across the country.

Iran faces crushing sanctions wrecking its economy and the threat of more coming from Trump, even as the American president suggests he wants to reach a deal with Tehran over its rapidly advancing nuclear program.

Meanwhile, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Friday criticised proposed talks with the United States and described negotiations with America as "not intelligent, wise or hon-

US to impose 25 per cent tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports

WASHINGTON, Feb 10: President Donald Trump said he will announce on Monday that the United States will impose 25 per cent tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports, including from Canada and Mexico, as well as other import duties later in the week.

"Any steel coming into the United States is going to have a 25 per cent tariff," he told reporters Sunday on Air Force One as he flew from Florida to New Orleans to attend the Super Bowl. When asked about aluminum, he responded, "aluminum, too" will be subject to the trade penalties.

Trump also reaffirmed that he would announce "reciprocal tariffs" — "probably Tuesday or Wednesday" — meaning that the US would impose import duties on products in cases where another country has levied duties on US goods.

"If they are charging us 130 per cent and we're charging them nothing, it's not going to stay that way," he told reporters.

Trump's comments are the latest example of his willingness to threaten, and in some cases to impose, import taxes. Tariffs are com-



ing much earlier in his presidency than during his previous four years in the White House, when he prioritised tax cuts and deregulation.

Trump has alternately said he sees import taxes as tools to force concessions on issues such as immigration, but also as a source of revenue to help close the government's budget deficit.

Financial markets fell on Friday after Trump first said he would impose the reciprocal tariffs. Stock prices also dropped after a measure of consumer sentiment declined on Friday, largely because many respondents cited tariffs as a growing worry.

The survey also found that Americans are expecting inflation to tick up in the coming months because of the duties.

Trump on Sunday did not offer any details about the steel and aluminum duties, or the reciprocal tariffs. Trump previously threatened 25 per cent import taxes on all goods from Canada and Mexico, though he paused them for 30 days barely a week ago. At the same time, he proceeded to add 10 per cent duties on imports from China.

Yet on Friday, he said he would also delay the tariffs on the millions of small packages — often from fast-fashion firms such as

Temu and Shein — until customs officials can figure out ways to impose them. The small packages have previously been exempt from tariffs.

Trump's latest remarks stirred immediate worry from some global trading partners.

South Korea's acting president, Choi Sang-mok, called a meeting with the country's top foreign policy and trade officials on Monday to examine how Trump's proposed tariffs on steel and aluminum would affect its industries.

The office of Choi, who also serves as the country's finance minister, said officials discussed the potential impact and Seoul's possible responses, but specific details of the meeting were not disclosed. The stock prices of major South Korean steelmakers, including POSCO and Hyundai Steel, dropped as the market opened on Monday.

South Korea shipped about USD 4.8 billion worth of steel to the United States from January to November last year, which accounted for 14 per cent of its global exports of the products during the period. (AP)

Pakistani lawyers stage protest against high-level meeting of constitutional body to pick eight SC judges

ISLAMABAD, Feb 10: Hundreds of lawyers on Monday staged protests in Pakistan's national capital against a high-level meeting of a constitutional body with the agenda to appoint at least eight judges of the Supreme Court.

The Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) meeting was being held despite opposition by four apex court judges, the legal fraternity, resistance by opposition the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and controversy over the recent transfer of judges to the Islamabad High Court (IHC), which was opposed by five IHC judges.

The JCP, a top body empowered to approve judicial appointments, will finalise appointments for eight vacant Supreme Court judges.

Lawyers gathered at various locations in Islamabad, with the Lawyers' Action Committee staging a protest near D-Chowk. But police responded by closing several key entry points to the Red Zone, which houses key buildings, including the Supreme Court.

Dozens of protestors gathered at Serena Chowk as they were stopped from going to the

Supreme Court due to the closure of the Red Zone. They chanted Azaadi (freedom) and Lawyers' unity zindabad (long live lawyers' unity). They were also holding a banner written in Urdu and reading 26th Constitutional Amendment unacceptable.

Clashes were also reported between lawyers and police when they tried to enter the Red Zone. However, there was no report of any arrest or injury during the protest. The protest led to the suspension of Metro bus services on multiple routes between Islamabad and Rawalpindi, causing significant inconvenience for commuters. The closure of the Red Zone has caused traffic disruptions, leading to heavy congestion on different roads in the capital.

Earlier, the legal fraternity in the country was already expressing concerns against the new appointments and transfers following the controversial 26th Constitutional Amendment passed last year.

The lawyers' representatives had held a convention at the Islamabad District Courts, oppos-

ing the 26th Amendment and demanding the cancellation of the JCP meeting.

They also announced on Feb 3 to protest against the transfer of three high court judges to the IHC but it could not elicit a widespread response. The Karachi Bar Association had supported the strike call by staying away.

Last month, the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA) moved an application before the apex court through Advocate Muhammad Waqar Rana, seeking postponement of the JCP meeting.

The JCP earlier this month asked all high courts to send a list of five senior judges from each for consideration for the appointment of eight of them to the Supreme Court.

Initially, the IHC had forwarded the names of three judges: Chief Justice Aamer Farooq, Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb to the JCP because Justices Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri and Babar Sattar did not meet the minimum requirement of five years of service. (PTI)

Indian restaurants among targets of UK 'blitz' against illegal migrants

LONDON, Feb 10: Indian restaurants, nail bars, convenience stores, and car washes were among the targets of what the Home Office on Monday described as a "UK-wide blitz" on illegal working in the country.

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said her department's Immigration Enforcement teams had a record-breaking January as they descended on 828 premises — a 48 per cent rise compared to the previous January, with arrests surging to 609, and marking a 73 per cent increase from the previous year. The Home Office said that while its teams respond to illegal working intelligence in all sectors, a significant proportion of last month's activity took place at restaurants, takeaways and cafes as well as in the food, drink and tobacco industry.

A visit to one Indian restaurant in Humberstone, northern England, alone led to seven arrests and four detentions, it noted.

"The immigration rules must be respected and enforced. For far too long, employers have been able to take on and exploit illegal migrants and too many people have been able to arrive and work illegally with no enforcement action ever taken," said Cooper.

"Not only does this create a dangerous draw for people to risk their lives by crossing the Channel in a small boat, but it results in the abuse of vulnerable people, the immigration system, and our economy," she said.

It comes as the Labour Party government's Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill returns to Parliament for its second reading this week. The new legislation aims to "smash the criminal gangs" that Prime Minister Keir Starmer-led administration says undermines border security.

Further Home Office statistics claim that between July 5 last year and January 31 this year, illegal work-

ing crackdowns and arrests have soared by around 38 per cent compared to the same period 12 months prior. A total of 1,090 civil penalty notices have been issued during that phase, with employers facing a fine of up to GBP 60,000 per worker if found liable.

"These figures demonstrate the commitment of my teams to crack down on those who think they can flout our immigration system," said Eddy Montgomery, Director of Enforcement, Compliance and Crime at the Home Office.

"I hope it sends a strong signal that there is no hiding place from the law, and we will continue to ramp up our activity to ensure those involved face the full consequences. We also know that many people who end up working illegally are often subjected to extremely poor conditions, so we will continue to do all we can to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable," he said. (PTI)

While these remain its main

How fast is your gut? The answer to this question is important to your health

OXFORD (UK), Feb 10: Many of us pay attention to the foods we're putting in our bodies — asking ourselves whether they're nutritious and healthy for us.

But have you ever stopped to ask yourself how fast this food is moving through your gut? The answer to this question is actually really important, as the speed that food moves through your digestive tract affects your health and wellbeing in many ways. Once you've chewed up and swallowed your meal, this food begins its journey along the gastrointestinal tract — a long and winding pathway that begins at the mouth and ends at the anus.

Along the way, it reaches specialist organs that churn and digest (stomach), absorb nutrients (small intestine) and absorb water and salts (large intestine).

The movement of food through the digestive tract is known as gut motility. This process is partly controlled by the trillions of bacteria present in our gut. The gut microbiome is extremely important as these bacteria help develop our immune system and break down food.

So, when we eat, we're not just feeding ourselves — we're feeding



the micro-helpers present in the intestine. To thank us, the bacteria produce small molecules called metabolites that boost our immune system and keep our gut moving by stimulating the intestinal nerves so they contract and move the food onwards. Without these bacteria and their metabolites, our guts would be less able to move food through the gastrointestinal tract. This could cause a build up of ingested material, leading to constipation and discomfort.

Gut transit time
The time it takes for food to pass from one end of the gastrointestinal

tract to the other is called gut transit time.

Gut transit time varies from one person to the next. Recent estimates suggest it can take somewhere between 12 and 73 hours for food to pass through the body — with the average being around 23-24 hours.

This variation in gut transit explains some of the gut microbiome differences seen between people — and consequently their gut health.

Many factors can also affect our natural gut transit time — including genetics, diet, and our gut microbiome.

If gut transit time is long (mean-

IMF mission to inspect regulatory, judicial system: Pak govt



ISLAMABAD, Feb 10: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is scrutinising the judicial and regulatory system of Pakistan as part of the ongoing USD 7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) to address governance and corruption vulnerabilities, the government has said.

The Ministry of Finance said on Sunday that an IMF technical mission is in town for a week-long examination of six key governance-related sectors and institutions.

Dawn News reported that Pakistan committed to strengthening institutional capacities with the IMF in October to fight corruption, support inclusive growth, and provide a level playing field for businesses and investments.

As a result, the ministry said a structural benchmark had been set to publish a report on the Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Assessment (GCDA) by July 2025, which will analyse critical governance and corruption vulnerabilities and identify priority structural reforms moving forward.

Sources said the mission would also engage with leading members of the superior judiciary besides the leadership of the financial, revenue, and election bodies to review their process.

The mission will examine the severity of corruption vulnerabilities across six core state functions, including fiscal governance, central bank governance and operations, financial sector oversight, market regulation, rule of law, and anti-money laundering and counter-financing terror.

The IMF team will engage with the Finance Division, the Federal Board of Revenue, the State Bank of Pakistan, the Auditor General of Pakistan, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan, the Election Commission of Pakistan, and the Ministry of Law and Justice.

It said the GCDA report will recommend actions for addressing corruption vulnerabilities and strengthening integrity and governance, which will assist the government in bringing about reforms for promoting transparency, strengthening institutional capacities, and achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

The finance ministry said the IMF had long provided advice and technical assistance that helped foster good governance, including promoting public sector transparency and accountability.

Traditionally the IMF's main focus has been encouraging countries to correct macroeconomic imbalances, reduce inflation, and undertake key trade, exchange, and other market reforms needed to improve efficiency and support sustained economic growth.

While these remain its main

focus in all its member countries, the IMF has found that a much broader range of institutional reforms was needed if countries were to establish and maintain private sector confidence and thereby lay the basis for sustained growth, the ministry explained.

It added the IMF had identified that promoting good governance in all its aspects, including the rule of law, improving the efficiency and accountability of the public sector, and tackling corruption were essential elements of a framework within which economies can prosper.

In 1997, the IMF adopted a policy on addressing economic governance, embodied in the Guidance Note on the Role of the IMF in Governance Issues.

To further strengthen the implementation of this policy, the IMF adopted in 2018 a new Framework for Enhanced Engagement on Governance (Governance Policy) to promote more systematic, effective, candid, and evenhanded engagement with member countries regarding governance vulnerabilities.

Under this policy framework, the IMF offers to undertake GCDA with member countries to analyse and recommend actions for addressing corruption vulnerabilities and strengthening integrity and governance in its member countries.

Following the analysis, GCDA prioritise and sequence recommendations for systematically addressing the vulnerabilities. Since 2018, as many as 20 GCDA reports have been finalised and include Sri Lanka, Mauritania, Cameroon, Zambia, and Benin. Ten diagnostics are ongoing, and several are under consideration.

As part of its commitment to strengthening the capacity of relevant institutions to fight corruption to support inclusive growth and provide a level playing field for businesses and investments, Pakistan is also required to publish the complete UN Convention against Corruption Review Report immediately after the review process is completed.

The government has also committed, subject to the Supreme Court clearance, to consider enacting legislative amendments, if required, to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Ordinance to strengthen the NAB's independence and effectiveness and empower the Provincial Anti-Corruption Establishments under the law to investigate money laundering related to corruption offences within their jurisdiction.

It will also allow them to request and receive financial intelligence from the Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU) as an investigating agency under the AML Act, and have sufficient resources and training to conduct parallel financial investigations. (PTI)

ing you have slow gut motility), bacteria in the large intestine produce different metabolites. This is because, just like us, the bacteria in our guts need to be fed. These bacteria enjoy fibre. But, if gut transit time is long and fibre is taking too long to reach the large intestine, these microbial inhabitants have to switch to an alternative food source. So, they turn to protein.

The switch to protein can result in the production of toxic gases leading to health problems such as bloating and inflammation.

Slow gut transit can also cause partially digested food to get stuck in the small intestine. This has additional health consequences — such as an overgrowth of small intestinal bacteria, which can lead to symptoms such as abdominal pain, nausea and bloating. Fast gut transit can negatively impact health, too.

There are many reasons that someone may experience fast transit time. For example, anxiety, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) can all cause decreased transit time and even diarrhoea.

In cases of fast transit, the resulting stool is loose with high water

content. This indicates that the faecal matter has not spent enough time in the intestine, preventing sufficient absorption of water and nutrients. In cases of IBD for example, this can lead to dehydration.

Testing your gut speed
Fortunately, there's a very simple at-home test you can do to check your gut motility. It's called "the sweetcorn test". And yes, it is what you're thinking. Don't eat any sweetcorn for 7-10 days (the "wash-out" phase). Then you are ready to begin the test. Note down the date and time, and eat some sweetcorn — a corn on the cob or a handful of corn is sufficient. Because the outer shell of the corn is indigestible, it will pass through your gastrointestinal tract with the rest of the food you've eaten and will eventually be visible in your stool.

What you'll do is keep an eye on the next few stools you pass and note down the date and time that you observe the golden treasure. It should be noted that this at-home test is not definitive — but it does represent a measure of transit time that, on average, gives similar results to more sophisticated measures. (AP)

BJP's Sambit Patra meets party MLAs in Imphal

'Singh knew he would be defeated in the no-confidence motion in the assembly'

IMPHAL, Feb 10: A day after Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh tendered his resignation, state BJP in-charge Sambit Patra on Monday held closed-door meetings with several BJP legislators at a hotel here to decide the next course of action, party sources said.

According to the sources, Patra met Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata, municipal administration housing development minister Y Khemchand, education minister Thounaojam Basanta Kumar Singh and BJP MLA Th Radheshyam. Three among them are known for their strained relationship with Singh.

The BJP legislators are expected to hold more meetings over the next 48 hours, either within the state or elsewhere, they added.

Meanwhile, security has been tightened across the state capital, especially in sensitive areas such as Sanjenthong, Singjamei, Moirangkhum, Keisampat, and

Kangla Gate.

Manipur Congress president K Meghachandra welcomed Singh's resignation but opposed any move to impose President's Rule in the state.

"Congress wants a new leader and a new government. We oppose any plans to impose President's Rule in the state because people's mandate must be respected by the Union government," Meghachandra told reporters.

He added, "Singh knew he would be defeated in the no-confidence motion in the assembly. He should have resigned long ago. It is his administrative failure that has plunged the state into turmoil."

The state's budget session, scheduled for Monday, was scrapped following Singh's resignation. The opposition had planned to bring a no-confidence motion against Singh during the session.

The National People's Party (NPP) also welcomed Singh's resignation and reaffirmed its com-



mitment to cooperating with the BJP to restore peace and normalcy in the state.

NPP legislative party leader Sheikh Noorul Hassan told reporters, "We withdrew support from the Singh government because we lost faith in his leadership due to his failure to restore peace and stability in the state. His

resignation is a welcome step toward achieving that goal."

He further added, "As part of the NDA alliance at the Centre, we will continue to cooperate and work with the BJP in the coming days to bring the state back to complete normalcy."

The NPP, which has seven legislators in the 60-member assembly,

withdrew its support from the Biren Singh-led government in November last year.

Reacting to Singh's resignation, Kuki student leader M Thengimang Haokip said the step should have been taken long ago.

"Singh was scared of the proposed no-confidence motion. The government of Manipur was bound to collapse. The next step will be re-election or alternatively, President's Rule," he added.

Amidst rumblings within the state BJP seeking a change of leadership in the strife-torn state, Singh on Sunday tendered his resignation to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan.

The governor accepted Singh's resignation, along with that of his council of ministers, and requested that he continue in office until alternative arrangements are made.

The development came hours after Singh returned from Delhi after meeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Singh had been defying the opposition's demand to step down as CM of the ethnic violence-hit state where trouble broke out 21 months ago in May 2023.

Last week, a new controversy erupted after the Supreme Court sought a sealed-cover forensic report on the authenticity of leaked audio clips alleging the role of Singh in the ethnic violence.

The tapes reportedly included conversations where Singh allegedly suggested that Meitei groups were allowed to loot arms and ammunition from the state government during the unrest, which has so far claimed 250 lives.

In his resignation letter, Singh said, "It has been an honour to serve the people of Manipur thus far. I am extremely grateful to the central government for time actions, interventions, developmental work and implementation of various projects for safeguarding the interests of every single Manipuri."

"My sincere request to the central government through your good office is to continue with the same. I take the opportunity to enumerate the most important ones of them ... To maintain the territorial integrity of Manipur which has a rich and diverse civilisational history over thousands of years," the letter added.

Singh also requested the Centre to continue the "crackdown on border infiltration and to formulate policy for the deportation of the illegal immigrants and the fight against drugs and narco-terrorism."

BJP sources on the other hand expressed hope that Singh's stepping down will help boost the efforts being helmed by the Centre to broker peace between the two main ethnic communities in the state. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless since ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023. (PTI)

Nagaland pvt hospitals to suspend services under Ayushman Bharat, CMHIS

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 10: The empanelled private hospitals in Nagaland will halt health services under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (ABPM-JAY) and Chief Minister Health Insurance Scheme (CMHIS) from February 15 until all pending claims are cleared.

The decision to this effect was taken by the Nagaland Private Doctors Association (NPDA) at an emergency meeting on February 8, sources said on Monday.

Voicing strong criticism against the Nagaland Health Protection Society (NHPS) and Future General Insurance (FGI) for failing to honour the terms of their memorandum of understanding with the Empanelled Health Care Providers (EHCPs), the NPDA accused them of misleading the public and unjustly blaming the doctors and healthcare institutions.

The state private doctor's body



also demanded that the NHPS issue an apology for "damaging the reputation of EHCPs".

The NHPS is a registered entity under the Nagaland health and family welfare department, which is responsible for managing public health protection schemes in the state.

The NPDA further said no future agreements concerning EHCPs will be signed without its approval.

Nagaland School Education Comm & Secy stresses on early preparation for exams

KOHIMA, Feb 10: Nagaland School Education department Commissioner and secretary Kevileno Angami on Monday stressed the importance of early preparations for academic examinations.

Addressing students of Dr N K Government Higher Secondary School Kohima as part of Prime Minister's 'Pariksha Pe Charcha', Angami acknowledged that exam pressure can often be overwhelming, but emphasised that it's equally important to be prepared to deal with life's problems and challenges in general.

"We must start preparing ourselves, not just for the exams, but for life. As we move through life, we will face many challenges, obstacles, and problems. But there will always be solutions," Angami told students.

She spoke on how life is full of difficulties, and how it is essential to develop a mindset that sees challenges as opportunities for growth.

Angami highlighted the significance of a positive attitude in facing both academic and life challenges.

The bureaucrat also acknowledged the success of Prime Minister Naren-



dra Modi's 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' programme, which has been running for several years now.

She was also appreciative that the event, as the name suggests, is primarily a platform for open discussions on examinations, addressing core issues on exam stress, anxiety, subject choices, and preparation which are universally relevant.

The discussion between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and students

was live streamed in schools across the state under the supervision of the department authorities as directed by Directorate of School Education, Nagaland.

The Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) will conduct the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) Examinations 2025 from Tuesday till March 5. (PTI)

8 of 9 firearms looted from IRB outpost recovered

IMPHAL, Feb 10: Security forces have recovered eight of the nine firearms looted from an India Reserve Battalion (IRB) outpost in Manipur's Thoubal district, a police statement said on Monday.

The firearms, including three AKs and five SLRs, were recovered during a search operation in Ngamukhong foothills in the district and a hideout of banned outfit Kangleipak Communist Party was also busted in another subsequent operation, it said.

"The operations were launched after around 30 armed miscreants equipped with sophisticated weapons, breached one police (IRB) outpost at Kakmayai in Thoubal district (on Saturday night) and overpowered the police personnel deployed at the post," the police statement said. "The armed miscreants looted nine firearms, including six SLR and 3 AKs, from the outpost and escaped," it said.

Security personnel had managed to detain one of the miscreants, identified as Hijam Ningthem Singh (49) who was later identified as a member of KCP, the statement said.

During further course of investigation and relentless search operations at different locations, police on Sunday recovered three AKs and five SLRs out of the nine looted firearms from Ngamukhong foothill area, it said.

Further, as a part of follow-up operations, security forces also conducted huge combing operations in Ningel, Malom, Toubul and Langathel in Thoubal district during which one hideout of KCP was busted in Langathel Chingkhong area.

INSAS and AK cartridges, 11 hand grenades, one 9mm pistol, bullet-proof vests and other articles were recovered from the hideout. (PTI)

Registration of workers must in Sikkim: Official

GANGTOK, Feb 10: The Sikkim government on Monday asked employers to ensure registration of workers in both organised and unorganised sectors to "avoid legal consequences", a senior official said. "Only registered workers are permitted to work in Sikkim," Labour secretary Regul K told reporters. He also said there is a provision for penalty for those who fail to comply with the registration requirements.

Labour registration is an ongoing process and can be completed any time of the year at any designated office across the state, he said.

"All workers must be registered to avoid legal consequences," Regul K said.

He said the labour department is carrying out an awareness campaign about the registration of workers in both organised and unorganised sectors under the Sikkim Labour (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 2021. Regul K said the Sikkim government has tightened labour regulations, making it mandatory for all workers in hotels, shops and construction sites to obtain a labour card to maintain a database.

The official also said all stakeholders are being apprised about the significance of the Act, highlighting its key provisions and applicability. (PTI)

'Will accept any decision by BJP high command to resolve leadership issue'

IMPHAL, Feb 10: Manipur minister Y Khemchand on Monday said BJP leaders will abide by whatever decision the party high command takes to resolve the leadership crisis in the state.

Khemchand made the statement shortly after BJP North East in-charge Sambit Patra held closed-door meetings with several party legislators at a hotel in Imphal to decide the next course of action.

According to party sources, Patra met Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata, education minister Thounaojam Basanta Kumar Singh, BJP MLA Th Radheshyam, and municipal administration and housing development minister Khemchand, separately. Amidst growing discontent within the state BJP and calls for a change in leadership, N Biren Singh tendered his resignation as Manipur chief minister to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Sunday.

The governor accepted his resignation, along with that of his council of ministers, and requested him to continue in office until alternative arrangements were made. "Whatever decision the high command takes, we will accept. The problem is over. The focus now is on how to restore peace," Khemchand told reporters.

Asked about the possibility of reconciliation between the two communities, Khemchand said, "Yes, I believe it will begin soon. According to the system of our party, whatever the high command decides, we must accept it, and all members will follow that decision." Khemchand has been vocal against the Biren Singh government for failing to restore peace and normalcy. He often remarked, "In the state's 2,000-year-old written history, there has never been a time when a valley resident could not step into the hills." Sources said BJP legislators are likely to hold more meetings in the next 48 hours, either in Imphal or elsewhere, to discuss the situation further. Meanwhile, security has been tightened across the state capital, especially in sensitive areas such as Sanjenthong, Singjamei, Moirangkhum, Keisampat, and Kangla Gate, to maintain order. (PTI)

Man lynched on suspicion of theft in Tripura

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Feb 10: A 35-year-old man was lynched by a mob on suspicion of theft in Belonia, located in Tripura's South District.

According to police officials, the incident occurred at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in the Belonia subdivision. The victim, identified as Babul Mia, a resident of the same area, was allegedly caught by locals who suspected him of being a thief.

"Last night, a person was detained at JNV School in Belonia on suspicion of theft. He was then assaulted by the public. When he was taken to the hospital, doctors declared him brought dead. A case has been registered, and further investigation is underway," a police officer stated.

Following the incident, Babul Mia's family members rushed to the hospital after receiving the tragic news.

"We don't know what happened. We got a call from the hospital and were informed of his death. We rushed there but still have no clarity on how he died," said a grieving family member.

Authorities have assured a thorough investigation into the incident, and legal action will be taken against those involved.

Two held with Yaba worth ₹ 28 crore in Tripura

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Feb 10: Tripura Police apprehended two individuals and seized Yaba tablets worth ₹ 28 crore in the Bet Bagan area of Dhalai district on Monday evening.

Dhalai district superintendent of police Mihir Lal Das stated that the arrests and seizure were made following a tip-off.

"As part of our ongoing crackdown on drug trafficking across the state, we received intelligence regarding a vehicle transporting a large consignment of Yaba tablets. Acting swiftly, our personnel intercepted the vehicle and conducted a thorough search. Approximately 9.24 lakh Yaba tablets were discovered concealed inside an oil tank. The estimated market value of the contraband is around ₹ 28 crore. The vehicle had originated from Assam," said the SP.

Young artists are custodians of Arunachal's rich heritage: DyCM

ITANAGAR, Feb 10:

Arunachal Pradesh deputy chief minister Chowna Mein said the Bharat Lok Sangeet-Arunachal Utsav 2025 is not just a festival but a reflection of India's ethos of unity and diversity.

By showcasing folk traditions from Arunachal Pradesh, various states of India, and international participants from Bhutan and Thailand, the festival reinforces Arunachal Pradesh's role in global cultural diplomacy while celebrating the artistic brilliance of its people, Mein said on Sunday. He emphasised the significance of folk music and dance as living traditions that connect generations and communities.

The DyCM highlighted the growing international exposure that Arunachal Pradesh's cultural heritage is receiving.

Mein disclosed that the cultural troupes from the state will soon participate in the North East Festival in Singapore, a testament to the increasing recognition of



Arunachal's folk traditions on global platforms.

"By providing such opportunities, the government is ensuring that the younger generation remains connected to their roots while also gaining exposure to international cultural landscapes," he said.

He further emphasised the importance of supporting young artists, calling them the custodians of Arunachal's rich heritage.

The deputy chief minister reiterated the state government's unwavering commit-

sai on Sunday.

The event is being organised by the government of Arunachal Pradesh under the aegis of Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat. The festival is a tribute to India's rich folk traditions, serving as a confluence of art, heritage, and cultural exchange.

This year, the festival features 15 cultural troupes from Arunachal Pradesh, including performances by the Adi, Aka Hrusso, Apatani, Idu Mishmi, Mema, Monpa, Nyishi, Tai Khanti, Olo, and other indigenous communities.

Additionally, cultural groups from Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, and Manipur have joined the festival, ensuring a rich blend of regional traditions. With the participation of international performers from Bhutan and Thailand, this edition marks a significant milestone in strengthening cross-cultural exchanges, reinforcing the message that folk traditions are universal, transcending borders and generations. (PTI)

No. BDB/6th ASFC/2020-21/

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Date -

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs.8.25(Rupees eight & twenty five) only with a validity period of 90 days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered Contractors of Class-II and Class-I (A,B,&C) category of Assam PWD(Building/BTC) according to their eligibility for submitting tender for the following work under 6th ASFC for the year 2024-25, as stated below. The tender will be received by the undersigned up to 12.00 Noon. On 25/02/2025 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.00 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of Works	Tender Amount (Approx)	Cost of Tender Paper	Time of Completion of Work
1.	"Imp. of road with E/F and S/G road from Seraban village to Crematory" under 6 th ASFC for the year 2023-24 (1 st Inst.) during 2024-25.	5,00,000.00	250.00/-	3(Three) Months from the date of issue of F.W.O.

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 17/02/2025 & 23/02/2025 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Demand draft/Banker's Cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of the B.D.O. Baska Development Block Mushalpur, payable at S.B.I. Mushalpur.

Sd/-Block Dev. Officer
Baska Dev. Block Mushalpur

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1454

Stricter measures needed to counter baseless allegations against EC officers: Delhi poll body chief

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Delhi Chief Electoral Officer R Alice Vaz, who was responsible for conducting the high-stakes elections in the national capital, has called for stricter measures to prevent people from levelling "baseless" allegations against EC officials.

In an interview with PTI, she emphasised that while existing provisions under electoral laws provide safeguards, evolving political scenarios may require tougher regulations to maintain trust in the electoral process.

"There is a need for stricter measures when it comes to allegations against officers involved in the election process. The Representation of the People Act and other legal provisions offer sufficient safeguards, but given the changing political landscape, it will be good if some more strict measures can also be put up," Vaz told PTI.

Her remarks come after the fiercely contested Delhi polls, in which the BJP delivered a decisive blow to the AAP, ending its decade-long rule. While the BJP secured 48 of the 70 seats, the AAP was reduced to 22 seats. As the CEO, Vaz played a crucial role in ensuring a free and fair election process in Delhi on behalf of the Election Commission.

This included overseeing poll preparations, implementing electoral guidelines, and addressing complaints from political parties and the public. She worked closely with district election officers (DEOs) and other officials to ensure transparency and strict adherence to the MCC.

"We have a well-defined complaint monitoring system. At the start of the process, we informed all political parties about the mechanisms available for lodging complaints. "Every issue raised -- whether online, through applications, emails, or even physically submitted complaints -- was thoroughly scrutinised as per the ECI's guidelines," she said.

During the campaign, the AAP was particularly vocal in its criticism of the CEO's office with party supremo Arvind Kejriwal accusing election officials of manipulating the electoral rolls and failing to act

against alleged violations by the BJP candidates. Responding to these allegations, Vaz reaffirmed that the EC followed all protocols to ensure fairness.

"We strictly followed all ECI guidelines, scrutinised every complaint properly, and took necessary action. Transparency was maintained throughout the process, and political parties were involved at every stage, from electoral roll verification to EVM checks and MCC enforcement," she explained.

One of the major challenges in this election was the heavy use of AI-generated content by political parties, which often targeted opponents through misinformation. Addressing this issue, Vaz said, "To counter misinformation and deep-fakes, we strictly followed the EC's laid-out guidelines for social media monitoring. Any violation related to electoral rules was promptly processed and forwarded for action."

To combat misinformation, the CEO's office launched an online portal called 'Myth vs Fact' to debunk false narratives surrounding electoral processes. "We actively updated this platform with clarifications to ensure voters received accurate information. Every day, we shared two to three myths along with verified facts to educate the public," she said.

She noted that during the peak election period, nearly 250 responses were issued, covering various topics from voter services and complaints to transparency measures. "Many complaints were also handled by the police, ensuring that electoral rules were enforced effectively," she added.

Explaining the role of the CEO, Vaz said the officer, on behalf of the ECI, is responsible for the overall election process and its execution. The CEO coordinates with DEOs and assistant returning officers (AROs) to ensure smooth polling and transparency. "In consultation with the AROs, the CEO acts on behalf of the ECI and ensures all election-related processes are conducted fairly. Political parties and the general public are kept informed about every step of the process," she explained. (PTI)

INDIA bloc formed for LS polls, state-specific alliances in assembly elections: Cong MP

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Amid criticism that the AAP-Congress bickering benefited the BJP in Delhi, Congress MP Manickam Tagore on Monday asserted that the INDIA bloc was formed for general elections 2024 and state-specific alliances were the way forward in the assembly polls.

Responding to those criticising the Congress for playing spoilsport for the AAP in Delhi, Tagore said alliance partners are asking the wrong person as they should put forward their questions to the person who "broke the alliance" in Delhi, an apparent reference to AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal.

"One thing is very clear INDIA alliance was created for general elections 2024. In different states, different strategy was evolved (in those polls also). Aam Aadmi Party and Congress had an alliance in Delhi but not in Punjab. We had an alliance in Gujarat but not in their places. They were supporting us in Goa," he said.

"In assembly elections, Arvind Kejriwal ji announced on December 1 that they are fighting alone. We hope that our alliance partners will also understand that they are asking the wrong person, they should ask the question to the person who broke the alliance," Tagore

told reporters outside Parliament.

He asserted that the INDIA bloc was formed particularly for general elections 2024. "Its main idea was to channelise the anti-Modi, anti-BJP anti-RSS forces at one level, that has been done. After that, coordination in Parliament has been happening at the floor level," he said.

"The speech of the leader of the opposition (Rahul Gandhi) had talked about an INDIA bloc vision as an alternative vision, it was not just a vision of the Congress. So we are positive towards it (INDIA bloc). But we know how one alliance partner's reaction can spoil it," he said.

"State elections are going to be different. State elections are going to be fought on state-level alliances. In Parliament, we are coordinating and our LoP calls it an INNDIA bloc vision," Tagore said.

In Parliament, the SP, TMC, AAP, everybody is together in the fight against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the Congress MP from Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar said. "INDIA bloc was formed like that -- we had an alliance in Delhi but not in Punjab. The Congress has an alliance with CPI(M) in Tamil Nadu but not in Kerala," he said. (PTI)

BJP MPs chant 'Modi, Modi' slogans in LS, RS over party's victory in Delhi polls

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: The victory of the BJP in the Delhi Assembly polls was hailed by ruling party members with chanting of "Modi, Modi" slogans in both houses of Parliament on Monday.

Soon after the Lok Sabha met for the day, members of the BJP got up and called out "Modi, Modi" slogans, with the Congress MPs objecting to the same.

The sloganeering by the treasury benches continued for a brief while before Speaker Om Birla called for the Question Hour.

Congress member Gaurav Gogoi and Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee were also seen raising some issues.

When proceedings of the Upper House started at 11 am, euphoric BJP members immediately started sloganeering in support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

However, the sloganeering was paused for a while when Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar extended birthday greetings to BJP member Sanjay Seth and then again started



immediately thereafter. BJP members started chanting "Delhi ke dil me Modi hai, Desh ke dil me Modi hai".

This was objected to by the opposition members including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge. Congress whip in Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh also stood up and raised objections saying it was against democracy.

Dhankhar pacified the members from both sides and called for the

laying of papers, but BJP members again started chanting "Modi Modi".

At this, Kharge told Dhankhar: "This has happened three times. What are you doing?" Responding to him, Dhankhar said, "I am addressing it".

Immediately after the laying of papers was over, Dhankhar made an appeal to the members and said he would not appreciate any disturbances. "We are the council of

states. We are the House of elders. It is required of us to patiently hear anyone who has been legitimately given the floor by the chairman. I will not appreciate any disturbance. There are occasions when people are euphoric and otherwise also.

"This House has to send a very sober message that it is meant for expression, dialogue and we will uphold it. I am sure that the leader of the House and the leader of the opposition will extend their warmest cooperation to me," the chairman said, with Leader of the House J P Nadda nodding in affirmation.

After that the chairman called Congress leader Sonia Gandhi for her zero hour submission in the House over people deprived of entitlements under the National Food Security Act 2013.

The BJP returned to power in Delhi after more than 26 years, winning 48 of the 70 assembly seats on Saturday. The AAP won 22 seats while the Congress drew a blank in the polls held on February 5. (PTI)

INDIA bloc needs to get its act together: Priyanka Chaturvedi

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: The INDIA bloc parties need to come together to decide the way forward to throw a challenge to the BJP and fighting each other is not going to help, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi said on Monday as a clamour rose once again questioning the future of the alliance in the wake of the Delhi Assembly polls, in which the AAP's defeat came as a setback to it.

Chaturvedi said the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) needs to get its act together.

"I think the INDIA bloc needs to put its act together, its head together and realise that our personal political ambitions are overriding the interests of India," she told PTI in the Parliament complex.

"We need safeguards in our democracy, Constitution -- that is why the INDIA alliance came together. In case we are going against that entire concept, ensuring that everyone gets defeated, and are busy defeating each other, it does not serve the purpose we came together for," Chaturvedi said.

"Let us be honest, have a conversation, put our heads together and ensure that we put up a spirited fight against the BJP," she said.

Meanwhile, Union minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader S P Singh Baghel took a dig at the INDIA opposition bloc, calling it an opportunist alliance.

"Opportunist alliances formed on the eve of elections always end like this," he said.

"Chanakya had said if there is a strong king, there will be alliances between his enemies... A similar alliance came ahead of the (2024) Lok Sabha polls. Now, they are going their own ways," Baghel said.

Union minister Ramdas Athawale, a leader of BJP ally Republican Party of India (Athawale), said the reason for the NDA's victory in the Delhi polls was that Arvind Kejriwal had come to remove corruption, "but indulged in corruption himself".

"Kejriwal and many other leaders went to jail. That dented the AAP's image. Even if the AAP and the Congress were together, we would have won," he said.

"The Congress will not grow under Rahul Gandhi's leadership... Mamata Banerjee says, I am strong. Every leader wants to lead the INDIA bloc. They came together in 2024 but now, are speaking against each other," Athawale said. (PTI)

Kerala govt, opposition unite to oppose Centre's offshore mining plan

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 10: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday stated that the state government, in collaboration with the opposition, will strongly oppose the Union government's decision to initiate deep-sea mining along the state's coast.

Replying to a submission raised by Leader of the Opposition V D Satheesan in the Assembly against the Centre's move, Vijayan welcomed the opposition's call for united resistance.

The Chief Minister said a discussion on the future course of action would be held with the Leader of the Opposition. Raising the matter, Satheesan urged the state government to intervene urgently despite its limitations.

Law and Industries Minister P Rajeev also informed the Assembly that the state government will take all possible steps to prevent the mining, which would severely impact the marine ecology and the livelihoods of fisherfolk.

"We have already informed the Centre of our disagreement," he said.

Following our resistance, the Union government has directed the National Institute of Oceanography to submit a report on the ecological impact after conducting a study, he added.

Rajeev said the government will take all possible steps to prevent offshore mining and expressed hope that Kerala's MPs will oppose the move in Parliament.

The fishermen's unions have called for a hartal on February 27 against offshore mining, he added. Satheesan pointed out that the Union government has invited tenders from private companies for mining sand and minerals along the coasts of Kerala, Gujarat, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

In the first phase, 242 square kilometres in Kollam district will be opened for sand mining.

"This is a grave issue that threatens the livelihoods of over one million fishermen in Kerala. Extracting sand from depths of 48.4 to 62.5 meters will have a severe impact on the fishing sector and coastal ecology," he warned.

He further stated that the removal of seabed deposits would disrupt marine flora and fauna, deplete fish resources, and push fishing communities into hardship. (PTI)

J-K: PDP leader Iltija Mufti alleges two of her PSOs suspended after Kathua visit

JAMMU, Feb 10: PDP leader Iltija Mufti alleged on Monday that two of her personal security officers (PSOs) were suspended after she managed to give a slip and visit the family of a young man in Kathua district who died by suicide following alleged harassment by police.

Iltija, daughter of former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti, has been claiming that the youth, Makhan Din, took his own life as he was unable to bear the torture of police for alleged links with terrorists.

Din, a Gujjar youth from Billawar who died on Tuesday evening after consuming insecticide, had recorded a video before his death, claiming his innocence and denying any connection to terrorism. The police and local administration have launched separate investigations into the incident.

Iltija has been demanding a judicial inquiry into the incident as well as into the death of a truck driver killed by army in Sopore in North Kashmir after he allegedly failed to stop at a checkpoint.

"Two of my PSOs (Hamid and Basharat) were suspended for no

fault of theirs," the PDP leader told reporters outside her party office in Jammu.

"If they were suspended so quickly, why has no action been taken against the station house officer (SHO) who has spread terror in Kathua and extorted money from innocent youth. Locals told me those who fail to pay are labelled as over ground workers (of terrorists)," she said. She also questioned why no action has been taken against the army personnel involved in the truck driver's death.

There was no word from the police over the allegations of Iltija as of now but a senior official said that it was a failure on the part to protect the VIP they were guarding.

Iltija alleged that her PSOs were suspended for failing to prevent her visit to Kathua. She also claimed that she had left Jammu to Kathua "like a thief" during the night.

She claimed that after 2019 abrogation of special status of erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, standing with truth has become a crime.

The PDP leader alleged that the government -- whether it is National Conference, Lt Governor-led

administration or the Centre -- has no priorities to make the place prosperous, safe and secure.

"The National Conference leader is on a shawl distribution spree, meeting (home minister) Amit Shah and hosting parties in Delhi. He has no time to visit Kathua to console the widow and two minor daughters of Makhan Din and truck driver's family," she said.

Iltija also criticised Union minister Jitendra Singh, whose constituency includes Kathua, for not taking up the incident with authorities at the Centre.

She refused to comment on the Delhi Assembly election results or the future of the INDIA bloc, saying "the lives of our people, their security and honour are much more important than what is happening in Delhi which is not my concern".

"My concern is the young man who lost his life but no action is taken against the corrupt SHO who should be sacked immediately.

Earlier in the day, Mehbooba said two PSOs of her daughter have been placed under suspension after the young leader's unscheduled visit to Kathua. (PTI)

BRS MLAs disqualification row: Rights of Sonia asks govt to complete SC political party can't be frustrated, says SC

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: In a democracy, rights of a party couldn't be permitted to be frustrated, the Supreme Court on Monday said while asking the "reasonable time" for Telangana Assembly speaker to decide pleas for disqualification of BRS MLAs who defected to the Congress.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and K Vinod Chandran was hearing two separate petitions, including the one filed by the BRS and others over the delay in deciding the disqualification petitions.

"In a democracy, the rights of the parties cannot be permitted to be frustrated. We have all the respect for the other two wings but that does not mean that Act of Parliament should itself be permitted to be frustrated," it said.

A high court division bench had said the state legislative assembly speaker must decide on the disqualification petitions against the three MLAs within a "reasonable time".

One of the pleas challenged the November 2024 order of the Telangana High Court over the disqualification of three BRS MLAs, who joined the ruling Congress party in the state whereas another petition related to the remaining seven legislators who defected.

In the hearing, the top court sought to know the "reasonable time" for the speaker to decide on the disqualification petition.

The bench asked the counsel appearing for the legislative assembly whether the "reason-

able time" could also mean the end of the term of assembly.

"In your perception what is the reasonable time," asked the bench, "reasonable has to be as per the dictionary meaning."

The counsel appearing for the assembly urged the court to keep the hearing after a week.

The bench posted the matter on February 18.

"If you don't give us a reasonable time, we are reasonable men," said Justice Chandran. The counsel appearing for the petitioners said a three-judge bench of the apex court had expressly said a "reasonable time" would mean within three months, barring exceptional circumstances.

In November last year, the high court set aside an earlier order passed by a single judge that the assembly secretary should place the disqualification petitions of BRS MLAs -- Danam Nagender, Tellam Venkat Rao and Kadiyam Srihari -- before the speaker. The speaker must decide the disqualification petitions within a reasonable time, it had said.

The high court said the speaker while dealing with the disqualification petitions should bear in mind the concept of reasonable time, by taking into account the period of pendency of the disqualification petitions, the object of inclusion of the tenth schedule to the Constitution and the tenure of the assembly. (PTI)

INDIA bloc needs to get its act together: Priyanka Chaturvedi

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi on Monday asked the government to complete the population census at the earliest, claiming that around 14 crore people in the country are being deprived of their rightful benefits of free and subsidised foodgrains under the food security law.

In her maiden Zero Hour intervention in the Rajya Sabha, Gandhi said beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) are being identified as per the 2011 Census, and not the latest population numbers and thus many are deprived.

"For the first time in independent India's history, the decennial census has been delayed by more than four years, despite originally being scheduled for 2021. There is still no clarity on when the census will be conducted," she said in the Upper House. Gandhi also claimed that the Budget allocations reveal that the updated census is unlikely to be conducted this year as well.

"Around 14 crore eligible Indians are thus being deprived of their rightful benefits under the NFSA," she said.

The senior Congress leader said the NFSA, introduced by the UPA government in September 2013, was a landmark initiative aimed at ensuring food and nutritional security for the country's 140 crore population.

The legislation, Gandhi said, played a crucial role in protecting millions of vulnerable households from starvation, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis.

She also said the quota for the beneficiaries is still determined based on the 2011 Census, which is now well over a decade old. (PTI)

Budget politically driven with Delhi polls in mind: P Chidambaram

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Congress leader P Chidambaram on Monday said the Union Budget 2025-26 was a "politically-driven budget" with Delhi elections in mind as it ignored the poor and bottom half of the population.

Initiating discussion on Union Budget 2025-26 in Rajya Sabha, Chidambaram also accused Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman of claiming to improve fiscal deficit by cutting Centre's capital expenditure and grants-in-aid to states and terming it as bad economics.

"There ought to be a philosophy behind the Budget, but I cannot find one in this Budget. I shall not attempt to do so because after going through the Budget speech and Budget numbers, I believe there is no philosophy behind the Budget," he said.

Chidambaram further said, "It is obvious that the budget was politically driven, I shall not elaborate upon that but I congratulate the finance minister for achieving one of her objectives a couple of days ago."

He was referring to BJP's win in the

Delhi assembly elections.

The former finance minister also stated that the MGNREGA daily wage could have been increased "because the poorest are the ones who are going for MGNREGA work" and also the statutory minimum wage across the board under the Minimum Wages Act, could have been raised and that could have benefited thousands and thousands of labourers.

"She (Sitharaman) did nothing. But, she was focussed on the Income Tax and she was focussed on the Delhi elections," Chidambaram asserted.

Referring to the Income Tax relief provided in the Budget, he said, "She remembered the middle class but what about the section of people she has forgotten?" Citing government data, Chidambaram said between 2012 and 2024, in the 12-year period, food inflation was 6.18 per cent, education inflation was 11 per cent, healthcare inflation was 14 per cent.

"These have crippled Indian households. Household savings have fallen



from 25.2 per cent to 18.4 per cent," he said, adding as per household consumption survey in 2023, the average monthly per capita expenditure of a rural family is only ₹ 4,226 and in urban areas it is only ₹ 6,996.

"What has this budget done for the average Indian household in the bottom 50

per cent and the bottom 25 per cent? Nothing? What relief has the finance minister given them?" Chidambaram asked.

He also said the wage of a salaried male worker has fallen in the last seven years from ₹ 12,665 per month to ₹ 11,858 per month. The wage of a self-

employed male worker has fallen from ₹ 9,454 per month to ₹ 8,591 per month.

"What is the position? The position is incomes are falling, wages are falling, government expenditures are not keeping pace with the promises, household net savings have fallen. Household debt has risen. This is the plight of the bottom 50 per cent of India. There is nothing in this Budget for the bottom 50 per cent," Chidambaram said.

Stressing that the Rajya Sabha cannot be divided into one half speaking for the top 50 per cent and one half speaking for the bottom 50 per cent, he said, "I am quite happy to speak for the bottom 50 per cent but I want the treasury benches also to impress upon their minister to speak for the bottom 50 per cent of India."

The senior Congress leader also alleged that the government's various schemes, including the PLI and Make in India, are "spectacular" failures and these have not been able to meet targets and not been able to generate employment.

He added that at present "the gravest

challenge facing the country is unemployment".

Chidambaram also accused the FM of cutting capital expenditure to improve the fiscal deficit from a target of 4.9 per cent to 4.8 per cent.

"But how did she achieve this 4.8 per cent? She cut capital expenditure by the Central government by ₹ 92,682 crore. Not revenue expenditure... She cut the grants-in-aid to states for creating capital assets, another form of capital expenditure, by ₹ 90,887 crore," he said.

He further said, "So total cut in capital expenditure by Centre and the states in the current year will be ₹ 1,83,569 crore. By cutting capital expenditure by such a humongous amount she saved on the fiscal deficit ₹ 43,785 crore," he said, adding that cutting capital expenditure could have been understood had the saving of the fiscal deficit been equally big.

"But after cutting ₹ 1,83,000-odd crore, she saved about ₹ 44,000 crore. Is it a good policy? I don't know. Is it good economics? I say no. It is not good economics," Chidambaram asserted. (PTI)

With nature of warfare changing rapidly, need to adopt and improve solutions constantly: Rajnath

BENGALURU, Feb 10: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said as the nature of warfare is changing rapidly, there is a need to adopt and improve solutions constantly, and efforts in defence manufacturing have to focus on creating counter measures for emerging areas.

Also, urging the CEOs of Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to come forward and utilise the opportunities offered by the expanding Indian defence ecosystem, he said, the opportunities are driven by our policies of 'Aatmanirbharta' or 'self-reliance' in defence production and facilitated by conducive policy regime.

The Defence Minister said this while addressing the CEOs Roundtable, as part of the 15th edition of Aero India Aero here.

"The essence of this conclave is, how to join hands to make India a leading defence manufacturer and service provider at the global scale. All this has to be viewed in the backdrop of the new technological revolutions such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum technology and others," Singh said.

He said, "As the nature of warfare is changing rapidly, we need to adopt and improve solutions constantly."

"For example, the earlier reliance on pure hardware based systems is increasingly getting replaced by



software based systems. Today, the nature of communication and data sharing in military operations are getting much more complex. Our reliance on space based navigation systems, space based communication and surveillance implies that space based assets would have to be integrated in our operational plans," he said.

Noting that the use of drones in recent conflicts indicates that the future would depend on the integrated efforts of manned, unmanned and autonomous warfare systems, the Defence Minister said, hence, our efforts in defence manufacturing have to focus on creating counter measures for these emerging areas.

Highlighting some of the challenges and concerns coming from the rapidly changing technological

scenario in the defence sector, he said, all these challenges need specific targeted solutions and counter measures. "The Government of India not only is fully aware of these dynamics but also geared to deal with them. This is where we have put in place transparent regulations, processes and policies which are industry friendly."

The 15th edition of Aero India, which is considered to be Asia's biggest aerospace and defence exhibition, was inaugurated by the Defence Minister at the Yelahanka Air Force Station here on Monday.

Self-reliance today is not only a strategic choice and opportunity, but a kind of compulsion too. These opportunities are fueled by a young generation of high-tech workforce, willing to undertake the plunge and a great startup ecosystem, Singh

said. "We have a large pool of human resources in the country. They are equipped with the required set of skills. The skilled youths constantly update themselves in the face of the fast-changing defence ecosystem in the world. At the same time, I also urge you all to come forward with your feedback, so that we can work on a better and more secure future together," he said.

In these challenging times, a period where the global security situation is fragile, where the rules-based order is being challenged and where technologies are creating new opportunities and vulnerabilities, this Round Table provides an opportunity to deliberate on these processes and technologies, the Defence Minister said.

"Brainstorming session like this would have a significant impact on how various initiatives are taken in future for national security, at the same time, showcasing the opportunities that India provides to be the hub for creating new technologies," he said.

A peculiarity of defence manufacturing is that the products of defence industrial systems are ordered by the government and also used by the government, he further said, "also, only the government can give license to manufacture or export them. Hence, there is a continuous involvement of the

government at every stage of this process."

Pointing out that the government has taken numerous initiatives over the last few years under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to strengthen domestic defence manufacturing, the Defence Minister said, it is going to be a major growth pillar for the Indian economy, as we chart the path of fastest growing major economy of the world, and are speeding-up to become the third largest economy of the world.

"In order to facilitate this transition from a developing country to a developed country by 2047, the government has taken many transformative steps to make our defence industry an important component of the overall national economy," he said.

Singh also said as a testimony to the emergence of India as a defence export nucleus, the country has seen 31 times growth in the export of defence products in the last 10 years as compared to Financial Year 2013-14.

We have continuously revised and updated our defence product lists with the aim to encourage more players to enter defence production. The issuance of Positive Indigenisation List is a clear indication of our intent to support the industry in India's efforts for self-reliance, he said. (PTI)

Maha Kumbh: Large number of devotees head to Kashi, Ayodhya after holy dip at Sangam



PRAYAGRAJ/VARANASI/AYODHYA, Feb 10: Undeterred by challenges, lakhs of devotees thronging the Maha Kumbh for a holy dip at the Sangam are now heading towards Kashi and Ayodhya, officials said.

According to government data, an average of 1.44 crore people are taking a holy bath at the Maha Kumbh every day.

Dr Shushma, who arrived in Prayagraj from Ranchi with her son on Monday, told PTI, "After taking a dip in the Sangam and visiting the fair, we will head to Kashi for Lord Shiva's darshan and later proceed to Ayodhya."

Similarly, 74-year-old Ketari Devi from Ara, Bihar, said, "We saw on TV and mobile that this Maha Kumbh is happening after 144 years. After taking a holy dip, we will visit Kashi. Despite the huge crowd, we hope that we will get his darshan."

Nishant Abhishek, who travelled from Mumbai, added, "We've heard that apart from Prayagraj, Kashi and Ayodhya are also witnessing heavy crowds. But this is a rare opportunity to visit all the three places during Maha Kumbh. We will also go to Ayodhya."

ACP (Traffic) Shailendra Singh said that a significant number of devotees are heading towards Varanasi and Ayodhya after their visit to the Maha Kumbh. ADCP (Traffic) Kuldeep Singh said that compared to the 2019 Kumbh, the crowd this time is much larger even on regular days, leading to frequent traffic congestion.

Due to the heavy rush outside the Prayagraj railway station, the Northern Railway's Lucknow division has temporarily closed it for passenger movement from 1:30 pm on February 9 to midnight on February 14, an official statement said.

However, eight other railway stations in the Maha Kumbh area continue to operate regular and special

As per government figures, over 44 crore devotees have taken a dip at the Triveni Sangam till February 9. On February 10, by 10 am, over 63 lakh devotees had performed the ritual bath.

On key bathing days, the footfall has been record-breaking. On January 13 (Paush Purnima), it was 1.70 crore while on January 14 (Makar Sankranti) it was 3.50 crore, and 7.64 crore (highest so far) took dip in the Sangam on Mauni Amavasya.

With an average of 1.44 crore people taking a dip daily, authorities are managing an unprecedented surge of pilgrims in the holy city.

Over 1.02 crore people have taken holy dip in the Sangam till 4 pm, which included over 10 lakh Kalpwasis and 91.94 lakh pilgrims. The total number of devotees taking dip in the Sangam till date since the start of the Kumbh Mela has crossed 44 crore.

In Varanasi, a large number of devotees returning from the Maha Kumbh are arriving to visit the Kashi Vishwanath temple, leading to massive crowds across the city.

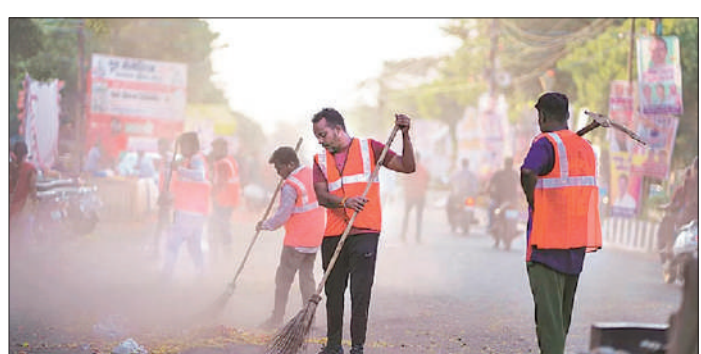
Due to the heavy rush, authorities have imposed restrictions on the movement of four-wheelers in several areas, and vehicles from outside the city are being halted at designated parking zones on the outskirts, officials said.

District and police officials are conducting regular patrols, while CCTV cameras and drones are being used to monitor sensitive and crowded areas, said DCP (Kashi Zone) Gaurav Banswal.

Multiple 'rain baseras' (temporary shelters) have been set up across the city for visiting pilgrims, he added.

DCP (Varuna Zone) Chandrakant Meena said that traffic diversions have been implemented at key locations to manage congestion. (PTI)

Swachh Bharat Mission helped save lives of 3 lakh children: Jal Shakti Minister Patil



NEW DELHI, Feb 10: The government's Swachh Bharat Mission has helped save lives of three lakh children in the country according to a WHO report, Jal Shakti Minister C.R. Patil informed the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

He said under the government's Open Defecation Free (ODF) policy, around 12 crore toilets have been constructed across the country and 60 crore beneficiaries have benefitted from the scheme so far.

Replying to supplementaries during Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha, the minister said the scheme has helped ensure cleanliness and also women safety as now they need not wait till evening for defecating in the open.

"In the first five years, 10 crore toilets were constructed. In the second phase another two crore toilets were constructed and a total of 12 crore toilets have now been built. But the total number of beneficiaries under the scheme are 60 crore.

"This has also ensured women safety as women would now not have to wait all day long for going in the open for defecation. A WHO report has stated that due to the clean India campaign, the lives of around 3 lakh children have been saved," the minister said in the upper house.

He said the Clean India mission and ODF policy is a process in continuity and to take it forward, the

Centre is working with state governments.

In his written reply to a starred question, the minister said 16,125 villages have declared themselves ODF-plus (Aspiring-1,497, Rising-558 and Model-14,070) up to February 6, 2025 in Himachal Pradesh.

"Sanitation is a state subject, the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation provides financial and technical support to states. Phase II of Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) is being implemented during the period from 2020-21 to 2025-26, with the focus on ODF sustainability and to cover all the villages with solid and liquid waste management i.e. converting the villages from ODF to ODF Plus (Model). The scheme is being implemented in rural areas of the country, including in Himachal Pradesh.

Observing that the task of constructing toilets is a continuous process and not a one-time activity, the minister said, "there are continuously new emerging households, migrant households etc. which will require toilets."

He said the construction of new Individual Household Latrines (IHLs) continues to be the first change on SBM(G) funds under Phase-II of SBM(G) and states are advised continuously to plan for left out toilets and address this gap on priority. (PTI)

As controversy grows over influencer's remarks, NHRC asks YouTube to remove episode

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: As controversy snowballed over influencer Ranveer Allahbadia allegedly offensive remarks made during an online reality show, a NHRC member on Monday shot a letter to YouTube saying it has "taken cognisance" of the issue and asked to take an "urgent action" and remove that episode from the popular platform.

Priyank Kanoongo, a member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in his letter said the rights panel has received a complaint from wherein it has been alleged that a YouTube show titled 'India's Got Latent', hosted by Samay Raina, contains highly objectionable, inappropriate and obscene remarks against the Indian society.

The letter has been written to YouTube's head of public policy in India.

"The complaint highlights concerns regarding the show's propa-

gation of negativity, discriminatory perspectives, religious and cultural intolerance, and disrespectful and obscene ideologies, particularly towards women and children. It is further alleged that, under the guise of freedom of speech, the show disseminates obscene and vulgar content along with misleading messages, thereby fostering a corrupt mindset in society," he wrote in the letter.

The content in question "prima facie appears to be in violation" of various legal provisions under the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the Information Technology (IT) Act and other applicable laws, it reads.

Furthermore, it is alleged that the show "severely infringes" upon fundamental rights relating to religious freedom and the safety and dignity of women and children, as enshrined in the Constitution of

India, the letter said.

A copy of the complaint has been annexed with the letter, it said.

"Additionally, the Commission has come across certain links indicating that a recent episode of the aforementioned show features YouTubers making vulgar and explicit statements concerning children and women. These statements are not only deeply objectionable but also amount to a serious violation of woman and child rights. The availability of such content on widely accessible platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, poses a grave threat to the safety, dignity, and mental well-being of children including woman," Kanoongo wrote in the letter.

Considering the gravity of the matter, the Commission has "taken cognisance of the issue under Section 12 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993", he said. (PTI)

Development work at Hastinapur site in UP taken up: Govt

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: There is a protected area -- mound known as Ulta Khera and the mound of Raghunathji -- at Uttar Pradesh's Hastinapur which is a site of national importance and development work has been taken up there in the recent past, the government informed Parliament on Monday.

Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said this in a written response to a query.

He was asked whether the government is considering any plans to develop the Hastinapur area as a pilgrimage site and cultural heritage given its mythological importance.

"There is a protected area namely 'Mound known as Ulta Khera and the Mound of Raghunathji' at Hastina-

pur which is declared as of national importance.

"Development works within the site viz, construction of pathways connecting the site with the main road, parking, development of gardens and provision of public amenities have been taken up in the recent past," the Union minister said.

He further said archaeological excavations were also conducted at the site in 2021-22 by the Archaeological Survey of India and a photo exhibition showcasing the excavation and the findings is on display at the site.

"An announcement was made in the Union Budget 2020-21 to develop Hastinapur as an iconic Site with an on-site museum," Shekhawat said. (PTI)

About 10,249 acres of defence land under encroachment: Govt

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Out of around 18 lakh acres of defence land across the country, about 10,249 acres are under encroachment, the government informed Parliament on Monday.

Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth said this in a written response to a query in the Rajya Sabha.

The government was asked about the details of defence land "under encroachment" in the country, with location-wise data.

"Out of around 18 lakh acres of defence land across the country, about 10,249 acres is under encroachment," the minister said in his response.

He also shared state-wise details of encroachment on defence land.

In another query, the government was asked whether it is aware of the fact that a large number of parcels of land or bundles of land belonging to defence have been leased to private and other entities, which are either not leased further or under en-

croachment.

Leases of defence land within cantonments have historically been granted to private individuals, institutions and government bodies for various purposes under the Cantonment Codes of 1899 and 1912, followed by the Cantonment Land Administration Rules of 1925 and 1937, Seth said.

"These leases were normally granted either in perpetuity or for a total lease period of 90 years. In order to extend the lease period of expiring or expired leases and regularise the occupation of these sites, besides recovering lease rent, the ministry issued an interim policy on March 10, 2017, which has been extended up to December 31, 2025. As regards encroachments on defence land, the same are dealt as per law under the provision of the Cantonments Act, 2006 and Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971," the minister said in his response. (PTI)

MP's AVGC-XR policy to generate 20,000-plus jobs, attract ₹ 2,000 cr investment: Official

BHOPAL, Feb 10: Weeks ahead of its ambitious Global Investors Summit 2025, the Madhya Pradesh government has launched its Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics and Extended Reality policy to attract ₹ 2,000 crore of investment and generate more than 20,000 jobs.

The new policy is designed to position the state as a leading hub for Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics, and Extended Reality (AVGC-XR), Madhya Pradesh Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Science and Technology Department, Sanjay Dubey told PTI on Monday.

"With a target of attracting ₹ 2,000 crore in investments and generating 20,000-plus jobs by 2029, this policy is a significant step toward strengthening India's creative economy," Dubey said.

He said that the policy offers a well-rounded approach, integrating fiscal incentives, skill development, infrastructure creation, and international collaborations.

"Building on its existing strengths in IT, ITES, and ESDM, as well as the state's established Film Policy, the AVGC-XR Pol-



icy 2025 fills the missing gap in creating a full-fledged media and entertainment ecosystem," Dubey, an IAS officer of 1993 batch and also IIT (Delhi) graduate, said.

The AVGC-XR Policy now expands this framework by integrating cutting-edge sectors such as animation, VFX, gaming, comics, and extended reality (XR). With this comprehensive approach, Madhya Pradesh is not just promoting film production but developing an entire digital content ecosystem, ensuring that pre-production, production, and post-production industries thrive within the state, he said.

The AVGC Media Park. Centers of Excellence (CoEs), and skill development initiatives will create synergies between film, gaming, and digital content industries, making Madhya Pradesh a one-stop destination for creative and technological innovation, Dubey said.

Asked about Union Budget 2025-26's focus on innovation, R&D and digital transformation and how Madhya Pradesh will align itself with this national vision, Dubey said that the budget's emphasis on deep-tech, AI, and digital economy expansion complements Madhya Pradesh's

AVGC-XR aspirations.

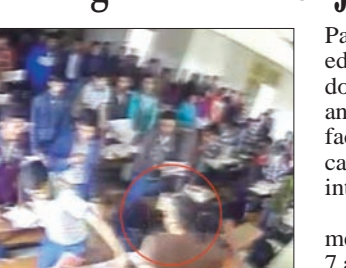
"Our policy actively promotes R&D and intellectual property (IP) creation through financial incentives, such as a 50 per cent subsidy for IP registration and support for emerging technologies like AR/VR. Additionally, our AVGC-XR Center of Excellence (CoE) will promote cutting-edge research, ensuring that Madhya Pradesh remains at the forefront of global digital content creation.

"The state is strategically aligning its initiatives with national goals to strengthen India's presence in the global AVGC landscape," he said.

Highlighting Madhya Pradesh work in this sector in comparison to other states, Dubey said that Madhya Pradesh is taking a proactive approach to AVGC-XR by offering one of the most competitive policy frameworks in the country.

"While states like Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Telangana have strong AVGC industries, our policy sets new benchmarks through a mix of fiscal incentives, infrastructure support, and talent development.

School principal caught on camera assaulting teacher in Gujarat; probe ordered



BHARUCH, Feb 10: A school principal was caught on camera thrashing a teacher inside his office in Gujarat's Bharuch district, prompting education authorities to order a probe.

The incident took place on February 6 at Navyug Vidyalaya, a grant-in-aid school run by a trust, in Jambusar town and the institute's management has asked school principal Hitendra Thakor not to report for duty for the time being, said Bharuch District Education Officer Swatiba Raol on Monday.

In the CCTV footage released by the school, principal Thakor, sitting inside his cabin, can be seen talking to a teacher, Rajendrasinh Parmar, who along with some other colleagues, was sitting across.

Suddenly, Thakor is seen getting up from his chair, rushing towards

Parmar and beating him up repeatedly. Thakor then pulls Parmar down on the floor from the seat and slaps him multiple times on his face in the presence of others, who can be seen in the video trying to intervene.

Raol said the school management approached her on February 7 and submitted a complaint about the principal.

"After receiving the complaint, I have formed a committee to conduct an inquiry into the incident. The committee will record the principal's statement today (Monday). We will take action after getting the inquiry report. As of now, the school management has asked Thakor not to come to school," said the education officer.

Raol did not shed light on what triggered the ugly incident, but Thakor separately told media persons that several parents had complained about Parmar's behaviour.

"Many parents had registered their complaints against Parmar. Thus, I had called him for a meeting on February 6. During that meeting, I tried to make him understand in a polite manner and also asked him why there has been no change in his behaviour so far," claimed the principal. (PTI)

DON'T HAVE A PLAN, JUST WANT TO GO WITH THE FLOW: ACTOR SHREYA CHAUDHRY



MUMBAI, Feb 10: Actor Shreya Chaudhry, best known for web series "Bandish Bandits", says she doesn't want to follow a conventional career path and is confident that right projects will continue to come her way.

The actor, whose credits include the "Commando" series and the short film "Conditions Apply", can be currently seen in the Prime Video film "The Mehta Boys".

"I love watching big-ticket masala

films but I've also grown up watching international and regional cinema like Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi Thai or Italian films. As an actor I want to do anything and everything. I don't have a plan; I just want to go with the flow.

"I feel lucky that I got to be part of projects like 'Bandish Bandits' and 'The Mehta Boys'. I want to continue to work with people who are passionate about cinema," Chaudhry told PTI.

The actor said her career took a turn after the success of "Bandish Bandits", also streaming on Prime Video.

"I feel heard and seen as an actor post 'Bandish Bandits'. It is a big deal for me. I want to be part of well-written stories, play characters in which I can dig my teeth, and work with some great people. I want to continue to be part of projects that excite me. It feels good to receive love for your work.

It's going to be onward and upward from here on," she added.

The first season of "Bandish Bandits", which was released in 2020 and also starred veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah, garnered an overwhelming response. The second chapter was released in December and opened to mixed reviews.

Chaudhry, who plays Zara in Boman Irani's directorial debut feature "The Mehta Boys", said she landed the film organically.

"I didn't choose the proj-

ect; the project chose me. I had manifested working with Boman sir, and not just as an actor... I wanted to join Spiral Bound after a friend of mine informed me about it. I couldn't attend the classes because I was shooting.

"I randomly said, 'I want to work with Boman sir'. Within a week, I got a call about a project that Boman sir was acting in, writing, and directing. I was like, 'By hook or crook I need to be part of this,'" she recalled.

Written by Irani along with Academy Award-winning writer Alexander Dinlaris of "Birdman" fame, "The Mehta Boys" revolves around a strained father-son relationship as they are forced to spend 48 hours together, leading to a tumultuous yet transformative journey. It stars Irani as Shiv Mehta and Avinash Tiwary as his son Amay Mehta.

Puja Sarup, who plays Irani's daughter Anu in the film, said she was thrilled to work with the actor-filmmaker.

"The excitement of working with somebody who has so much experience and more than that, he had excitement and curiosity. He wanted to explore, and dig, so for me, that was the moment when I felt, 'Let's do this!'" Sarup said.

"The Mehta Boys" is produced by Irani, Danesh Irani, Vikesh Bhutani, and Shujaat Saudagar under the banner of Irani Movietone LLP in association with Chalkboard Entertainment LLP. (PTI)

Bengaluru Police stops Ed Sheeran's street show citing lack of permission

BENGALURU, Feb 10: Bengaluru Police on Sunday morning halted British musician Ed Sheeran's live street performance in the city, citing lack of permission by the popular singer-songwriter.

The police stopped the gig, which was underway at Church Street, when the Grammy winner was midway into the performance of his chartbuster "Shape of You".

In one of the clips, Sheeran -- who performed in Bengaluru on Saturday night and will once again take the stage in the city on Sunday evening -- can be seen arriving with his security personnel at the venue when he was greeted by cheering onlookers.

"We were going to play more than one song but we're being asked to play one song," he said on the microphone, before he started strumming the interlude of "Shape of You" on his guitar.

Just before he could finish the refrain of the song, a policeman stepped in and pulled the cables attached to the microphone and musical instruments.

A senior police official of the Cubbon

Park police station said Sheeran was performing "without any permission so they had to stop".

"The police got there because someone had complained of public nuisance," he told PTI, adding if the musician and his team had the permit they could have shown it to the cops.

Church Street is a busy area in Bengaluru known for its nightlife and cultural events.

Also known for tracks like "Perfect Duet", "Thinking Out Loud" and "Shivers", Sheeran is currently on the India leg of his Mathematics (+-÷x) Tour. (PTI)



Oscars to make it mandatory for films to mention their AI usage: report

LOS ANGELES, Feb 10:

The use of artificial intelligence, better known as AI, in films is increasing at a fast pace and the makers whose films make it to the Oscars will now reportedly have to disclose the details of the same.

fair.

According to a report by entertainment news outlet Variety, the makers will now have to mention all the changes that are made with the help of AI in their projects.

"The Academy currently

closure mandatory in the 2026 Oscars rules, which are expected to be published in April. The Academy's SciTech Council is working on recommended language," the report stated.

The Brutalist faced massive backlash after it was identified that the makers used AI in post production. Soon, film's director Brady Corbet issued a statement saying the film had limited usage of AI and the actors had practised with the Hungarian dialect coach prior. He noted that the sketches of the buildings in the film were hand-drawn.

For Jacques Audiard's directorial Emilia Perez, AI was used to clone the voices of the actors, it read. Other Oscar contenders, including A Complete Unknown and Dune: Part 2, have also relied on AI to an extent, the report added. (PTI)



Over the last few days, the controversy around Oscar-nominated films The Brutalist and Emilia Perez has taken over with many questioning whether the usage of AI in films is

offers an optional disclosure form for AI use, but Governors and Branch executive committees are now investigating how AI is used in each branch with an eye toward making dis-



If something happens, I'd like for him to be there: Saif on Taimur going with him to hospital

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Why did eight-year-old Taimur go with his father Saif Ali Khan to the hospital in the dead of night after the horrific knife attack at their home? Many thoughts were running through the actor's head and one of them was this if "God forbid" something were to happen to him, he would like his son to be around.

"He was absolutely composed. He was fine. He said, 'I'm coming with you.' I was getting a lot of comfort just from looking at him at that time. And I didn't want to go alone," Saif has said in an interview with Times of India, his first since the January 16 attack.

"My wife sent him knowing what he would do for me. Maybe it wasn't... at the moment, it was the right thing to do. I felt good about it. And I also thought, if God forbid, something happens, I'd like for him to be there. And he wanted to be there also."

It was a very filmy scene, recalled the actor, who was stabbed multiple times and was taken to hospital in an autorickshaw with a portion of the knife still lodged in his spine.

In his detailed recap of the intruder attack and its aftermath, the "Omkaara" star said Taimur and his house help Hari rushed him to the hospital. He also spoke of how fortunate he was to escape paralysis and that he will never keep a weapon at home, notwithstanding the family's trauma. (PTI)

Ranveer Allahbadia apologises for controversial comments: 'Had a lapse in judgement'

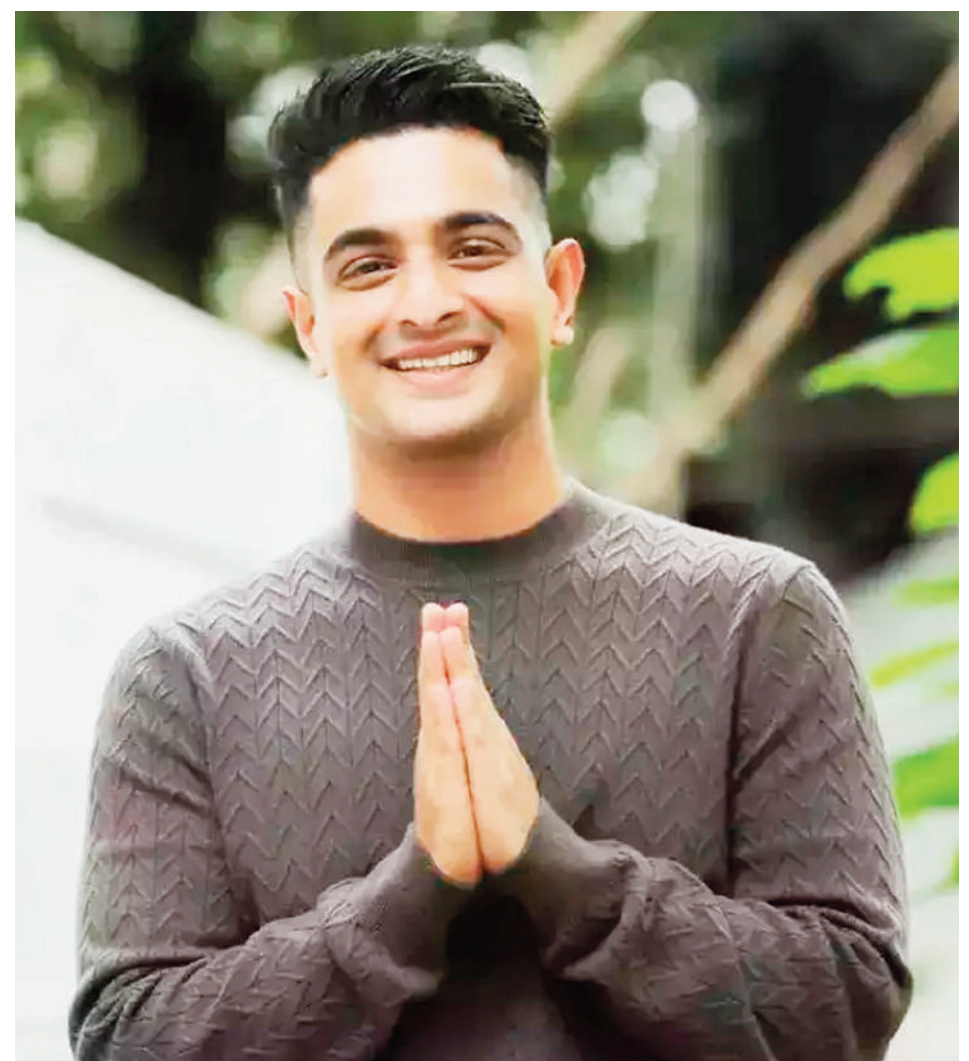
NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Popular social media personality Ranveer Allahbadia on Monday apologised for his controversial comment on a show, saying comedy is not his forte and described the whole episode as a "lapse in judgment".

"My comment was not just inappropriate, it wasn't even funny. Comedy is not my forte. Just here to say sorry," Allahbadia, popularly known as BeerBiceps, said in a video statement posted on his social media handles.

Allahbadia has been mercilessly trolled for his distasteful comment on parents and sex on Samay Raina's "India's Got Latent" show.

"Many of you asked if this how I wish to use my platform. Obviously, this is not how I wish to use my platform. I am not going to give any context, justification or reasoning behind whatever happened. I am just here for an apology. I, personally, had a lapse in judgement. It wasn't cool on my part." His podcast is watched by people of all ages and he doesn't want to be the kind of person that takes that responsibility lightly, the influencer said.

"Family is the last thing that I would ever disrespect. Need to use this platform better and that's been my learning from this whole experience. I promise to just get better. Have asked the makers of the video to remove the insensitive sections from the video and all I can say in the end is sorry. I hope you can forgive me as a human being." (PTI)



Man City vs Real Madrid: an accidental blockbuster in the Champions League playoffs

LONDON, Feb 10: Real Madrid against Manchester City in the Champions League is the accidental blockbuster of the new knockout playoffs round that starts Tuesday.

The past two title winners surprisingly finished mid-table in the new 36-team standings format that ended in January. The top-eight teams skipped the playoffs and went directly to the round of 16 in March. The penalty for City and Madrid is now to meet in the extra stage inserted into the format just to enter the round of 16 that they have come to expect as their rightful place.

Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain also are wealthy

and influential clubs now facing unexpected jeopardy in the two-leg playoffs on back-to-back mid-weeks in February.

The bonus for UEFA and broadcasters is having global attractions in action for two extra games after an expanded opening league phase. If record 15-time champion Madrid is to retain its European title, it will take playing 17 games instead of 13 last season. Madrid eliminated Man City in the quarterfinals one year ago, and in two epic semifinal legs before lifting the trophy in 2022. Man City won their semifinals meeting decisively in 2023 on the way to its first European Cup title.

A different City is a different

Man City in personnel and personality that Pep Guardiola will send out Tuesday in Manchester.

Star midfielder Rodri is out injured despite being included Friday in an updated squad, playmaker Kevin De Bruyne is less often fit, and the team's pursuit of a fourth straight Premier League title has been conceded with Liverpool the likely successor. New signings Omar Marmoush in attack and Nico Gonzalez in midfield have barely settled in — with Gonzalez getting injured early into his debut in the FA Cup and now a doubt for the Madrid game.

Madrid, however, is now rolling as La Liga leader since its

early-season wobbles when Kylian Mbappé took longer than expected to settle in.

The France superstar has scored nine goals in his last eight games, most recently the equalizer against Atletico Madrid in the Spanish league on Saturday. His first game in a Madrid shirt against Erling Haaland is a key narrative among many before the winner is decided Feb. 19 at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

French derby Brest exceeded expectations by getting out of the league stage in its first season not just in the Champions League but in European competition. For that reason, the Brittany side might have been hoping for a rare match

against a team from outside France in the playoffs — instead, it got PSG.

Indeed, the teams met just last week, with PSG winning 5-2 at Brest's 15,000-seat Stade Francis-Le Blé. That stadium in northwestern France does not meet UEFA's requirements so Brest has been playing its Champions League home games at Guingamp's Stade de Roudourou, 114 kilometers (70 miles) away.

PSG hasn't lost in any competition since Nov. 26 and starts as the big favorite to advance in a competition it has yet to win in 14 years under Qatari ownership.

Italy vs. the Netherlands An all-France game in February was im-

possible in the past 20 years because UEFA separated teams from the same country until the quarterfinals draw. Now the tennis-style seeded knockout bracket does not keep national rivals apart.

There could have been Dutch and Italian derbies in the playoffs but Juventus was paired with PSV Eindhoven and Feyenoord got AC Milan. All four are former European champions.

Juventus and PSV meet Tuesday for the second time in Turin this season. Juventus, which has drawn more games that it has won this season, beat PSV 3-1 in September in the first of the 144 league-phase games.

Bayern aims to be homeward bound Bayern reached the final when the Champions League title was last decided at its stadium in Munich — in 2012, when Chelsea won on penalties after a 1-1 draw.

The seven-time European champion has a long road back to a home-field final on May 31 after placing 12th in the league standings. Still, the blow of being in the playoffs was softened by being drawn against Celtic instead of Man City.

The runaway Scottish league leader, which won the 1967 European Cup seven years before Bayern's first title, hosts the first leg on Wednesday. (AP)

Barcelona inch closer to Madrid rivals in Spanish league with 4-1 win at Sevilla



MADRID, Feb 10: Barcelona is making sure there will be a three-way fight for the Spanish league title.

The Catalan club moved closer to rivals Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid at the top of the standings on Sunday by routing Sevilla 4-1.

Robert Lewandowski, Fermín López, Raphinha and Eric García scored a goal each as Barcelona took advantage of the 1-1 draw between Madrid and Atletico in the capital derby on Saturday.

Third-placed Barcelona is now two points behind leader

Madrid and one point behind Atletico. Barcelona had a comfortable away win despite playing with 10 men from the 62nd when López was sent off for a hard foul. The red card was shown after a video review.

It was the third straight league win for Barcelona, and its ninth

victory in 11 matches across all competitions.

Sevilla, in 13th place, has won only one of its last five league games. Lewandowski put Barcelona ahead in the seventh minute with his eighth goal in his last nine games in all competitions. Ruben Vargas equalized

a minute later for the hosts before López put Barcelona back in front in the 46th. Raphinha added to the lead in the 55th and García sealed the win in the 89th.

"We needed to win to stay in contention and put some pressure on our rivals," Barcelona defender Inigo Martínez said. "The team is playing with a lot of confidence right now and we know that we can still improve. We need to stay on this track."

Defender Jules Koundé made his 124th appearance for Barcelona, equaling the mark of Ludovic Giuly in fifth place for the most appearances for Barcelona by a French player. Eric Abidal tops that list with 193 appearances.

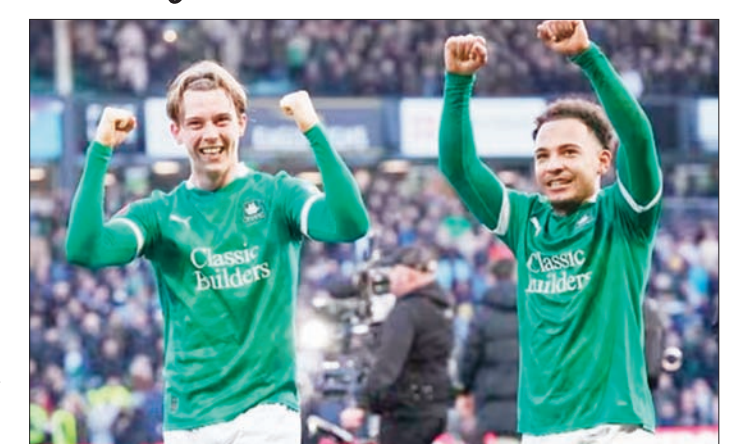
Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo had to be substituted about 20 minutes into the match with a right ankle injury.

Other results Brais Mendez scored an 84th-minute winner as seventh-placed Real Sociedad beat relegation-threatened Espanyol 2-1 at home.

Defenders Cristhian Mosquera and Mouctar Diakhaby scored first-half goals as Valencia moved to 18th with a 2-0 home win over 17th-placed Leganes.

Mauro Arambarri converted a 44th-minute penalty to give 14th-placed Getafe a 1-0 road win over 19th-placed Alaves. (AP)

Second-tier Plymouth knock out Liverpool in fourth round



LONDON, Feb 10: Premier League leader Liverpool was knocked out of the FA Cup by second-tier struggler Plymouth after losing 1-0 in a stunning fourth-round upset on Sunday.

It ended any hopes of a quadruple of major trophies for Liverpool, which leads the Premier League by six points with a game in hand, finished top of the revamped first stage of the Champions League and has reached the English League Cup final.

Ryan Hardie's 53rd-minute penalty proved to be the winner for Plymouth, a club from the southwest of England which is in last place in the second-tier Championship and recently fired Wayne Rooney as its manager.

"We all came here today with a dream," Hardie said, "and we have done it."

Liverpool fielded a heavily rotated lineup, without stars like Mohamed Salah, Cody Gakpo and Virgil van Dijk who weren't even on the bench, but still had established internationals like Darwin Nunez, Luis Diaz and Diogo Jota on the field in a frenetic ending to the game as Plymouth was forced to defend doggedly.

At the end of a nerve-shredding nine minutes of stoppage time, Plymouth goalkeeper Conor Hazard produced a stunning save to tip over a header from Nunez and then was in the right place to keep out another header — this time from Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher after he came up for a corner. In the end, the crucial moment was when Harvey Elliott

raised his hands to stop the ball going into the penalty area and the referee awarded a handball. Hardie composed himself and slotted his spot kick the opposite direction to where Kelleher dived.

"They were great today and made it really, really hard for us and we couldn't cope with that," Elliott said. "It's a learning curve. It's a different game for us because we're not used to playing these kind of games."

Liverpool manager Arne Slot congratulated Plymouth and acknowledged his team "hardly created anything at all."

"Probably our best part of the game was the last 10 minutes, so that tells you we kept on fighting," Slot said. "But credit to them — good game plan and they worked incredibly hard."

Plymouth became the first club from outside the Premier League to beat a team that is leading the top flight since Wigan eliminated Manchester City in February 2018, statistic supplier Opta said of the FA Cup.

There were great scenes at the final whistle as Plymouth players hugged each other on the field and fans did the same in the stands at Home Park.

Liverpool is an eight-time winner of the FA Cup, most recently in 2022.

Rashford makes Villa debut in win over Spurs Marcus Rashford came off the bench for his Aston Villa debut in a 2-1 win over Tottenham, which has been knocked out of two cup competitions in a week. (AP)

Jil Teichmann wins singles, Anshba-Pridankina claim doubles title in WTA 125 Mumbai Open

MUMBAI, Feb 10: India's Prarthana Thombare and her Dutch partner Arianne Hartono went down to the Russian duo of Amina Anshba and Elena Pridankina in the doubles final, while Jil Teichmann triumphed over Mananchaya Sawangkaew to claim the singles title at the Mumbai Open WTA 125 Series here.

While Teichmann from Switzerland got the better of her Thai opponent Sawangkaew 6-3, 6-4, the pair of Anshba and Pridankina defeated Thombare and Hartono 7-6 (4), 2-6, 10-7.

Thombare and Hartono displayed aggressive intent, racing to a 4-2 lead in the first set. However, the Russian duo, led by a determined Pridankina, mounted a fierce comeback and forced the set into a tiebreak. Despite their valiant efforts, Thombare and Hartono narrowly lost the tiebreak, conceding the first set 6-7.

Undeterred, Thombare and Hartono regrouped in the second set and levelled the match by taking the second set convincingly 6-2.

In the final set, Thombare and Hartono

initially held a 5-3 advantage and seemed poised for victory.

However, the Russian duo dug deep, clawing their way back into the match and clinched the deciding tiebreaker 10-7.

The former world No 21 Teichmann was in complete control of the match and walked away with the winning prize and trophy. She also got into the top 100 WTA rankings.

Teichmann and Sawangkaew went toe-to-toe in the opening three games of the first set. The Swiss player was leading the set 2-1 after which she used the momentum to her

advantage and claimed the next four games on the trot.

Despite her efforts and swift movement across the court, Sawangkaew couldn't match the speed of her opponent's variation in shots. She tried to make a comeback, winning two games in the end but Teichmann claimed the first set 6-3.

After six games, the scores in the second set stood at 3-3 with both players matching their strides. Teichmann was dragging the rallies longer to tire Sawangkaew out and forced her into making errors. (PTI)

Spanish defender Sergio Ramos says he's in Mexico to win more trophies

MEXICO CITY, Feb 10: The chance to win more trophies and play at the next edition of the FIFA Club World Cup convinced Spanish defender Sergio Ramos to sign a one-year deal with Monterrey of Liga MX in Mexico. Ramos, who will turn 39 in March, was introduced by the club on Sunday.

"I'm not tired of winning, but I did not come here to talk about my accomplishments," Ramos said at a press conference in Monterrey, northeastern Mexico. "I've never been here, I want to leave a legacy in Mexico, I'm not here to travel, I'm here to try to win new titles."

Commonly known as Rayados, Monterrey is one of the most economically powerful clubs in the country.

It's one of three Mexican teams that will participate in the expanded Club World Cup which is set to be played in the U.S. next summer. The other two are León and Pachuca.

As well as the domestic league, Monterrey is also competing in the CONCACAF Champions Cup.

"This team (has) a huge growth margin, they are going to play local and international tournaments," Ramos said. "It's a good moment to make yourself noticed." He added "it was an easy decision to take."

Serial winner Ramos, part of Spain's World Cup-winning team in 2010, has not played an official match since May of last year when he was playing for Sevilla in the Spanish league.

He's not worried about the challenge ahead. "In soccer the age does not matter, performance matters," Ramos said. "To come here after a long career shows the hunger that I have to keep on winning." Ramos also won Euro 2012 with Spain and five Spanish league titles and four Champions League titles with Real Madrid, where he played for 16 seasons. (AP)

Eagles deny the Chiefs a Super Bowl threepeat with dominant defense in a 40-22 rout

NEW ORLEANS, Feb 10: Yo Philly: Jalen Hurts and Nick Sirianni are world champions.

A ferocious Philadelphia Eagles defense tormented and frustrated Patrick Mahomes while Hurts made all the plays the offense needed.

So much for the Kansas City Chiefs' quest for a Super Bowl threepeat.

It wasn't even close.

Cooper DeJean got a pick-off on his 22nd birthday, Josh Sweat pressured Mahomes all night and the Eagles routed the Chiefs 40-22 on Sunday to secure the franchise's second Super Bowl championship.

Hurts threw for two touchdowns and ran for a score on a tush push to earn Super Bowl MVP honors, and Vic Fangio's defense was so dominant that the Eagles didn't need much from Saquon Barkley.

The game-changing running back finished with 57 yards, breaking Terrell Davis' record for yards rushing in a season,

playoffs included. Hurts threw for 221 yards.

"This is the ultimate team game. You can't be great without the greatness of others. Great performance by everybody — offense, defense, special teams," Sirianni said. "We didn't really ever care what anyone thought about how we won, or their opinions. All we want to do is win."

Hurts has been doubted since he started for Alabama in a national championship game and was benched for Tua Tagovailoa at halftime. Finishing second to Mahomes in MVP voting two years ago didn't quite silence all the detractors. Now, he's hoisted the Vince Lombardi trophy.

Sirianni, who mocked fans chanting "Fire Nick!" during a victory over Cleveland in October and was called a "clown" on national television, also quieted critics by adding a championship ring to a coaching resume that includes the fifth-best winning percentage in league



history. With Donald Trump becoming the first president in office to attend a Super Bowl, the Eagles outplayed Kansas City in

every facet, delighting a raucous pro-Philly crowd that celebrated each score with a familiar rendition of "Fly! Eagles! Fly!"

Even Taylor Swift's presence

couldn't help the Chiefs. They lost for the first time in 10 games this season with the pop superstar in a suite watching boyfriend Travis Kelce, who didn't catch a pass until late in the third quarter.

Not in Kansas City's worst nightmares could its fans have imagined such a lackluster performance. The Chiefs had won three of the previous five Super Bowls, losing 31-9 to Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers four years ago.

Mahomes was 8-0 against Fangio's defenses before the longtime coordinator and former Broncos head coach outcoached Andy Reid, capping his first season with his hometown team. Reid fell to 3-3 in Super Bowls, including a loss with the Eagles.

The Eagles sacked Mahomes six times, the most of his career, including 2 1/2 by Sweat and two by Milton Williams. And they did it without Fangio calling a single blitz. (AP)

Without PV Sindhu, India face uphill task at Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships



QINGDAO (CHINA), Feb 10: Without the services of an injured PV Sindhu, India will face an uphill task in pursuit of an elusive gold medal at the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships which get underway here on Tuesday.

India hope to improve on their bronze medal finish from the previous edition where Sindhu played a key role in Dubai two years ago. Her absence this year due to an injury will be a significant setback as the team embarks on its campaign in the prestigious biennial event.

Sindhu sustained a hamstring injury during a pre-tournament training camp in Guwahati on February 4, forcing her to withdraw from the tournament at the last minute. Her unavailability puts the onus on world No 29 Malvika Bansod to step up in women's singles.

Placed in Group D, India will open their campaign against Macau on Wednesday, followed by a clash with a strong Korean outfit on Thursday. A top-two finish in the group will secure a spot in the quarterfinals, and while India is likely to progress to the last eight, advancing further will require exceptional performances from the squad.

While India have never won the gold at the Asia Mixed Team Championships, they did secure mixed team gold and silver at the Commonwealth Games in 2018 and 2022.

India have had notable success in recent team events, including their first-ever Thomas Cup gold in 2022, the 2024 Badminton Asia Team Championships silver in Malaysia, and a historic men's silver at the Hangzhou Asian Games.

The team features many key players

from those victories, including HS Prannoy, Lakshya Sen, Ashwini Ponnappa, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, and Chirag Shetty, with all eyes on them to put up an inspired performance.

While Satwik and Chirag have been consistent with semifinal finishes at the Malaysia Open and India Open, Prannoy has been troubled by niggles after returning to action following the Olympics, where he was affected by a pre-tournament chikungunya bout. Syed Modi champion Lakshya, on the other hand, has endured a few first-round exits this season and will need to regain his form quickly.

As expectations will be high for the men's singles and men's doubles, India also boasts strength in women's doubles, with Gayatri Gopichand and Treasa Jolly repeatedly showcasing their skills. The duo recently broke into the

world's top 10 on the back of their maiden super 300 title run at Lucknow and qualifying at the BWF World Tour event last year.

Adding to the experience is Ponnappa, who competed at the Paris Olympics alongside young Tanisha Crasto. The duo won the Guwahati Masters Super 100 last December and will look to put up a good show here.

The mixed doubles pair of Sathish Karunakaran and Aadya Varyath will also carry confidence into their first team event, coming off a gold medal at the National Games in Dehradun earlier this month.

In the last three editions of the tournament, China clinched the title in 2023 and 2019 while Japan emerged as champions in the inaugural edition in 2017. The event was not held in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (PTI)

Pakistan are a dangerous side in home conditions, should make Champions Trophy semifinals: Shastri

DUBAI, Feb 10: Armed with a fearsome pace attack and playing in home conditions, hosts Pakistan could be a force to reckon with in the Champions Trophy even though they will miss opener Saim Ayub, reckons former India coach Ravi Shastri.

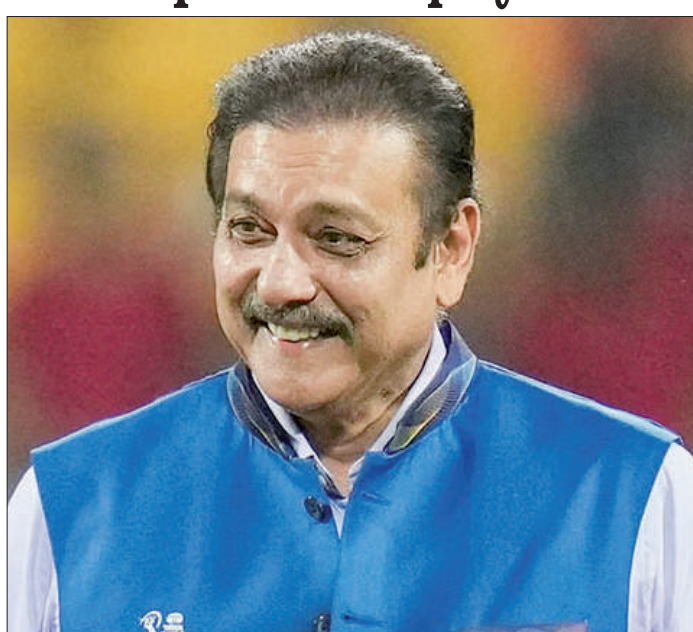
Defending champions Pakistan head into the Champions Trophy riding high on three consecutive ODI series victories over South Africa, Zimbabwe and Australia.

"I think Pakistan are the kind of side that, with the exposure they've had in the last six to eight months in white-ball cricket, have put up some really strong performances, especially in South Africa," Shastri told The ICC Review.

Despite the absence of the injured Ayub, who has become a vital cog in the Pakistan side, Shastri remains confident in the team's depth.

"They've missed Ayub at the top, and he's a crucial player. But Pakistan have enough depth to be dangerous, especially in home conditions. I would say they should qualify for the semi-finals and from there, it's anyone's game."

Shastri is certain that, should



Pakistan make it to the knockout stages, they will be a formidable threat to any team.

"Pakistan are still very, very dangerous, and if they qualify, they'll be doubly more dangerous."

Echoing Shastri's thoughts, Australian legend Ricky Ponting focused on Pakistan's lethal pace

attack that includes Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hasnain.

"I agree with Ravi. Saim Ayub is a high-quality player, and his absence is a massive gap to fill," Ponting said.

"But Pakistan's fast bowling brigade is very, very good. Led by Shaheen Afridi and Naseem Shah,

who've been terrific in recent series, they have the pace and skill to trouble any batting line-up."

Since returning from South Africa, where he notched three consecutive fifties, former skipper Babar Azam's form has dipped. Ponting said his form will be crucial for Pakistan.

"Babar has been a bit up and down in recent years, but if he and (Mohammad) Rizwan can bring their A-games, that's when Pakistan becomes incredibly dangerous," Ponting said.

"They've still got enough high-quality players to beat any team on any given day. If they play well, they'll be right in it."

Ponting also acknowledged the added dimension that playing in front of a home crowd can bring. "The pressure of playing at home can work both ways. It can be a real motivator, especially with the home crowd behind you. That support can sometimes help you cross the line in big moments," Ponting said.

Pakistan will begin their Champions Trophy campaign against New Zealand in Karachi on February 19 before taking on arch rivals India on February 23 in Dubai. (PTI)

Just another day in office, says Rohit but concedes it's not that simple

CUTTACK, Feb 10: It was just another day in office, said a nonchalant India skipper Rohit Sharma after his 32nd ODI century ended a prolonged lean patch but acknowledged that the process of getting back among runs "is quite difficult" even though it "sounds very simple".

Rohit blazed his way to a 90-ball 119 with 12 fours and seven sixes to set up India's four-wicket win over England in the second ODI here on Sunday, giving the hosts an unsailable 2-0 lead in the three-match affair.

"...when people have played for a number of years and scored so many runs over the years...that means something," Rohit said in a video shared by BCCI.

"I've played this game for a long time now and I understand what is required of me. So, it's just about going out there and doing your things and this was, what I did today was, one of my things."

Rohit's 119 was his first century in ODIs since October 2023, a period during which the opening batter hit five fifties in 13 matches. Across formats, this was his first century since March 2024 when he hit 104 against England at Dharamsala.

"In my mind, it was just about doing things that I do, try and bat the way I do. I've been here long



enough... one or two knocks is not going to change my mind and the way I bat. But (it was) just another day in the office," the 37-year-old said.

Rohit, however, admitted that regaining form despite knowing the methods and ways, is not always easy.

"When you have scored so many, you have done something, right? You just need to get back to that mindset of you know, how to get runs," he said.

"(It) sounds very simple, but it is quite difficult. But in my mind, it was just about enjoying and that is what we play the sport for, to enjoy the game more than anything else," he explained.

Rohit's lean patch, particularly in Tests since October 2024 wherein he crossed fifty only once in eight games against Bangladesh, New

Zealand and Australia, led to calls for the India stalwart to contemplate his future.

The usually affable Mumbai-based batsman has been combative in his response to such suggestions. After Sunday's blitzkrieg too, he asserted that his only goal is to perform on the field and ignore the noise on the periphery.

"We need to do our job, okay? Our job is to go out there and play the game. As long as you go there and you know that today when you go to bed, you know that you've given your best, that is what matters," he said.

"Every time I walk onto the pitch, walk on to play the game, I want to try and do well. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it may not happen. As long as I am clear what I want to do, that's all that matters. Nothing else matters," he added. (PTI)

If even Rohit Sharma can be under pressure, we should be easier on ourselves: Buttler



Rohit's adaptability and said watching a player of his stature in action was a learning experience.

"He really showed (that) in this day and age, in the modern sort of way of playing 50-over cricket, it's very dynamic, very aggressive. He scored at a rate just confirms really that the way we want to play is the right way that you have to play to try and win games in cricket," Buttler said.

"The way Rohit played showed that the way we want to play our cricket is the way, the correct way to play cricket."

Once again, England got off to a flier scoring 75 for no loss in first 10 overs with Ben Duckett and Phil Salt making the most of the powerplay, before Indian spinners led by Ravindra Jadeja's three-wicket haul seized the momentum. Buttler felt England fell short of a match-winning total.

"We, again, started really well. I thought Duckett and Salt played the powerplay brilliantly and got in some nice positions. We just needed one or two of us to sort of really kick on and play a real innings of note and maybe push our score up to 330-350 kind of territory," Buttler said.

"But some positives (are) there, we've been making steps again in the right direction, but probably didn't (put), not the perfect, complete performance with the bat. Credit to Rohit Sharma. I thought he played a fantastic knock. He's set the standard in ODI cricket for a while and another great innings today," he added.

Despite the defeat, Buttler counted on the positives in England's approach and emphasised the importance of learning from such moments.

"Any time you don't win games in cricket, that tends to be what happens. You just weren't quite good enough for long enough. In the cycle of the team, there's a few players who are just gaining experience and days like today are great lessons and that's what you want."

"You've got to accelerate that learning and keep pushing the guys in the right direction. Like I say, we're doing some things right. You always want to do some things better," he added. (PTI)

After rare loss, Gukesh eyes comeback against Caruana

HAMBURG (GERMANY), Feb 10: World champion D Gukesh will have his task cut out as he looks to stage a comeback against Fabiano Caruana of the USA in the Freestyle Grand Slam chess tournament here.

Gukesh suffered a rare setback in normal time control on Sunday, losing to Caruana in the first game of the quarterfinals.

The Indian is now under pressure to perform with his black pieces and draw level with Caruana who has been dreaming to be a world champion for a few years now.

The freestyle chess is built around 960 random positions shifting the initial position of the pieces from the base rank while the pawns remain intact.

The legendary Bobby Fischer was the first to advocate freestyle chess, and given the support the new format has received, it could well be the future of the sport.

Gukesh will have to fight hard, as his opening choices have come under scrutiny already while a whole new repertoire needs to be built. Caruana was almost staring at a defeat in the opening

game of the quarters but will be looking at the return game with a lot of enthusiasm.

In the first game of the quarters, Gukesh was at the top of his game for the major part, improvising when it was necessary but the Indian failed to find a queen sacrifice in the latter stages of the middle game, and that cost him dearly.

As it happened in the game, Caruana was quick to take charge of the situation and did not give anything back.

Meanwhile, Magnus Carlsen, the main protagonist behind the tour, continued from where he left and scored a fine win over Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan.

Alireza Firouzja of France lost to Vincent Keymer of Germany in the opener, and the irony is that the latter was chosen to be his first round opponent by the winner of the qualifier event.

In the other game of the quarters, Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan played out a draw with Hikaru Nakamura while in the inconsequential ninth place decider, American Levon Aronian finally won his first game at the expense of Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia. (PTI)

Rahul coming below Axar raises eyebrows, where does it leave Pant?

NEW DELHI, Feb 10: Towards the end of the second ODI between India and England in Cuttack, the broadcaster's camera briefly panned to Rishabh Pant sitting in the dug-out, wearing the sleeveless green fluorescent bib which is mandatory for the reserves.

On the field, it was KL Rahul batting at No.6, an unusually low position for the man who has been preferred over Pant.

Ravi Shastri, who was on air, didn't hold back while talking about what he felt about a specialist top-order batter like Rahul coming in at No.6 instead of bowling all-rounder Axar Patel, who was promoted to No.5 during the first two games.

Many in Indian cricket shared Shastri's sentiments and are also wondering where does it leave an explosive game-changer like Pant if the management remains firm on the left-right combination formula to promote Axar above Rahul.

If ends justify the means, then head coach Gautam Gambhir stood vindicated after Axar scored 52 and 41 not out in the first two games even though he came in at a time when India were well on course for victory.

"India would be thinking about the composition in the next game and Champions Trophy. There is Rishabh Pant sitting on the bench. There are certain questions to answer," Shastri said on air for host broadcasters Star Sports.

Pant's 871 runs at an average of just over 33 in 31 ODIs aren't exactly great numbers but cricket metrics over the years have changed. One also has to look at the kind of



impact a player can make during certain passages of play.

If Rahul is being seen as someone, who will come to bat after 30th or the 35th over in ODIs, there is every chance that Pant might make more impact than him.

Rahul has had four knocks at No. 6 in which his tally is 42 runs off 46 balls. His highest score is 31. Pant has tallied 45 runs in two games. He also faced 46 balls in these two games with 28 being his highest score.

Also, one has to wonder whether Rahul's batting capabilities are being fully utilised at

No.6.

While Indian bowlers haven't let England off the hook in both ODIs, Rahul the batter, who scored more than 500 runs in the 2023 ODI World Cup at No. 5, is coming at a position which is perhaps not suited to his style of play.

"Gautam always looks at team's requirements and he finds KL suitable at No.6 as it helps him keep left-right combination intact. Now Axar has scored runs at No.5 and it does leave Pant in a tricky place.

"It will be tough to slot him in if this is the

60 swimmers compete for mandal-level selection in Sualkuchi

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 10: As part of the Assam government's initiative, 'Khel Maharan 2', a mandal-level swimming competition was held on Monday at the Sualkuchi Swimming Training Centre. A total of 60 swimmers from Kamrup, Baksa, Tamulpur, and Nalbari districts participated in the competition.

The event was inaugurated at 10 am by Kamrup District Commissioner Dev Kumar Mishra. Bhaskar Ranjan Das, Secretary of the Assam Swimming Association, appreciated the Chief Minister's initiative to prioritise water sports. He expressed confidence that through "Khel Maharan", hidden talents from rural areas would be discovered and groomed into national and international-level players.

The event was attended by Dr. Kartik Medhi, Executive President of the Kamrup District Sports Association, Mukuteswar Goswami, Publicity Secretary of the Assam Swimming Association and Secretary of the Kamrup District Swimming Association, District Sports Officer Satyabrata Gogoi, along with several renowned athletes.

The selection process was conducted under the supervision of the District Sports Officer's office, with Panjaj Bhargali, Mukuteswar Goswami (representative of the Assam Swimming Association), Babul Gurung, and Aminesh Haloi overseeing the proceedings. The winning players from the four participating districts have been selected for the next stage.

batting combination they are looking at," a former India player, who has seen Gambhir's tactical moves from close quarters, told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

What has baffled many is how can Rahul, who has given his best at No. 5 and the opening slot in ODIs, be batting below a bowling all-rounder.

"KL has been outstanding at No.5 for India. He scored nearly 1300 runs (1259) and enjoys a strike-rate of near 100 (95.45) with an average close to 60. These are exceptional numbers and why do you want to reinvent the wheel?" a livid former national selector questioned the experiment.

But then the counter argument could be that Axar's elevation has yielded the desired results. It's another matter that nobody yet knows whether Axar is a good enough candidate to be sent on days when India could be 20 for 3.

So why sent Rahul only in challenging conditions and not allow him to also get some easy runs like Axar?

Another former India player, who has worked with Gambhir said that come what may, the former opener will play eight batters irrespective of format.

"If you want batting till No. 8, you have got to play multi-skilled players and if Axar is playing then Pant can't play. And Axar will play in these conditions.

"Hence not just it is an unfortunate situation for Pant, who is not finding a slot in the side, it is also going to be tough for Rahul as his game isn't suited for four drop," he said. (PTI)