

6 WORLD

- Hamas returns bodies of 4 Israeli hostages
- Yoon appears in 2 different S Korean courts while defending his martial law decree

8 NATION

- UGC draft regulations will bring higher education: Kerala CM
- UP budget lacks emphasis on public welfare: Mayawati

26 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

www.thehillstimes.in

THE HILLS TIMES

Voiced of the hills people

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Vol. No. XXVI Issue No. 041 RNI-ASSEN/2000/12862 DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2025 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

Tauqeer Sheikh visited India 18 times, Himanta tells Assembly



GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that the preliminary investigation has found that Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, who is allegedly linked to Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's British wife, has visited India 18 times to date.

During a discussion on Motion of Thanks on the governor's speech, Sarma also claimed that the initial information in the case is "very fatal" for the Congress and will have a "huge impact" on the politics of Assam.

"Within three days, the Assam Police SIT on the case found that Ali Tauqeer Sheikh visited India 18 times. Now, we will know who invited and hosted him during those visits," he added.

The CM also stated he knows informally that the preliminary investigation has revealed some startling facts, the impact of which will be huge on Assam politics.

"As per the initial information, the facts are very fatal for the Congress party. As a responsible person standing inside the assembly, I am saying this. I promise to the Assam Assembly that we will break the network of Ali Sheikh. Give us three months and we will inform everything in the August session," he added.

Sarma said the investigation findings will put some people in an indefensible position.

"Sheikh apparently works in a climate action group. But his

tweets and social media activities are on Assam immigrants. These are an attempt to interfere in India's internal affairs," he added.

The Assam chief minister and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, the Deputy Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha, over his wife Elizabeth Colburn's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency ISI.

The Assam Police on Monday constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe a case against the Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh for his social media comments on Assam and India's internal affairs.

Sheikh, an advisor to the Pakistan Planning Commission and a former colleague of Colburn, was charged under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

After much hue and cry over Gogoi's wife's alleged ISI links, the Assam cabinet on Sunday decided not to register any case against the parliamentarian or his British spouse but instructed the DGP to file an FIR against the Pakistani national.

The state govt also announced that it will write to the Centre for probing Colburn's participation in Lok Sabha campaigns in the erstwhile Kaliabor constituency, which was won by the Congress MP twice, despite being a British citizen. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM assures to beef up security of Dhubri MP Rokibul, son come under attack in Nagaon dist

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 20: Congress Dhubri Lok Sabha MP Rokibul Hussain and his personal security officers were attacked by unidentified miscreants at New Bazar in Rupahihat, Assam's Nagaon district, on Thursday.

The incident occurred when Hussain and his son, Tanzil Hossain, were on their way to attend a party meeting at Puthikhaiti in the district.

"A group of unidentified miscreants with their faces covered attacked Hussain, his son Tanzil Hossain, and his security personnel. The miscreants used cricket bats and sticks to assault them. Hussain's vehicle was also damaged in the sudden attack," said eyewitnesses.

They further stated that the security personnel accompanying Hussain fired in the air to disperse the attackers. However, the miscreants managed to snatch the keys of the vehicle, leaving Hussain and his team stranded.

"The gang of miscreants was so ferocious that they even leaped at the security guards and beat them up," they added. Hussain claimed that the attack was pre-planned and that he had informed the district administration and the police about the possibility of such an incident.

He demanded immediate action against the perpe-

trators and called for the resignation of the Home Minister. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) strongly condemned the attack.

Making a statement in the Assembly, the Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the crowd had tried to prevent Hussain from entering the village when his PSO opened fire.

Despite the attack, the MP proceeded to the scheduled meeting venue, where the event was conducted in the presence of the district Superintendent of Police, he added.

The chief minister further assured that Hussain's security would be beefed up while he remains in the district, particularly in Samaguri and Rupohihat.

Director General of Police (DGP) Harmeet Singh told reporters that the situation was under control and that the SP concerned was investigating the incident.

"We will share further details as the investigation progresses," he said. The MP was unharmed, but two of his PSOs sustained minor injuries and are receiving necessary medical treatment, Singh added.

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) President Bhupen Borah condemned the attack, calling it a failure of the Chief Minister, who also holds the Home portfolio, in maintaining (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Shah asks NE insurgents to surrender



NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday appealed to insurgents in the Northeast to lay down their arms and join the mainstream saying their participation in India's development journey is most welcome.

Participating in the 'Unity Utsav

lay down the arms and join the mainstream. Your participation in India's development journey is welcome," he said.

The home minister said there has been 70 per cent reduction in violence in the Northeast in the last five years, 70 per cent less casualties in security forces and 85 per cent less deaths among civilians.

He said over 10,000 insurgents have surrendered in the last five years, 12 peace accords were signed with different outfits and two border agreements were also signed among the states.

"The Northeast wants peace, Northeast wants development, Northeast wants to work as an integral part of India," he said.

The home minister said if the youth of the Northeast put forward two steps to be part of India's development process, the whole country will put forward four steps with open heart to welcome them. "Every part (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM to be in Assam for 2 days from Feb 24 for investment summit, dance event: CM

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will reach Assam on a two-day visit from February 24 to attend a world record making dance event and inaugurate a business summit, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said here on Thursday.

The Prime Minister will arrive on Monday afternoon and attend the Jhumoi dance by artistes of the tea tribe community at the Sarusajai Stadium.

Altogether 8,000 people will take part in the 'Jhumoi Binadini', an attempt to set a world record for the largest participants in a Jhumoi dance event.

Modi will then proceed to the infrastructure and investment summit site at the Veterinary College

Field at Khanapara to visit a related exhibition, the chief minister said at a press conference.

One gallery there will display exhibits highlighting the traditional industries of the state, titled 'Pride of Assam', while the other one - 'Future of Assam' - will reflect the modern industries and infrastructure development, Sarma said.

The Prime Minister was scheduled to spend around 45 minutes at the galleries on Monday, Sarma added. On Tuesday, the PM will inaugurate the summit scheduled to be attended by industrialists such as Mukesh Ambani, Gautam Adani, Anil Agarwal, Prashant Ruia and Sajjan Jindal along with entrepreneurs from Assam. Union ministers (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Attacks on minorities in B'desh did not take place: BGB DG

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Attacks on minorities in Bangladesh after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government did not happen, the chief of that country's border guarding force claimed on Thursday as he termed reports in this regard as "exaggerated".

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) director general Maj Gen Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui also said "many new issues" under the common heads were discussed during his high-level talks with BSF DG Daljit Singh Chawdhary here.

Siddiqui, while speaking to reporters during a joint press conference with Chawdhary, asserted that authorities of his country took steps for the protection of the minorities as he gave example of his force "personally" extending security cover to Durga Puja pandals within 8 km of their jurisdiction along the international border. This was the first high-level meeting of the two forces after the regime change in Bangladesh in August last year.

The BGB DG also said they raised "objections" and "flagged a number of cases" during the bi-annual talks DG-level with regard to the fencing being done by India along the 150 yards of the IB and has requested for a "joint inspection" before the work is done.

"The attacks on minorities in the recent past, I would say, that this is an exaggeration and to be honest

such attacks on minorities per se did not happen."

"The substantiation for this is the recently held Durga Puja which was one of the most peacefully organised and arranged Hindu festival. The law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh were very precisely and strictly tasked by the government so that the Hindu community is able to perform... (the rituals)," the BGB chief said.

He said they got "several requests (from minority community), sometimes without any fear or any threat and even when there was nothing substantial (vis-avis threats against minorities), we provided security."

Siddiqui said such reports were more in the media, "tempting" the politicians to comment. There were such instances during the initial couple of months after August 5 (fall of Hasina government in 2024) but now it is not like that, he said.

Asked if there were any changes in the agenda points from both sides, post the regime change in Bangladesh, the BGB DG said while "the broad heads might be the same but the inner text, contextual differences... (had changes) and there were many new issues under the common broadheads..."

The BSF chief, however, said that the agenda points "more or less were the same with few changes here and there" as the Indo-Bangla (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Rekha Gupta is Delhi's new CM

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Debutant legislator Rekha Gupta was sworn in as Delhi chief minister along with six ministers on Thursday in a grand show of strength full of colour and spectacle to mark the BJP's return to power in the city after more than 26 years.

The ceremony at the sprawling Ramlika Ground was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the top BJP brass and NDA leaders. Gupta is Delhi's fourth woman chief minister after her party's Sushma Swaraj, the Congress' Sheila Dikshit and AAP's Atishi. The 50-year-old MLA from Shalimar Bagh, who took charge of her office at the Delhi Secretariat in the afternoon, is also the only woman in the NDA team of chief ministers and the second in the country after TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal.

The former student leader presides over an all-male cabinet that includes giant slayer Parvesh Verma, who defeated Arvind Kejriwal in the elections, Hindutva poster boy Kapil Mishra and the BJP's Sikh face Manjinder Singh Sirsa. Besides, Ashish Sood, Ravinder Indraj Singh and Pankaj Singh were also administered the oath of office by Lt Governor V K Saxena. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The final day of the festival featured the concluding ceremony at Singmirjeng stage

Curtains fall on 51st Karbi Youth Festival at Taralango



DIPHU, Feb 20: The mega cultural extravaganza -- 51st Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) -- concluded at in Diphu's Taralango on Wednesday evening.

It began on February 15, showcased the rich culture and traditions of the Karbi community

living in the hill districts of Assam.

Organised by the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), the festival featured a blend of age-old traditions and modern performances, including folk songs, dances, traditional games and sports, fashion shows, rock contests, Miss and Mr. KYF competitions, an art and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

It can lead to severe neurological consequences, including permanent brain injury

WHO identifies encephalitis as increasing global threat, matter of urgent public health priority

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: The World Health Organization and Encephalitis International have launched a critical Technical Brief on encephalitis which identified the infectious and autoimmune disease as an increasing global threat, making it an urgent public health priority.

The Technical Brief outlines the worldwide burden of encephalitis, key actions required to improve prevention, data collection and surveillance, diagnostics and treatment, aftercare and awareness, and research innovation.

"Encephalitis is an increasing global threat. Without urgent attention and investment, we will see more needless deaths and disabilities from the condition," said Dr Ava Easton, the chief executive of



Encephalitis International.

Encephalitis, caused by infectious and autoimmune factors, is an often-deadly brain inflammation that can affect anyone regardless of age, sex or ethnicity. It can lead to severe neurological consequences, including permanent brain injury.

It arises either from an infection invading the brain, such as Japanese Encephalitis and Scrub Typhus which are more prevalent in India or from the immune system mistakenly attacking the brain.

According to a survey in 2024, as many as 1,548 Japanese Encephalitis cases were reported from 24 states and Union Territories in the country.

WHO and Encephalitis International urged policymakers, public health professionals, healthcare providers, and researchers to implement its recommendations to save lives and reduce disability associated with encephalitis.

"WHO's recognition of encephalitis as a growing global threat marks a pivotal moment. We must act decisively to improve prevention, diagnosis, and care for those affected. Encephalitis disproportionately affects individuals in low-to-middle-income countries, where healthcare resources are often limited," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Modi govt putting India's national security, territorial integrity at risk: Kcharge

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday hit out at the Modi government over reports that China was settling 90 new villages along the Arunachal Pradesh border and accused it of putting India's national security, territorial integrity and sovereignty at risk.

In a post on X, Kharge alleged that the priorities of the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi were "PR stunts" and "false advertisements" and "not national security".

"Narendra Modi ji, you are adopting the policy of giving a 'red salute' to China instead of showing 'red eyes'. India's national security, territorial sovereignty and integrity are paramount, the Modi government is putting it at risk," he said in his post in Hindi.

"Our allegation is made with great responsibility and is based on facts. China has started settling 90

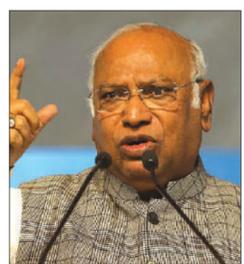
new villages on the Arunachal border. Earlier, China had settled 628 such villages on our border, according to newspapers.

"The Modi government promotes the 'Vibrant Villages Programme' on the border a lot, you have exaggerated it in Parliament. But the truth is that 90% of the funds of the 'Vibrant Villages Programme' have not been spent in the last two years. This scheme was launched in February 2023 and out of the Rs 4,800 crore allocated fund, only Rs 509 crore has been spent," he said.

The Congress chief said that in Himachal Pradesh, where 75 villages need to be improved, the Modi government at the Centre has given almost no funds for it.

Kharge claimed that in December 2024, China announced plans to build the 'world's largest dam' on the Brahmaputra River, which could prove disastrous for our national security, environment and the north-eastern states.

The Brahmaputra River, he said, accounts for 30 per cent of India's freshwater resources, making its flow vital to India. The Congress president said according to a reply by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in the Rajya Sabha in 2022, your government said that "in March (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Sensex, Nifty fall for 3rd day on selling in blue-chips, broader markets rebound

MUMBAI, Feb 20: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined for the third day on Thursday as fresh tariff threats, weak Asian markets and foreign fund outflows hurt investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 203.22 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 75,735.96. During the day, it tanked 476.17 points or 0.62 per cent to 75,463.01.

The NSE Nifty dipped 19.75 points or 0.09 per cent to 22,913.15.

Selling in frontline stocks HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, ITC and Maruti dragged down the key indices. Broader markets, however, bucked the trend with midcap and smallcap indices gaining more than 1 per cent.

From the Sensex pack, HDFC Bank fell the most by 2.35 per cent. Maruti, Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, ITC, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Bajaj Finance were among the major laggards.

NTPC, Adani Ports, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel and Infosys Bank were among the gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹



1,881.30 crore on Wednesday after a day's breather, according to exchange data.

"Domestic equity indices experienced minor losses as rising concerns over potential US tariffs on Indian goods led to capital outflows. Additionally, the proposed trade policy is expected to exert inflationary pressures, with the latest Fed Minutes indicating that an interest rate cut may be delayed," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

"Benchmark indices closed slightly lower on expiry day after a rangebound and volatile session. The FOMC minutes hinted that the US Federal Reserve might pause rate cuts due to inflation concerns," Satish Chandra Aluri, Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Among BSE sectoral indices, bankex dropped 0.50 per cent, followed by financial services (0.25 per cent), BSE Focused IT (0.10 per cent) and FMCG (0.04 per cent). Power jumped the most 2.19

per cent, followed by utilities (2.17 per cent), metal (2.02 per cent), services (1.86 per cent), oil & gas (1.66 per cent) and industrials (1.55 per cent).

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.32 per cent and midcap index climbed 1.18 per cent.

"Weak Asian market cues kept the mood sluggish with a negative bias through the session in the domestic market as investors continue to trade with caution. FIIs exiting Indian equities in droves over past few months have been making investors jittery, thus leading to risk averseness," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Among Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the negative territory.

European markets were trading mostly higher, US markets ended in positive territory on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude went up 0.08 per cent to USD 76.10 a barrel.

In the three straight days to Thursday, Sensex dipped 260 points while Nifty skidded 46 points. (PTI)

PNB slashes retail loans rates by 25 bps



NEW DELHI, Feb 20: State-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) on Thursday announced reduction in interest rates by up to 25 basis points on retail loans, including housing and auto loans, following the RBI rate cut.

The revised rates apply to a wide range of products, including home loans, car loans, education and personal loans, ensuring that customers continue to receive diverse financing options, PNB said in a statement.

After a gap of five years, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reduced the repo rate, the rate at which banks borrow from the central bank, by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent on February 7.

Following the rate cut, PNB has revised the home loan rate to 8.15 per cent under various schemes. Customers can benefit from a complete waiver of upfront processing fees and documentation charges till March 31, 2025, it said.

The traditional home loan scheme offers rate of interest starting from 8.15 per cent per annum with an EMI of Rs 744 per lakh, it said.

With regard to auto loan, it said, for financing both new and used cars, the rate starts from 8.50 per cent per annum with EMIs as low as ₹ 1,240 per lakh.

To promote sustainable mobility, PNB offers a 0.05 per cent concession in rate starting from 8.50 per cent per annum and starting EMI of Rs 1,240 per lakh.

Customers can benefit from a longer repayment tenure of up to 120 months and enjoy 100 per cent financing of the ex-showroom price, it said.

In the case of education loans, the minimum card rate has been reduced to 7.85 per cent per annum.

Customers can avail personal loan up to ₹ 20 lakh through a seamless digital process, eliminating the need for branch visits or paperwork, it said, adding the revised rate starts from 11.25 per cent.

The new rates are effective from February 10, PNB said. Earlier this month, State Bank of India (SBI) had slashed interest rate on retail loans including housing by 25 basis point in alignment with RBI policy rate reduction. (PTI)

Vedanta gets demerger nod; 99.99pc shareholders, 99.95pc lenders support move

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Vedanta Ltd on Thursday said its shareholders and lenders have approved the splitting of the metals to oil conglomerate into five independent, sector-focused entities.

In a stock exchange filing, Vedanta said 99.99 per cent of shareholders who voted for the demerger scheme, supported the move.

Parallely, 99.59 per cent of the secured creditors, and 99.95 per cent of unsecured creditors of Vedanta Ltd voted in favour of the demerger.

Mining tycoon Anil Agarwal launched the plan to overhaul the business in 2023 after failing to take Vedanta private in 2020.

The five entities being created from the split would include Vedanta Ltd, which would house the company's base metals.

According to Vedanta's demerger scheme, every Vedanta shareholder will receive 1 additional share in each of the 4 newly demerged companies on the completion of the demerger process.

The other companies that will be created out of the demerger are Vedanta Aluminium, one of the world's largest producers of aluminium; Vedanta Oil & Gas, India's largest private-sector crude oil producer; Vedanta Power, one of India's largest generators of power; Vedanta Iron and Steel - a company with a highly scalable ferrous portfolio; and Vedanta Limited which will include the world's second largest integrated zinc producer and third largest silver producer in Hindustan Zinc.

Vedanta Ltd will also act as an incubator for new businesses, including Vedanta's technology verticals.

Of the 391.03 crore shares of the company, 324.58 crore or 83 per cent, voted on the demerger scheme. Of these, all but 42,186 shares were polled in favour

of the demerger, according to the filing.

As per Vedanta's demerger scheme, the demerger will create five independent companies of a global scale focussed on the mining, production and/or supply of aluminium, iron-ore, copper, oil & gas, and on generation and distribution of power.

It will enable greater focus of the Vedanta management on the relevant businesses thereby allowing further streamlining of operations and more efficient usage of assets and leveraging of opportunities.

Similarly, the demerger scheme has emphasised that over time, each of the independent companies can attract different sets of investors, strategic partners, lenders, and other stakeholders enabling deeper collaboration and expansion in these specific companies without committing the existing organisation in its entirety.

The demerger will enable investors to separately hold investments in businesses with different investment characteristics and market potential thereby allowing them to select investments which best suit their investment strategies and risk profiles.

As per Vedanta's demerger scheme, it will also enable focused and sharper capital market access (debt and equity), thereby unlocking the value of the demerged entities.

Vedanta Ltd currently operates a diversified portfolio with interests in metals, mining, oil and gas, power generation, and other emerging sectors.

As listed companies have to seek various approvals under relevant sectoral and capital market regulations, the proposed demerger scheme will remain subject to receipt of other applicable statutory, government and regulatory approvals, including inter alia from the National Company Law Tribunal. (PTI)

India needs at least 20,000 pilots in coming years: Civil Aviation Minister

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu on Thursday said India will need at least 20,000 pilots in the coming years to meet the rising air-travel demand in the country -- one of the world's fastest growing aviation markets.

Addressing a gathering at the UDAAN Bhawan here following the launch of Electronic Personnel License (EPL) for pilots, the Minister said aviation has always been the backbone of connectivity, economic growth, and technological advancements.

He said the country will have 50 more airports in the next five years. The number of airports has doubled to 157 in the last 10 years.

"We are looking at a number which is very ambitious... if you look at the airline sector, we have orders of up to 1,700 planes that are about to come into the Indian fleet. And with so much growth that we are going to see in the coming days, there is going to be a need for at least 20,000 pilots in



the near future," Naidu said. Naidu further said his ministry is using technology in a big way.

"With the launch of EPL, we are ensuring that the pilots can now access their licenses with greater ease and efficiency. This initiative also aligns with the government of India's mission of Digital India, reinforcing our dedication on leveraging technology for the benefit of the citizens and the industry at large," he said. With the launch, India has become the second country in the world to implement EPL for flight crew. China has already implemented such a facility.

Implementation of Electronic Personnel License (EPL) by Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) aligns with the government's Ease of Doing Business and Digital India Initiative.

The adoption of EPL cements India's position as a leader in aviation innovation, the DGCA said.

The step aligns with the roadmap of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for modern aviation governance and reflects the nation's readiness to embrace the future.

Pilots can now securely access their licenses anytime via the eGCA app, with seamless real-time verification for global agencies, the Minister said in a post on social media platform 'X'.

"This is a game-changer for Indian aviation -- enhancing safety, interoperability, and aligning us with global best practices," the post said. Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlungmang Vualnam and Director-General (DG) of DGCA Faiz Ahmed Kidwai were also present on the occasion. (PTI)

India's third-largest economy showing signs of moderation. As per the government's advance estimates, the economy is expected to grow at 6.4 per cent in the current financial year.

Prior to taking over as CEA, Nageswaran worked as an author, teacher and consultant. He has also been a part-time member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister from 2019 to 2021.

Besides, he has taught at several business schools and institutes of management in India and Singapore and has published extensively. Nageswaran holds a Post-Graduate Diploma in Man-

agement (MBA) degree from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He obtained a doctoral degree in Finance from the University of Massachusetts in 1994 for his work on the empirical behaviour of exchange rates.

He was the Dean of the IFMR Graduate School of Business and a distinguished Visiting Professor of Economics at Krea University.

Nageswaran helped co-found the Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy and helped launch the first impact investment fund of the Avishkaar Group in 2001. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Tauqeer Sheikh visited

The CM on Tuesday said he is not on a "witch hunt" drive over the controversy surrounding Colburn's alleged links with ISI and said that he is driven by only national security, which cannot be compromised.

Earlier, Sarma had softened his stand against Gogoi and said on Sunday that the opposition leader may be "trapped or blackmailed" in the larger "anti-India" conspiracy and expressed sympathy for him.

The BJP leader had last week targeted the Assam MP over the issue, demanding answers regarding the allegations of ISI links, "leading young individuals to the Pakistan embassy for brainwashing and radicalisation, and the refusal to take Indian citizenship for the past 12 years", referring to Colburn's nationality status.

He had also alleged that the deputy leader of Congress in Lok Sabha had raised questions in Parliament on sensitive defence matters after his marriage to the British citizen, a charge termed by the opposition leader as a "false accusation". The BJP had also accused Gogoi's wife of having links with Pakistan and the ISI, a charge rejected by the Congress leader as "laughable and entertaining".

Gogoi on Friday said that the BJP went to extreme steps to defame him and his family and asserted that he would be taking appropriate legal action, while he penned a letter in Assamese addressed to his wife and shared it as a post on Facebook on Saturday, assuring her that truth shall prevail. (PTI)

Rokibul, son come under attack

law and order in the state. "If no action is taken against the attackers, it will prove that Assam is under 'jungle raj,' and the people will be forced to acknowledge that the police have become a tool in the hands of the BJP," he said.

Borah alleged that several such attacks on Congress leaders and workers had taken place under the current regime, but no action had been taken against the perpetrators so far.

The Congress leader demanded the immediate arrest of those involved in the attack and adequate security for the MP, claiming that his life was under threat.

"If the CM fails to take any action, we will be forced to take strong steps," he warned.

Hussain won the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat last year by a record margin of over 10 lakh votes.

His son had contested the bypoll for the Samaguri Assembly constituency—represented by Hussain for five terms—but lost to BJP candidate Diplu Ranjan Sarma.

Several incidents of violence were reported in the constituency and nearby areas in the run-up to the by-polls in November last year. (With PTI Inputs)

Shah asks NE insurgents

of the country has a special place for the Northeast in their hearts," he said. Shah said the Northeast has rich tradition and rich cultural heritage for which the country is proud of. Without the rich cultural heritage of the Northeast, India is incomplete, he said.

"Unity in diversity is our strength," he said and highlighted that the Northeast has over 220 different communities, over 160 tribes, over 200 languages and dialects, over 50 unique festivals, over 30 classified traditional dance forms and over 100 different cuisines.

Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a new dimension to the identity of the Northeast by naming the region, comprising eight states -- Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim -- as 'Ashtalakhshmi'.

"From economic and cultural fields to sports, education, agriculture and entrepreneurship, works have been done to open the doors of unlimited opportunities for the youth of the Northeast in every field," he said.

The home minister said 212 teams and 1,500 students have participated in the event organised by the Assam Rifles.

"I want to congratulate Manipur as most prizes were bagged by students from that state. That is why Prime Minister Modi has decided that the country's first sports university will come up in Manipur," he said. (PTI)

PM to be in Assam for 2 days

S Jaishankar, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Ashwini Vaishnav, Sarbananda Sonowal and Pabitra Margherita will also be present at the summit. Union Road Transport and Highways minister Nitin Gadkari will virtually address a session. Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman will address the valedictory session on Wednesday where two presentations on semiconductors and Numaligarh Refinery's Bio Refinery will be also made, the chief minister said. Representatives of the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other international funding agencies will also be present on the occasion, he added.

The sessions will be held on 200 years of Assam Tea, Vision for Global leadership, MSME, tourism, health, biomanufacturing and biofoundries, startup ecosystem, agarwood processing, advancing semiconductor horizons and other sectors. The chief minister said that the summit was expected to bring in investments to the tune of Rs one lakh crore and 'we have received 1,512 requests for signing MoUs which will be scrutinised during the cabinet meeting on Sunday'. 'We will not sign MoUs just for the sake of signing but will go for real investments that will be viable for the state,' he said.

A total of 18,578 people have registered so far for the summit and so far the 'response has been very good and unprecedented', the chief minister added. Heads of 35 missions have confirmed their participation in the forthcoming two-day business summit - Advantage Assam beginning from February 24 and the number may go up to 50, the chief minister said. (PTI)

Attacks on minorities in B'desh

border was a very "dynamic and active" border.

On the issues related to fencing discussed during the three-day talks that concluded on Thursday at the BSF headquarters, the BGB DG said they have "highlighted the number of potential cases" where the construction of development works close to the IB were being done and this was the "most focussed" agenda during the latest talks. He said 150 yards on either side of the zero line is considered a "no man's land" and both sides are not allowed to construct any permanent structure or any structure that has "defence potential", without the consent of the other party.

"The communication gap occurs when the fencing is required within the 150 yards...beyond 150 yards we don't mind at all how long, how heavy or how high the fence is made," Siddiqui said.

He said Bangladesh has "raised objection" where it thought that mutual consent is yet to be done or it could be done in a better manner. Both he and the BSF DG said that they "hope to resolve these issues in the future" with the BGB DG saying a joint inspection will be carried out in such areas. Asked about the instances of illegal infiltration from Bangladesh into India, both the chiefs said such instances had actually gone down across the 4,096 km long IB, post August 5 of last year. (PTI)

Rekha Gupta is Delhi's new CM

All the ministers took oath in Hindi, except for Sirsa who did so in Punjabi. Congratulating the new chief minister, Modi expressed confidence that she will work for the city's development with full vigour.

"She has risen from the grassroots, being active in campus politics, state organisation, municipal administration and now MLA as well as Chief Minister..." he said. About 50,000 people crammed into the historic ground, which has seen many a rally and protest through the decades, festooned with marigold flowers and bunting. There was dance, music and drumbeats with many waving BJP flags, chanting "Jai Shri Ram", "Modi, Modi" and a bunch of enthusiastic supporters singing "Ram Ji Ko Keh Dena, Jai Arya Ram".

The high on optics event was attended by chief ministers of states ruled by the BJP and its NDA allies -- Maharashtra's Devendra Fadnis, Andhra Pradesh's Chandrababu Naidu, Goa's Pramod Sawant, Haryana's Nayab Singh Saini and Meghalaya's Conrad Sangma. Union ministers, including Amit Shah, party chief JP Nadda, Rajnath Singh and Hardeep Puri, were there too to mark the occasion of the party adding one more electoral win to its kitty.

Uttar Pradesh deputy chief ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, and Andhra Pradesh's Pawan Kalyan were present too. After the ceremony, the new cabinet and other dignitaries headed for lunch at a luxury hotel in the city. The coming days will likely be politically fraught with the AAP -- which cedes control of the city after 10 successive years, first under Arvind Kejriwal and then Atishi -- and BJP facing off on various issues. (PTI)

Curtains fall on 51st Karbi

literature meet, and a traditional dress exhibition-cum-sale, among other events.

A key highlight of the festival was the handover of leadership to the newly elected KCS president Humsing Bey and general secretary Sumil Tokbi, marking the end of Chandra Sing Kro's long tenure. Kro, who served as KCS President for 28 years, stepped down to pave the way for younger leadership.

The final day of the festival featured the concluding ceremony at Singmirjeng stage, where chief executive member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, attended as the chief guest. "I congratulate Chandra Sing Kro for his relentless service over the last 28 years in preserving KYF and promoting Karbi culture and traditions. We must appreciate and thank him for his dedication to the KCS," the CEM said.

Expressing confidence in the new leadership, Ronghang added that he hoped Humsing Bey and Sumil Tokbi would take KYF to greater heights. Reiterating his commitment from the inaugural ceremony on February 16, Ronghang announced that the KAAC would construct a ground in each of the 26 MAC constituencies to promote Hambi Kepathu -- Ghela, Khel, a traditional Karbi sport.

During the closing ceremony, the overall best team award went to Diphu-Manja KC Zone, while Borjan KCS Zone secured second place, and Den Arong KCS Zone took third place.

Meanwhile, the No Tok Let National Rock Contest, organized by No Tok Let in collaboration with KCS, declared Version 2 (Nagalang) as the winner. Nchanter (Uttarakhand) secured the first runners-up position, while Armored (Karbi Anglong) finished as the second runners-up.

WHO identifies encephalitis

Dr Easton said. The technical brief aims to focus attention on the increasing global threat of the disease, prevention strategies and existing gaps in the diagnosis, treatment and care which will help enable more people affected to receive the treatment and care they need to live fulfilling and healthy lives, said Dr Tarun Dua, Brain Health Unit, Department of Mental Health, Brain Health and Substance Use. (PTI)

Modi govt putting India's

2021, China adopted its 14th Five-Year Plan, which mentions plans for hydropower projects in the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra River".

"This means that the Modi government was aware of this matter since 2021, but still, your government remained absolutely silent. It is clear...Modiji, your Government's priority is PR stunts and false advertisements for itself, not the national security of India," Kharge said citing news reports of China building 90 new villages along the border in Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: The government on Thursday extended the tenure of Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) V Anantha Nageswaran for two years till March 2027.

Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the tenure of Nageswaran on a contract basis up to March 31, 2027.

With the approval of ACC, the tenure of V Anantha Nageswaran as Chief Economic Adviser on contract basis is extended up to March 31, 2027, or until further order whichever is earlier, an office order said.

Nageswaran assumed charge of the CEA on January 28, 2022, for a three-year term.

The office of CEA is responsible for giving advice to the government on various economic policies and drafting the Economic Survey which is tabled in Parliament a day ahead of the Union Budget.

Nageswaran, an academic and former executive with Credit Suisse Group AG and Julius Baer Group, succeeded K V Subramanian.

His extension comes weeks after the Economic Survey 2024-25 projected a growth of 6.3-6.8 per cent for the next financial year amid

Asia's third-largest economy showing signs of moderation.

As per the government's advance estimates, the economy is expected to grow at 6.4 per cent in the current financial year.

Prior to taking over as CEA, Nageswaran worked as an author, teacher and consultant. He has also been a part-time member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister from 2019 to 2021.

Besides, he has taught at several business schools and institutes of management in India and Singapore and has published extensively. Nageswaran holds a Post-Graduate Diploma in Man-

agement (MBA) degree from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He obtained a doctoral degree in Finance from the University of Massachusetts in 1994 for his work on the empirical behaviour of exchange rates.

He was the Dean of the IFMR Graduate School of Business and a distinguished Visiting Professor of Economics at Krea University.

Nageswaran helped co-found the Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy and helped launch the first impact investment fund of the Avishkaar Group in 2001. (PTI)

Primary objective of the meeting was to strengthen implementation of key schemes Joint stakeholders meet on Mission Shakti and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao held in Silchar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Silchar took a significant step towards gender equality and child protection as a Joint Stakeholder Meeting under Mission Shakti was held at the new conference hall of the Deputy Commissioner's office on Wednesday.

The meeting, organised by SANKALP, District Hub for Empowerment of Women (Cachar) under the Department of Women and Child Development, was conducted in collaboration with UNICEF partner organization Independent Thought and the District Administration.

The event also marked the 10th anniversary of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative.

The primary objective of the meeting was to strengthen the implementation of key schemes like SAMBAL, SAMARTHYA, and BBBP, with a strong focus on preventing child marriage, combating gender-based discrimination, and ensuring a safe environment for every girl child.

Various stakeholders attended the session, emphasizing the need for collective action and convergence of efforts to promote women and child welfare.

Additional District Commissioner, Women and Child Development, Kimchin Lhangum, delivered the opening address, highlighting the importance of interdepartmental coordination and community partic-



ipation in ensuring the success of Mission Shakti and BBBP.

She underscored the role of collaborative governance in protecting the rights of women and children.

As the discussion progressed, District Social Welfare Officer (In-Charge) Anjali Kumari and Assistant Commissioner Bonani Bhattacharjee provided an in-depth overview of Mission Shakti and BBBP.

They discussed the initiatives' key achievements, ongoing challenges, and proposed solutions, while also emphasising the importance of critical helplines like Women Helpline (181) and Child Helpline (1098) to

ensure accessible assistance for those in distress.

Addressing the critical issue of child marriage prevention, Ram Kishor Mahawar, State Manager, Independent Thought, stressed the responsibility of stakeholders in advancing Mission Shakti and the Bal Vivah Mukh Bharat initiative.

He called for convergent action among departments to protect children from early marriages, reinforcing the need for a comprehensive strategy to safeguard their rights.

The legal framework for the protection of women and children was also a focal point of the discussions. Salma Sultana, Secretary,

District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Cachar, elaborated on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (POSH) Act and its implementation across the district.

She highlighted the legal safeguards against crimes like child abuse, exploitation, and forced marriages, urging all concerned departments to strengthen support systems for vulnerable groups.

The joint initiative reaffirmed the commitment of the District Administration, the Department of Women & Child Development (Cachar), and UNICEF's partner organization Independent Thought to ensure gender justice and child protection.

The discussions held during the session paved the way for enhanced collaboration, policy refinement, and effective execution of welfare schemes at the grassroots level.

With a unified vision, stakeholders pledged to work towards a future where every girl's potential is nurtured, protected, and celebrated.

The meeting concluded with a renewed commitment to eliminating discrimination and fostering empowerment, reinforcing the goals of Mission Shakti and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao.

This was stated in a press release issued by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone, Silchar, Assam.

CPI demands 4 p.c. property tax on 200 billionaires to roll back privatisation policy



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Feb 20: CPI Sivasagar district council cadres on Thursday registered their protest against the alleged "anti people" budget tabled in the Parliament for 2025-26.

In the protest rally, CPI State Secretary Kanak Gogoi, District Secretary Mani Buragohain and Workers' Leader Madan Barua explained the reason of having been forced to take to the street again against the BJP led government.

Their demands include: (1) 4 per cent wealth tax and corporate tax increase on the country's 200 billionaires (in dollars), (2) legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farmers' produce and withdrawal of draft National Agricultural Marketing Policy, (3) Stop privatization of public assets through national monetization of

pipelines and withdrawal of 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment in insurance sector, (4) 50 p.c. increase in allocation for MN-REGA, (5) introduction of Urban Employment Guarantee Act, increase in funding for old age pensions and other social security benefits.

They have also demanded 3 p.c. of GDP allocation for health and 6 p.c. of GDP for education, increase in food subsidies to strengthen public distribution system, substantial increase in allocation for women and child development for SCs and STs, increase in expenditure for Integrated Child Development Scheme and repeal of cess and additional taxes on petroleum products not shared with the states. The meeting was also addressed by veteran CPI leader Dharma Barua, Ajay Bora and Anuradha Gohain Gogoi.

Journalist conferred with 'Asom' title

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 20: Journalist Uttam Nath was conferred with the title "Asom" by Ahom Jatiya Mahasabha in a public meeting convened by the Biswanath district Yogi Sammilani.

Nath was felicitated on the occasion of the recently concluded Me-Dam-Me-Phi.

The meeting was held at the Gereki Gaon namghar preemies on Thursday.

Nath was also felicitated by the Gereki primary committee of Yogi Sammilani with a citation, gamosa and a collection of books.

Other than Uttam Nath, the district committee also felicitated Homeshwar Nath, Nagen Nath and Rupa Devi who have been selected in different portfolios of the state committee of All Assam Yogi Sammilani.

Asstt teacher conferred with PhD

HT Correspondent

MORIGAOON, Feb 20: Imdad Ali son of Lt Miajan Ali and Sahida Begum, an assistant teacher of Morigaon HS and MP School was conferred with doctorate degree in the field of mathematics.

His thesis was titled as "A study on factors affecting algebraic problem-solving achievements and its achievements among secondary school students in Morigaon district of Assam." Ali completed his research under the supervision of Dr. Samiran Das, associate professor, department of mathematics, Central Institute of Technology, Kokrajhar, BTR, Assam.

Fake fertilizer seized, one in custody

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, Feb 20: Assam Police has seized fake fertilizer and also apprehended a person in Jangalpara village in Darrang district.

The seizure was made during a raid in the said area on Wednesday night. As per reports, local village defense battalion saw fake fertilizer being mixed with a substance like sand in one Sahara Ali's house. The battalion Kharupetia police on the basis of suspicion.

Upon receiving the information, the police swung into action and reached the spot and seized the alleged fake fertilizer.

"One accused was taken into custody on the charge of making fake fertilizer," the reports added.

Following the development in the area, the villagers gathered at the scene and demanded strict action against those making fake fertilizer. However, after receiving the news of the police raid, Ali, who was allegedly involved in the making of fake fertilizer fled away.

Presently, the matter is under investigation and an officer from the Agriculture department officer has been called to ascertain the truth.

Free health check-up camp at Ledo

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Feb 20: A free health check-up camp was organised on Thursday jointly by the Northeastern Coalfields Coal India Ltd, Margherita and Warriors (NGO), Tinsukia as part of their corporate social responsibility initiative. The free health camp was held at Durga bari temple premises, Ledo under Margherita Co-District to provide free health check-ups and medicines to over a hundred patients.

The free health check-up was conducted by a team of doctors from NEC CIL Margherita including Dr Sanjib Sonowal, Dr Manab B Gogoi, Dr Dibya Singh, Dr Tul Tul K Sangma and Dr Manisha Upadhyay from Ketetong mobile unit tuberculosis screening test.

The free health check-up camp was a part of Prime Minister tuberculosis eradication programme where tuberculosis, diabetes and other diseases were tested and free medicines were provided accordingly. Dr Divya Singh Borthakur, a noted ophthalmologist and Medical officer of NEC CIL, Margherita said that under the corporate social responsibility of NEC CIL, Margherita the free health check-up camp was attended by more than 100 people with different types of tests being conducted.

Baksa sends 64 participants for historic Jhumur dance performance in Guwahati



KOKRAJHAR, Feb 20: The District Commissioner of Baksa, Gautam Das on Thursday flagged off two buses carrying 64 participants from Baksa district to participate in the Historic Grand Jhumur Dance Showcase to be held in Guwahati.

The dancers, hailing from Doomni Tea Estate (Baksa) and Fatimabad Tea Estate (Manas LAC), will

take part in the grand Jhumur dance performance, which is set to make history on February 24.

Assam is gearing up for a historic cultural event, "Jhumoir Binandini," which will see over 9,000 performers from 27 districts showcasing the rich tea garden culture of the state.

The grand event, celebrating 200 years of Assam Tea, will take place at Sarusajai Stadium, Guwahati, in the august presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Speaking on the occasion, DC Gautam Das expressed pride in the participants, stating, "This is a proud moment for Baksa district. Our talented dancers will be part of a historic performance that showcases Assam's vibrant traditions. I wish them the very best as they represent our district on this grand platform."

The participants have undergone rigorous rehearsals to perfect their moves ahead of the event.

Nodal Officer and ADC Jeetu Kr Barman has been closely overseeing the arrangements, ensuring the dancers receive the necessary support and guidance.

College teacher detained for alleged drinking

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 20: An assistant professor of Nowgong Girls' College has been detained for allegedly forcing three students to drink liquor in his car during the college youth festival. According to sources, the students were spotted in an intoxicated state by the college authorities.

The allegedly accused, Amit Kumar Roy Choudhury has admitted to consuming liquor and was found with liquor bottles in his vehicle, the sources added.

Following this, the police has detained Choudhury and provided the students with proper medical attention. This incident has sparked a widespread outrage among the people. The college authorities have convened an emergency meeting to discuss the incident, sources added further.

Railway Electrification of Lumding - Dibrugarh Section nearing completion

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: The Principal Chief Electrical Engineer of Northeast Frontier Railway conducted an inspection of the ongoing electrification work on the Mariani - Simaluguri and Simaluguri - Dibrugarh sections via Moranhat on February 19 and 20.

Upon completion, Dibrugarh will be directly connected to Guwahati through Overhead Equipment (OHE), enabling the Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express and other superfast trains to operate on electric traction.

The electrification of the Simaluguri - Tinsukia section is in its final phase, with commissioning targeted for March 25, 2025.

Notably, the Lumding - Dimapur - Furkating - Mariani sections have already been commissioned. Additionally, electric locomotive trials for the Mariani - Simaluguri - Dibrugarh section were successfully conducted on January 31, marking a significant milestone in the region's railway electrification efforts.

The railway electrification project for the Lumding - Dibrugarh route via Tinsukia, along with the Simaluguri - Dibrugarh section and associated sidings under Northeast Frontier Railway is progressing at a rapid pace. Spanning the Lumding and Tinsukia divisions, the project commenced physical work in May 2022 and involves extensive infrastructure development. The project includes the installation of 488 RKM/650 TKM of Overhead Equipment (OHE), five traction substations, 29 switching stations, and five transmission lines spanning over 50 km.

Additionally, it comprises the construction of five OHE/PSI depots, five tower wagon sheds, and several civil structures, including 121 staff quarters, administrative buildings and station upgrades.

A significant infrastructure enhancement under this project is the reconstruction of the Road Over Bridge (ROB) at Mancotta, aimed at improving connectivity over the Dibrugarh & Dibrugarh Town station.

The electrification of this crucial rail corridor will enhance operational efficiency, reduce dependence on diesel, lower carbon emissions and significantly improve connectivity in the Northeast.

The successful completion of these sections will mark a major milestone in railway infrastructure development, ensuring smoother, faster and more eco-friendly train operations for the region.

KYF celebrations turn ugly

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 20: The 51st Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) in Taralango concluded in violence with burning of two vehicles and stone pelting by festival goers and police firing in the air.

As per preliminary reports, a ladder used for work at the temporary Toyota showroom by APDCL fell down due to the rush which injured two women.



Some youths took objection to the accident and got agitated. Matters got out of control and the youths burned down a vehicle belonging to the APDCL in the wee hours of around 2 am.

The volunteers of Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) tried to pacify the youths but it was of no use. The police and paramilitary forces arrived at the scene but the miscreants pelted stones at them as well.

The violent mob they burnt another pick-up truck of APDCL on their way back while leaving the scene. The stone pelting incident injured one police constable and two fire fighters.

The large mob also targeted the cars of festival goers and fire brigades damaging them.

Samagra Shiksha Sonitpur honours 119 schools



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Feb 20: In an august event organised by Samagra Shiksha Sonitpur in the conference hall of the District Commissioners office here on Thursday, a total of 119 school management and development committees and Matrigots among 800 schools of the Sonitpur district were honoured with special awards for their better management and pursuit of excellence in managing the respective schools.

The meeting held for the purpose was chaired by the additional district commissioner (Education), Sonitpur Kabita Kakati

Konwar. The best school from 119 circle resource centres of the district were honoured specially for their performance during the year.

Addressing the gathering ADC Kabita Kakati Konwar urged all to focus on achieving educational and academic excellence during the days ahead.

"We should payhead and dedicate our services fully for the infrastructural and academic development of the schools and strive for excellence".

Representing the award winning schools Gajen Nath, Head of the Milanpur Saikia Chuburi M.E.

KSA condemns illegal entry from Meghalaya into WKA

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 20: In a press release, the Karbi Students Association (KSA), Hamren Regional Committee condemned the illegal entry of several political parties from Meghalaya into West Karbi Anglong for campaigning for the upcoming Member of District Council (MDC) elections in Meghalaya.

The KSA termed this act as a clear violation of electoral rules and an infringement on the territorial integrity of West Karbi Anglong. The association has urged the citizens of West Karbi Anglong, particularly those residing in border areas, to refrain from participating in Meghalaya's elections.

"It is crucial to uphold the integrity of our land and ensure that administrative boundaries are respected," the KSA stated.

The association also extended its support to all communities, especially the Khasi-Pnar people residing in West Karbi Anglong, who may face difficulties or feel insecure.

"Please reach out to the Karbi Students Association. We are always ready to support and assist you," the KSA assured.

Orai Thulunga NGO organises 3-day training on mushroom cultivation in Udalguri

HT Correspondent

UDALGURI, Feb 20: Orai Thulunga NGO, an Orang-based organisation, has organised a three-day training programme on mushroom cultivation in Udalguri district, starting from February 19.

The first training session was conducted at Selmari in Udalguri district, witnessing active participation, particularly from rural communities.

The second-day training took place at the Orai Thulunga NGO head office in Orang.

The third and final session is scheduled to be held at Silputa on February 21.

Expert trainers Bhupesh Baglari, Jwngshar Mochahari, and Rumi Deka imparted hands-on training to the participants, equipping them with essential knowledge and skills in mushroom cultivation.

The program is being organised by Orai Thulunga NGO under the guidance of the Central Institute of Horticulture (CIH), Medziphema,



Nagaland, as part of the Farmers' Training under the Human Resource Development Program of the Government of India.

A total of 150 mushroom farmers, with 50 participants attending each session, have benefited from the training.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

For the mind disturbed, the still beauty of dawn is nature's finest balm — Edwin Way Teale

Hoping independence of EC

With Union Government of India making the appointments of the Chief Election Commissioner of India, and an Election Commissioner under the new law of 2023, while the law itself is pending adjudication in the Supreme Court of India, people's hopes and fears about independence of Election Commission of India running high. The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act of 2023 was challenged in the Supreme Court of India on the ground that it goes against the spirit of the 2022 Constitution Bench verdict which emphasized that the appointment process should be insulated from executive interference so that its functioning will be truly independent. The Constitution Bench in its verdict had put in place a committee comprising Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and Chief Justice of India to secure the appointment process democratic in true sense of the term. The law kept majority of the executive to control the very appointment process to have executive's wish implemented. Supreme Court of India did not deliver judgement in time, and under the same controversial law Modi government had appointed the new CEC and an EC on Monday night, February 17, after the meeting of three members — Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Minister of Home Amit Shah, and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi.

A day after the appointment of new CEC Gyanesh Kumar and an EC Vivek Joshi, the petitioners who have challenged the law on the appointment of Election Commissioners requested the Supreme Court on February 18 to hear the matter on top priority on February 19 itself, fearing that the matter may not be heard at all since it was listed as no. 41 item. The request was declined, but Justice Surya Kant who was presiding over the bench, asked the petitioner's advocate Prashant Bhushan to make a mention on February 19. Later, The Supreme Court postponed the hearing to March 19, owing to non-availability of dates in between. Now, when the CEC Gyanesh Kumar and EC Vivek Joshi had already joined, people and political parties of the country are looking towards them with much hope and fear regarding independence of the Election Commission of India, irrespective of the final decision of the Supreme Court of India on the validity of the laws itself under which they have been appointed. Since the term of EC's under the new law is six year or 65 years of age, Gyanesh Kumar will be retiring in January 2029, just before Lok Sabha election of 2029. Thereafter, Vivek Joshi may become CEC, under whose control Lok Sabha election 2029 will be fought. Under the new law, only CEC has constitutional protection against removal, and ECs do not have any such protection. Their terms will depend on the wish of the CEC and the Government of India.

The level of hope and fear on Vivek Joshi is much higher than on Gyanesh Kumar since, Lok Sabha Election 2019 would most probably be held under his tenure. The 1989 batch Haryana cadre IAS officer, Vivek Joshi has been much loved by the Union Government is well known, especially after he was made chief secretary in November 2024 despite senior officers from the 1990 batch were waiting for their turn.

Assam's historic leap: New Accord cements indigenous rights and cultural safeguards

The recent agreement between the Assam government and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) to implement 38 out of 52 recommendations of the Justice (Retd.) Biplab Sharma Committee marks a watershed moment in Assam's long-standing quest to safeguard its indigenous identity. This development, centered around Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, promises substantial constitutional, legislative, and administrative reforms aimed at protecting Assamese culture, language, and land rights.

Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, signed in 1985 following the Assam Movement (1979-1985), mandates special constitutional safeguards to protect, preserve, and promote the identity of the Assamese people. The movement itself was a result of prolonged agitation against the influx of undocumented immigrants, which Assamese nationalists believed posed an existential threat to the socio-political and cultural fabric of the state. However, despite the Accord's signing, the execution of its key provisions remained largely unfulfilled for decades. The recent dialogue between the Assam government and AASU signals a decisive shift toward actualizing these long-delayed promises.

Land Rights and Protection of Indigenous Ownership
One of the most pivotal aspects of the agreement is the safeguarding of land rights for Assam's indigenous communities. The government has decided to designate certain revenue circles modeled after tribal belt blocks, where only individuals who have resided for at least three generations or since 1951 will be eligible to purchase land. This step is a direct response to concerns over demographic shifts and land alienation, which have been at the heart of Assamese political discourse for decades.

Language Policies: Strengthening the Assamese Linguistic Identity
Language preservation is another major pillar of the government's implementation plan. Assamese will now be made a mandatory subject in all schools in the Brahmaputra Valley, ensuring that future generations remain connected to their linguistic heritage. In the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), both Assamese and Bodo will be compulsory subjects, reinforcing the linguistic diversity of the region while ensuring that indigenous identities are protected. A landmark decision was also made to introduce Assam's history and geography as a compulsory subject up to Class 8. This measure aims to instill a strong sense of historical awareness among young students, re-

inforcing Assamese identity from an early age.

To further elevate Assamese as the language of governance, the state government has decided that, from April 14 (Bohag Bihu, the Assamese New Year), all official government notifications will be published in both English and Assamese. Additionally, a Directorate of State Languages will be established as an independent regulatory body to oversee the enforcement of language policies.

Recognizing the need for linguistic adaptation in the digital era, the government has proposed collaborating with institutions such as Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University to develop an AI-based translation tool. This tool will ensure efficient translation of government documents into Assamese, facilitating wider accessibility and use of the language in administrative affairs.

Employment and Economic Empowerment for Indigenous Youth

The Assam government has also prioritized job creation as a means to strengthen economic security among indigenous communities. A total of 2,000 new government posts will be created to support land administration and revenue-related work, ensuring efficient implementation of land protection policies. Preference in recruitment will be given to indigenous applicants, reflecting a conscious effort to empower local youth.

Further, discussions are ongoing regarding employment reservations for Assamese people in government jobs, as recommended by the Biplab Sharma Committee. The committee suggested 100% reservation for Grade 3 and Grade 4 government jobs and 70% for Grade 1 and Grade 2 posts.

While a final decision on this remains pending, the government has assured AASU that the issue will be revisited in upcoming negotiations.

Cultural Protection and Preservation of Religious Heritage

The agreement also entails measures to safeguard Assam's rich cultural and religious heritage. A dedicated commission will be established within the next three months to formulate policies for the protection of xatras and naamghars—traditional institutions that hold immense cultural and spiritual significance for Assamese society. These sites have historically faced encroachment and neglect, and their statutory protection marks a major step toward preserving Assam's religious traditions.

The government has also allocated Rs 100 crore for the development of Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra, Assam's premier cultural center. This investment underscores the state's commitment to promoting indigenous arts, literature, and performing traditions.

To strengthen academic research on Assamese literature and history, the government has announced the establishment of two research chairs: the Padmanath Gohainbarua Chair at Tezpur University and the Laxminath Bezbaruah Chair at Assam University, Silchar. These initiatives aim to foster scholarly engagement with Assamese cultural heritage, ensuring its preservation for future generations.

Tripartite Talks and Future Roadmap

While the state government has made substantial commitments, several recommendations of the Biplab Sharma Committee fall beyond its jurisdiction and require intervention from the Union government. Chief Minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma has urged the Centre to initiate tripartite discussions involving AASU, the Assam government, and the Union government to address these recommendations comprehensively.

The next phase of negotiations is set to commence in March, with follow-up discussions scheduled in April. AASU leaders have emphasized the need for continuous dialogue to ensure the full realization of Clause 6's objectives. "The khilonjiya (indigenous) people of Assam must have dominance over the land of Assam. Constitutional safeguards for the indigenous people are crucial," AASU's chief advisor Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharya reiterated.

A Step Forward, But Challenges Remain

The Assam government's proactive stance in implementing Clause 6 of the Assam Accord is a crucial step toward addressing long-standing grievances of the indigenous Assamese people. The focus on land protection, language preservation, employment generation, and cultural safeguarding reflects a multidimensional approach to securing Assam's identity.

However, the road ahead is fraught with challenges. Effective implementation of these measures will require consistent political will, robust legal frameworks, and vigilant monitoring. The success of these policies will ultimately depend on how well they are enforced and whether they can withstand political and legal scrutiny.

The upcoming negotiations in March and April will be critical in determining the final shape of these policies. As Assam moves forward, it remains to be seen whether these steps will mark a new era of stability and cultural resurgence or merely serve as another chapter in the region's protracted struggle for identity and autonomy. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)*

From NATO to trade wars: Lasting impact of Trump's transactional diplomacy

By M. A. Hossain & Vishakhajha

For decades, U.S. alliances have been the backbone of global stability, fostering economic cooperation and collective security. NATO, economic partnerships with European and Asian allies, and engagement in international organizations have cemented America's leadership in world affairs. However, under Trump's second term Presidency, these traditional alliances came under significant strain. His "America First" approach represented a dramatic departure from the multilateralism that had defined U.S. foreign policy for decades, favouring a more unilateral and transactional approach.

Trump's administration took a "Realist" stance, prioritizing national sovereignty, economic self-interest, and security over diplomatic cooperation. While "Realism" as a school of international relations, underscores the role of power and self-preservation in an anarchic global system, Trump's application of this principle went beyond pragmatic statecraft. His scepticism of NATO, confrontational trade policies, and direct engagement with authoritarian leaders reshaped America's global standing and tested the resilience of long-standing alliances. This shift raised fundamental questions about the future of the international order and whether the damage to these partnerships would be lasting.

Trump viewed alliances not as enduring commitments based on shared values but as transactional relationships in which the United States should only participate if they provided immediate national benefits. His administration's approach to international agreements underscored this perspective. In 2017, he withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement, arguing that it placed unfair economic burdens on American taxpayers while giving competitive advantages to countries like China. European allies, who had invested diplomatic capital in the deal, saw the move as a retreat from global leadership and a signal that the U.S. was no longer committed to cooperative solutions for pressing global issues.

The following year, Trump further alienated European allies by withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal. The agreement had been a diplomatic achievement that involved the U.S., the European Union, and other key players in curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions. Despite European objections, Trump unilaterally pulled the U.S. out, citing concerns over Iranian compliance and the agreement's perceived shortcomings. This move deepened transatlantic tensions, forcing European nations to scramble to salvage the deal without U.S. support. The decision reinforced the notion that the U.S. was becoming an unreliable partner, willing to abandon agreements negotiated in good faith.



Trump viewed alliances not as enduring commitments based on shared values but as transactional relationships in which the United States should only participate if they provided immediate national benefits. His administration's approach to international agreements underscored this perspective

Nowhere was Trump's scepticism toward alliances more apparent than in his approach to NATO. Since its founding in 1949, NATO has been a pillar of U.S. and European security, ensuring a collective defense against external threats. However, Trump repeatedly criticized the alliance, arguing that the United States was disproportionately shouldering its costs while European members failed to meet their financial commitments. His administration focused heavily on the 2% GDP defense spending target that NATO members had agreed upon, using it as a metric to question the alliance's effectiveness.

While previous U.S. administrations had also encouraged greater burden-sharing, Trump's rhetoric was uniquely confrontational. Pete Hegseth, the US secretary of defence, left European defence ministers in shock during a meeting in Brussels on February 12, 2025, as he unequivocally stated that European security is no longer a primary focus of the United States. French President Emmanuel Macron, who began advocating for greater European defense autonomy, Macron even proposed the formation of a "true European army" to reduce reliance on the U.S. for security.

Trump's questioning of NATO's value aligned with the 'Realist' perspective that alliances should be conditional and serve immediate national interests. However, this stance also undermined trust in U.S. leadership and introduced uncertainty among allies. The long-term strategic consequences of Trump's NATO scepticism were significant. By casting doubt on America's commitment to transatlantic security, he emboldened ad-

versaries such as Russia, which has long sought to exploit divisions within NATO. The instability created by his rhetoric encouraged European nations to rethink their security strategies, though efforts to establish a more independent European defense force faced significant political and economic hurdles. Trump's trade policies further strained U.S. relations with key allies. His belief in economic nationalism—viewing trade as a zero-sum game—led to tariffs, renegotiations, and disputes that disrupted longstanding agreements. His administration imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from the European Union, Canada, and Japan, citing national security concerns. The decision triggered swift retaliatory measures, escalating tensions and undermining the trust that had defined transatlantic economic

relations.

At the same time, Trump launched a trade war with China, imposing tariffs on billions of dollars' worth of Chinese goods. While this policy was aimed at countering Beijing's economic rise, it had unintended consequences for U.S. allies. European nations and Asian partners, who had complex trade relationships with both the U.S. and China, found themselves caught in the middle of a growing economic conflict. Rather than building a unified front to challenge China's influence, Trump's approach created rifts within the Western alliance, weakening the effectiveness of a collective economic strategy.

One of Trump's most consequential trade decisions was withdrawing the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement designed to counterbalance China's economic expansion in the Asia-Pacific region. Regional allies such as Japan and Australia had viewed the TPP as a critical component of economic and strategic cooperation. Without U.S. participation, the remaining member states moved forward with a modified deal, reducing American economic influence in the region and leaving a vacuum for China to fill.

Trump's foreign policy also reflected a deep scepticism toward international institutions. He frequently dismissed multilateral organizations as bureaucratic and ineffective, favouring direct negotiations and unilateral actions. A striking example of this came in 2020 when he withdrew the U.S. from the World Health Organization (WHO) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Citing the organization's alleged bias toward China, Trump cut American funding like USAID and withdrew from global coordination efforts. His decision was widely criticized by allies, who saw it as an abdication of U.S. leadership at a critical moment. While Trump framed the move as a defense of national sovereignty, it reinforced the perception that the U.S. was disengaging from international cooperation, further isolating itself from global partners.

Another defining feature of Trump's foreign policy was his engagement with authoritarian leaders, prioritizing strategic and economic interests over democratic values. His administration pursued direct negotiations with President Putin or previously North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, marking an unprecedented level of dialogue between the two nations. While these summits reduced immediate tensions, they yielded no concrete agreements, raising concerns about their long-term effectiveness.

Trump's presidency significantly altered America's relationships with its allies, embracing a 'Realist' approach that prioritized national power, economic self-interest, and unilateral decision-making. While his policies—such as pressuring NATO allies to increase defense spending—aligned with some longstanding U.S. concerns, his confrontational approach weakened diplomatic trust and created greater global uncertainty. *(IPA Service)*

Trump wanting Russia and Ukraine both at its backyard

By: Er.Rajesh Pathak

US is reported to be engaged in back-door dialogue in pursuing Iran to backtrack from its nuclear-programme. Or else, it is also reminded, be ready for its destruction. Trump is known for his this kind of dictatorial approach.

On the other side in virtue of Modi's initiatives the things are edging closer to bring to an end the Russia-Ukraine war. Trump is reported to have had more than an hour talks with Putin, bypassing NATO. The centre of dialogue was that the part that had come in possession of Russia, it would remain to it henceforth. And the rest as usual to be under Ukraine, with the condition that where critical minerals are found in abundance the mining facilities for them to be made available to the US companies. As for the Ukraine's future economic security that has to be borne by Europe. And while US will withdraw its forces from there. Be it remember, the Uranium requirement is fulfilled by Russia only. Soon Trump and Putin will make visit to each other country, this also came out of the discussion.

This development, at least, might ensure the relief from being dependence on vagaries of China for critical minerals to a great extent. Yes, if the minerals acquired from Ukraine get to be refined in Japan before reaching US.

At present China only is the real rival of US. The China where besides rare earth minerals the 80% Polysilicon used in solar panel; 40% Copper; 50% Lithium; and Cobalt, more than 50% are refined. It is therefore Trumps wants to have Ukraine and Russia both at his backyard. For like China, Russia is also rich in mineral wealth besides crude oil.

However, amid this geopolitical upheaval, it's, notably, a proud moment for India. Once during his visit 3 years back Sam Altman, when asked, called technological talent of India "hopeless". Whereas his recent visit last days saw him having had to call the same talent of India "incredible". Why he had to say so, the answer to it also has come so soon. And this answer came from the scientists of ISRO and IIT Madras, who jointly developed swadeshi chip to be used in space rocket and aero-engines to be used in fighter jet. ISRO'S chairman, Dr VK Narayan called the chip a milestone in the efforts towards "Make in India". The chip will be made operative in Shakti processor, which too built by Madras IIT.

Completely swadeshi, the chip's fabrication is done in Semiconductor laboratory limited (SCL) Chandigarh; packaging done in TATA advanced system, Karnataka; Printed circuit board developed in PCB Power, Gujrat; And its assembly and integration is conducted in Syrma SGS, Chennai.

How the world treated India's diaspora at the time of its independence

By: Ajay Kamalakaran

One of the many lasting consequences of the British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent was the emergence of a large Indian diaspora across the British Empire. From the South Pacific to the North Atlantic, Indians spread everywhere. To countries such as Fiji, Mauritius and Trinidad, they went mostly as indentured labour. And to countries such as Canada and Australia, they went mainly in search of better opportunities.

A large number of these Indians did not come back, choosing instead to become citizens of their adopted homes. In some countries, they were treated with a degree of fairness, while in others, they faced openly discriminatory policies.

Just two months after India attained independence, Bishwanath Das, a member of the Constituent Assembly representing Orissa, prepared a series of questions about Indians' citizenship rights in Commonwealth countries. In particular, he wanted Jawaharlal Nehru to answer the following in a meeting of the Constituent Assembly on November 21:

"Will the Honourable Prime Minister be pleased to state:

■ the number of Indians living in other States and Colonies, including the British Commonwealth of Nations (number in such cases to be given separately);

■ the States that have conferred Citizenship Rights on Indians;

■ the disabilities that are still attached to Indians in each of the States constituting the British Commonwealth of Nations as also the British colonies; and

■ the action taken, in each case, by the Government of India with the concerned States and Colonies to confer Citizenship rights on Indians since September 1946?"

The Constituent Assembly was given all this information by Nehru with the

help of the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations. Revisited today, it makes for interesting reading, showing the spread of the Indian diaspora.

'Few disabilities'

Australia, New Zealand and Canada may be sought-after destinations for Indians in the 21st century, but back in 1947, a time when these countries enjoyed Dominion status, they only had a small number of Indians.

In Australia, the Indian diaspora consisted of just 4,544 people, all of whom had citizenship and voting rights, although that did not protect them from official discrimination.

"There are a few disabilities in some of the States," Nehru's statement to the Constituent Assembly said. "E.g., Certain sections of Widow's Pension Act, Family Endowment Act and Rural Workers' Accommodation Act of New South Wales discriminate against British Indians as such. In Western Australia there are legal discriminations against British Indians along with other Asiatics and Africans with respect to Crown land, mining, certain occupations and employment."

The statement added that the Indian High Commissioner had been instructed to challenge these injustices and that Western Australia had given a favourable response.

A similar situation to Australia prevailed in Canada. It had an Indian-origin population of 1,500 and every one of them had citizenship rights. But at the provincial level, discrimination was not rare. In British Columbia, for instance, the diaspora had to fight for its right to municipal franchise.

A lot better than Canada and Australia was New Zealand. As the government statement in the Constituent Assembly pointed out, India's 1,200-strong diaspora in New Zealand enjoyed "complete equality" of citizenship along with other subjects of the Crown.

Another country where Indians did not face discrimination from the gov-

ernment was the United Kingdom. But there was a question mark over their citizenship after India obtained independence. It was not clear at the time how many Indians living in the UK wanted Indian citizenship and how many wanted British citizenship. Complicating the matter further was the choice of Pakistani citizenship.

"Figures of the total Indian population are not available; but the total number of Indians who fall under well defined categories, like students, pedlars, seamen, professional and businessmen, retired persons, persons on the High Commissioner's staff, persons in domestic, catering and industrial services, is estimated to be between 5,000 and 6,000," the government statement read.

Exploitative system

Unlike in the UK or Canada, most Indians in the Caribbean were descendants of indentured labourers. A grossly exploitative system that replaced slavery, indentured servitude was abolished by the British government in 1917. But while it lasted, it was seen by the colonisers as a source of model immigrants.

In 1903, The Times of London published an article headlined "The Triumph of Trinidad", praising Indian workers while criticising workers of African origin. "The coolies come here under indenture to serve at a fair wage for five years," a correspondent wrote in the newspaper. "At the end of ten years they may, if they please, demand a free return passage home. I am told there is not more than one in five who avails himself of this privilege... Unlike the negro, who careless of mankind, eats and drinks as long as he has cash and when it is expended turns to for a brief spell of work, the coolie is of a frugal mind."

In 1947, three countries in the Caribbean had sizeable Indian diasporas. Of these, Trinidad (1,70,396 members) and British Guiana (1,68,921) offered full citizenship rights and had no discriminatory laws against Indians.



But Jamaica (26,507) granted citizenship only to Indians who were born there or had lived there for more than 10 years.

Across the Caribbean, Hindus were not allowed to cremate their dead. Nehru's statement in the Constituent Assembly pointed out that literacy levels were low among the Indian community in the Caribbean and that few members of the diaspora held public posts.

Dishonourable mentions

The government statement also spoke of British colonies in Africa and Asia-Oceania, of which South Africa stood out in particular for its discriminatory policies against its 1,82,500-strong Indian diaspora.

"Indians are subject to various disabilities in the matter of franchise, immigration and inter-provincial migration, acquisition and occupation of land, facilities for trade, education, marriage, travel, industries and professions, employment in public services, pensions, local Government, arms and

ammunition, and various other matters," the statement said. "The Government of India have referred to the treatment of Indians in South Africa to the United Nations General Assembly."

There were other dishonourable mentions too in the government statement. Ceylon, it said, had discriminatory policies against Tamil estate workers. Kenya granted Indians full citizenship but did not let them buy or lease land in the highlands for agriculture, nor did it let them live in many residential areas of Nairobi and Mombasa.

Fiji, which was home to 1,30,000 Indians, gave them citizenship but did not let them buy land from native Fijians and made them pay a so-called residential tax. "Indian children lack adequate educational facilities compared to European and Fijian children," the government statement said. Indians also faced prejudice at the hands of Europeans in Fiji: "it is understood that Indian residents are not allowed admission in European-managed hotels and clubs or public playgrounds." The

government said it had flagged the grievances of Indian sugarcane farmers, who were tenants of the Sugar Refining Company.

In Africa, at least three countries did not officially discriminate against Indians: Tanganyika (38,500-member diaspora), Uganda (25,972), and Zanzibar (16,000). These colonies did not have a system of elections, so Indians were nominated to their legislative councils.

Nehru's statement in the Constituent Assembly listed 11 territories where the government had no information about the diaspora's citizenship status, including Hong Kong (1,900 Indians), St. Lucia (2,189), Grenada (5,000), British Honduras (8,000), British Somaliland (520) and Aden (9,456).

Just three months into independence, there was not much more India could do besides using its high commissions to engage with the local authorities. Over the last seven decades, though, it has built a strategy that sees the diaspora as an asset and a bridge to the rest of the world. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

The new India-US security compact

By: Vivek Mishra

As states transition in economic heft, power, and influence, so do their relationships. Most starkly, this is visible in the changing nature of their ties with great powers. On the contrary, the recalibrations by great powers themselves have implicit success stories about growing powers, not just one of accommodation but increasingly, compulsion. While the United States (US) has remained a constant paradigm of growth, influence, and both soft and hard power for over three-quarters of the last century, China and India have presented two very contrasting pictures of the kind of relationship rising states have with the preeminent power of the world. China's growth in the last three decades, in many ways, was facilitated by the US's role as the global security guarantor. Now, China and the US are fundamentally locked in a great power competition, with almost every aspect of the contest speeding towards a downward spiral. Three factors have intensified this trend. First, rapid shifts in American social and political choices and patterns domestically have altered how America thinks of its security and role in the world. Second, the US wants to retain its numero uno position even as China is hurtling from behind in the most critical of domains that underscore this great power competition. China's transformation of its naval power brings unprecedented pressure onto the Indo-Pacific countries and in the tacit spread of its economic tentacles throughout the world, compelling a reassessment of the metrics of the global power dynamic. Finally, a new tech race, which is beginning to unravel and will likely shape the course of great power competition in the next few decades, has enforced an order of multilateral accommodation of rising powers upon the US. Together, these have led to a new utilitarian view of security, power and influence in Washington. India is at the helm in that reassessment of Washington.

When the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, visited the US to meet with his counterpart, President Donald Trump, on 13-14 February 2025, camaraderie, nostalgia, optics, and pragmatism seemed to roll into one. Keen observers of the India-US relationship were expecting Trump to give a new imprimatur to the bilateral relationship and not simply conform to the existing paradigms of continuity in bilateral ties. The barely 40-hour trip saw a new US-India COMPACT (Catalyzing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology) agreement, which aims to serve as the new broad framework for combining cooperation in defence, trade, energy security, technology and innovation, people-to-people ties, and multilateral cooperation.

For the last two decades, the India-US defence ties based itself on the continued momentum provided by the 2005 Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship which promised "setting the US and India on a path to increasingly broad, complex, and strategic cooperation" and the subsequent 10-year framework signed in June 2015 which provided "avenues for high-level strategic discussions, continued exchanges between armed forces of both countries, and strengthening of defence capabilities." The latest extension of the framework is reflective of the expansive nature of defence ties between the US and India, especially in its increasing importance for cooperation in the transfer of sensitive technologies and strategic trust. India and the US announced the



signing of a new ten-year framework this year for the US-India Major Defence Partnership in the 21st Century, as the one signed in 2015 nears its culmination. Importantly, the new framework weaves in India's Major Defence Partner (MDP) status to ensure that new technology access and supply guarantees in the area of defence and security can be part of a sustained process over the next decade.

A path that was set for the India-US defence cooperation in 2005 has required a new thrust every 10 years to accommodate new priorities. The latest iteration has placed the expansion of defence industrial cooperation, coproduction, and interoperability at the heart of bilateral defence ties. Among key plans to speed up supplies for India's defence requirements, India and the US have announced that they will pursue new procurements and co-production arrangements for 'Javelin' Anti-Tank Guided Missiles and 'Stryker' Infantry Combat Vehicles in India this year. Besides, the procurement of six additional P-8I Maritime Patrol aircraft is likely to boost India's Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities in the expanse of the Indo-Pacific region.

The second Trump administration has clearly taken a long view of the security ties with India, wherein the focus of the planned steps is to further integrate bilateral security ties by making them deeply structural. A wider leveraging of India's MDP status through the Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 (STA-1) authorisation; initiating negotiations for a Reciprocal Defence Procurement (RDP) agreement to enhance bilateral procurement channels and establish well-oiled reciprocal supply lines for defence goods and services; and reviewing arms transfer regulations, including the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), are all geared towards fostering deeper integration, interoperability, and co-production.

Given the lessons learnt over the past five years—both on and off the battlefield—it was rather incumbent upon Modi and Trump to outline a roadmap for the next decade. The importance of autonomous systems to the future of warfare and security is one such domain. India and the US announced the Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA), a new initiative seeking to augment industry partnerships and production in the Indo-Pacific region. Partnerships between Indian and US companies for coproducing maritime systems and AI-enabled counter Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) could be useful for both countering and establishing

deterrence.

Perhaps most importantly, India and the US have broken 'new ground' by announcing their intention to "support and sustain the overseas deployments of the US and Indian militaries in the Indo-Pacific"—a significant joint security commitment to the region. These deployments could reshape how India and the US approach regional security in the Indo-Pacific by enhancing cooperation in logistics, intelligence sharing, force mobility for joint humanitarian and disaster relief operations, and, most importantly, for countering common threats from the Gulf to the Far East.

There were several other announcements in the field of technology, innovation, energy security, space and people-to-people ties, which all feed into the new security compact between the two countries. However, three trends in the India-US bilateral as well as their multilateral cooperation framework stood out in the joint statement. The Indian Ocean will be a key domain in the Indo-US cooperation. The launch of the Indian Ocean Strategic Venture—a bilateral initiative to advance coordinated investments in economic connectivity and commerce—along with Meta's ambitious 50,000-kilometre undersea cable project, underscores a long-term commitment to connect and strengthen global digital infrastructure and regional security. Second, Modi's visit underscored that the commitment of both India and the US to the importance of the Quad framework in the Indo-Pacific remains resolute. And finally, a key convergence point in this new bilateral compact between India and the US is connectivity projects. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) aims to serve as the next transregional connectivity project which could reroute energy supply chains. However, its success remains contingent on the geopolitical externalities of the Middle East.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, US Vice President J.D. Vance emphasised that America expects Europe to take on a greater security role, allowing Washington to focus on other critical regions. The implicit message was clear: Indo-Pacific security and the challenge posed by China remain top priorities for the US. Despite concerns that a second Trump administration might scale back America's global security commitments, its strategic competition with China is set to continue. A confident Trump administration views India as a crucial partner in advancing its strategic objectives while recalibrating America's role on the global stage. (Courtesy: ORF)

'Why does the government present the same words differently in each budget?'

By: Nishant Anand

While rejecting Keynesian economics and adopting neoliberal policies, major proponents of the international market claimed that when the market fails, the government should withdraw and leave the responsibility to private investors. Along with this claim, there was another assertion that the international market could never fail or disappoint. But is this a reality or merely a slogan? We witnessed its truth when the world went through the biggest economic crisis of the century in 2008 and has not fully recovered yet. Similarly, in 1997-98, the economies of the Asian Tigers (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand), which had fully embraced the new economic policies, completely collapsed.

With the announcement of the budget, economists have started analyzing its implications. Many have stated in their analyses that the budget favors the wealthy, reduces public spending, and encourages foreign investment. However, there is nothing new in this. This trend has been consistently increasing in every budget. The narrative of "controlling inflation" in the name of economic innovation is repeatedly emphasized. But why does this keep happening?

Why does the government continue to present the same words in different ways in each budget? Our Prime Minister and Finance Minister always provide a simple and straightforward answer that resonates with the citizens: this will make India a major global economy, attract large companies to invest here, and strengthen our economy. In this article, I will try to explore these three points, not just by superficially looking at the current budget figures. In the next article, we will discuss this with the relevant data.

In 1943, an economist named Kalecki made a statement similar to Karl Marx's concept of the "reserve army of labor." He said that in the future, to control labor demand and suppress dissenters, a cyclical economy of unemployment would be maintained, leading to mass layoffs and a consistently high demand for labor in the job market. This would compel workers to accept lower wages. How could this economist foresee such a scenario 30 years ahead, and how could Marx predict events 200 years into the future?

This demonstrates that the ideological framework used to formulate economic policies determines whose interests are prioritized. Therefore, it is not enough to merely say that a government is making economic policy; it is crucial to understand for whose benefit these policies are being made. Incidentally, Kalecki made this claim when major European countries were following Keynesian economics.

At the core of Keynesian economics was the domestic market, focusing on increasing domestic demand and managing it to stimulate job creation and enhance purchasing power. However, this system largely controlled external influences, particularly foreign financial capital. The notion that external financial capital is essential for development was already dismissed by Russia when it became one of the world's largest economies within 10-12 years after the 1917 revolution. Keynesian economics helped revive the American economy and was followed by a period when nations emphasized internal consolidation.

However, this was not favorable to foreign financial capital. Therefore, in 1944, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), now known as the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were established. Their primary objective was to open national borders for international trade and operate economies under market control. They got their opportunity when the Middle East war in the early 1970s caused a sharp rise in oil prices, raising questions about Keynesian economics and



leading to trade deficits. Some international analysts believe that the U.S.-sponsored war in the Middle East aimed to expose the limitations of Keynesian economics and prepare the world for neoliberal policies—a mission they successfully accomplished.

Why was it necessary to completely reject Keynesian economics for neoliberal policies? The first reason is that Keynesianism promoted a closed or highly restricted economy, limiting external control. Second, it prioritized social welfare over private interests to some extent, which was against the interests of large private investors. If private investors spent more on the labor market, it would reduce their profits, which they did not want. Third, inclusive economic policies that consider all social strata reduce the chances of establishing economic monopolies.

These three reasons clarify how economic policies in the world, especially in semi-colonial countries, have shifted. Monetarism—where inflation control is prioritized while ignoring the employment market—became a global trend in the 1980s but became evident in India in the 1990s. Under this policy, domestic expenditure was curtailed under international pressure to control fiscal deficits, deliberately increasing unemployment and discrediting the old system. During this period, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Bill was passed, reducing domestic financial expenditure. This process continued with various sectors being opened to foreign investment.

Every government made promises of better employment but never delivered, keeping public attention focused on GDP growth. Meanwhile, the beneficiaries of these policies remained unclear. Later, economists like Layard, Nickell, and Jackman tried to normalize unemployment by introducing the "natural rate of unemployment" theory. However, one question remains: Why was inflation control prioritized while maintaining fiscal balance? Rising inflation indicates an unsuitable investment environment, making it less attractive to foreign investors. Therefore, the government focused on controlling inflation to promote "easy money" (foreign investment).

This new system set new standards of development, shifting focus from domestic demand and employment to increasing exports for higher profits. This benefited large corporations in two ways: they received a free hand in increasing production by investing in semi-colonial countries, and they could easily move to tax havens whenever major countries increased tax rates. These "footloose" companies could comfortably shift to regions willing to do anything for investment.

In the next article, we will discuss the adverse effects of this economic policy, including its implications not only for the economy but also for political and legal systems, which are being undermined. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Hamas returns bodies of 4 Israeli hostages said to include mother, her 2 young children

KHAN YOUNIS (GAZA STRIP), Feb 20: Hamas on Thursday released the bodies of four Israeli hostages, said to include a mother and her two children who have long been feared dead and had come to embody the nation's agony following the Oct 7, 2023, attack.

The remains were said to be of Shiri Bibas and her two children, Ariel and Kfir, as well as Oded Lifshitz, who was 83 when he was abducted. Kfir, who was 9 months old when he was taken, was the youngest captive. Hamas has said all four were killed along with their guards in Israeli airstrikes.

The militants displayed four black coffins on a stage in the Gaza Strip surrounded by banners, including a large one depicting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a vampire. The fighters then carried the coffins over to Red Cross vehicles, where staffers in red vests covered them in white sheets before placing them inside.

The Red Cross convoy headed back to Israel, where authorities will carry out the formal identification of the remains using DNA, expected to take up to two days. Only then will the families be given the final notification. The Israeli military confirmed it had received the coffins.

Thousands of people, including



large numbers of masked and armed fighters from Hamas and other factions, gathered at the handover site on the outskirts of the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis.

Israeli channels did not broadcast the handover. In Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, where Israelis have gathered to watch the release of living hostages, a large screen showed a compilation of photos and videos of Lifshitz and the Bibas family, including a chuckling baby Kfir and the family dressed up in Batman costumes.

Dozens of residents of Kibbutz Nir Oz, where the four were kidnapped, gathered to wave Israeli flags outside of their temporary home an hour north of the kibbutz. Israelis have celebrated the re-

turn of 24 living hostages in recent weeks under a tenuous ceasefire that paused over 15 months of war. But the handover on Thursday will provide a grim reminder of those who died in captivity as the talks leading up to the truce dragged on for over a year.

It could also provide impetus for negotiations on the second stage of the ceasefire that have hardly begun. The first phase is set to end at the beginning of March.

Infant was the youngest taken hostage

Kfir Bibas was just 9 months old, a red-headed infant with a toothless smile, when militants stormed into the family's home on Oct. 7, 2023. His brother Ariel was 4. Video shot that day showed a terrified Shiri swaddling the two

boys as militants led them into Gaza.

Her husband, Yarden Bibas, was taken separately and released this month after 16 months in captivity.

Relatives in Israel have clung to hope, marking Kfir's first and second birthdays and his brother's fifth. The Bibas family said in a statement Wednesday that it would wait for "identification procedures" before acknowledging that their loved ones were dead.

Supporters throughout Israel have worn orange in solidarity with the family — a reference to two boys' red hair — and a popular children's song was written in their honor.

Like the Bibas family, Oded Lifshitz was abducted from Kibbutz Nir Oz, along with his wife Yocheved, who was freed during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023. Oded was a journalist who campaigned for the recognition of Palestinian rights and peace between Arabs and Jews.

Hamas-led militants abducted 251 hostages, including some 30 children, in the Oct 7 attack, in which they also killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians.

More than half the hostages, and most of the women and children, have been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Israeli

forces have rescued eight and have recovered dozens of bodies of people killed in the initial attack or who died in captivity.

It's not clear if the ceasefire will last

Hamas is set to free six living hostages on Saturday in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, and says it will release four more bodies next week, completing the ceasefire's first phase. That will leave the militants with some 60 hostages, all men, around half of whom are believed to be dead.

Hamas has said it won't release the remaining captives without a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal. Netanyahu, with the full backing of the Trump administration, says he is committed to destroying Hamas' military and governing capacities and returning all the hostages, goals widely seen as mutually exclusive.

Trump's proposal to remove some 2 million Palestinians from Gaza so the U.S. can own and rebuild it, which has been welcomed by Netanyahu but universally rejected by Palestinians and Arab countries, has thrown the ceasefire into further doubt. Hamas could be reluctant to free more hostages if it believes the war will resume with the goal of annihilating the group or forcibly transferring Gaza's population. (AP)

Italy PM Meloni visits pope in hospital, says he's in good spirits as tests show slight improvement

ROME, Feb 20: Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni visited Pope Francis for 20 minutes in the hospital on Wednesday and reported he was "alert and responsive" and full of good humour, despite his diagnosis of pneumonia and a complicated bronchial infection that has sidelined the 88-year-old pontiff for six days.

The Vatican said Francis' overall condition remained stationary but that blood tests showed a "slight improvement" in key inflammation indices. Francis also worked in the afternoon with his collaborators, the Vatican said in a late statement.

Meloni said she wanted to bring get-well wishes to the pope on behalf of the government and entire nation. "We joked around as always. He has not lost his proverbial sense of humour," she said in a statement issued by her office.

Meloni is the first confirmed outside visitor known to have called on the pope, beyond his secretaries and medical team, since his admission on Friday at Rome's Gemelli hospital, where popes have their own suite on the 10th floor.

The Vatican has said Francis was up, eating and had gotten out of bed after a tranquil night, a day after tests confirmed he had pneumonia in both lungs on top of asthmatic bronchitis.

The Italian premier, who came to power in 2022 with a message touting her Christian credentials, has referred in glowing terms to the influence on her of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both reference points for European conservatives like herself. While she and Francis don't see eye-to-eye on her crackdown on migrants, they have teamed up constructively on a campaign to reverse Italy's low birthrate.

Her visit came as prayers were pouring in for Francis' recovery.

Francis also received another get-well wish from US Vice-President JD Vance, whom the pope recently targeted in criticising the Trump administration's plans for mass deportations of migrants.

"Let's all say a prayer for Pope Francis, who appears to have some serious health issues," Vance, a Catholic, posted on X from his private account.

Francis was admitted to the Gemelli hospital on Friday after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened. On Monday, medical personnel determined that he was suffering from a polymicrobial respiratory tract infection, meaning a mix of viruses, bacteria and possibly other organisms had colonised his respiratory tract.

Late on Tuesday, the Vatican said a chest CT scan showed the onset



of bilateral pneumonia on top of asthmatic bronchitis, which is being treated with cortisone and antibiotics.

"I think the key will be how well and quickly he responds to treatment," said Dr Andrew Chadwick, a respiratory and intensive care specialist at Oxford University Hospitals.

Bronchitis can lead to pneumonia, which is a deeper and far more serious infection of the lungs' air sacs. Pneumonia can develop in part or all of one lung or in both lungs. It tends to be more serious when both lungs are affected because there isn't healthy tissue to compensate.

Treatment varies by severity but can include providing oxygen through a nasal tube or mask, intravenous fluids -- and treatment of the underlying cause of the infection. To date, Francis is breathing on his own and his heart function is said to be good. He has eaten breakfast every day, gotten out of bed, read the newspapers and done some work from his hospital room.

The Vatican hasn't provided any information about how Francis is responding to any of the drugs he has been given other than to say he isn't running a fever. The Argentine pope, who has previously admitted to being a non-compliant patient, has a number of conditions that make him particularly at risk for complications: Aside from his age, he is not physically active and uses a wheelchair, limiting his ability to clear the fluids building up in his lungs.

Dr Meredith McCormack, director of pulmonary and critical care medicine at Johns Hopkins University, said doctors will be looking to see if Francis responds to the therapy, which can include physiotherapy to help clear the lungs. Severe cases of pneumonia are typically treated for about one to two weeks, but recovery in an older person could extend beyond that.

"Lack of worsening would be an encouraging sign," said McCormack, who is not involved in Francis' care. The Vatican has given no indication of how long the pope might remain hospitalised, only saying that the treatment of such a "complex clinical picture" would require an "adequate" stay. (AP)

Yoon appears in 2 different South Korean courts while defending his martial law decree

SEOUL, Feb 20: Travelling around Seoul in a prison transport vehicle, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol appeared in two different courts on Thursday, contesting his arrest on rebellion charges in one and fighting an effort to remove him from office in the other.

Both cases - one on criminal charges, one an impeachment - are related to his brief imposition of martial law in December.

Security was heightened at the Seoul Central District Court as the motorcade transporting Yoon arrived for a preliminary hearing that involved discussions of witnesses, proposed evidence and other preparations for his criminal trial.

The court, which scheduled another preliminary hearing in March, was also reviewing a request by Yoon's lawyers to cancel his arrest and release him from custody. Such challenges are rarely successful. The court was expected to make a decision sometime during Thursday evening.

Yoon next traveled across the capital to the Constitutional Court, which is nearing a decision on whether to formally remove him from office after he was impeached by the National Assembly. Yoon was expected to face key impeachment witnesses, including Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, who has told lawmakers and investigators that Yoon sidestepped a constitutional requirement to deliberate in a formal meeting of the Cabinet before declaring martial law on Dec. 3.

The court has also called Hong Jang-won, former first deputy director of South Korea's spy agency, who has said that Yoon had ordered him to help a defense counterintelligence unit detain key politicians, including National Assembly speaker Woo Won Shik and opposition leader Lee Jae-



myung. Yoon was indicted Jan 26 on rebellion charges, which carry a potential punishment of death or life in prison. In South Korea, presidents have immunity from most criminal prosecutions, but not on charges of rebellion or treason.

The indictment alleges his imposition of martial law was an illegal attempt to shut down the National Assembly and arrest politicians and election authorities. The conservative Yoon has said his martial law declaration was intended as a temporary warning to the liberal opposition and that he had always planned to respect lawmakers' will if they voted to lift the measure.

Yoon's presidential powers were suspended when he was impeached Dec 14, leaving him to fight for his political life at the Constitutional Court.

Martial law was lifted about six hours after Yoon declared it but has caused political turmoil, disrupted high-level diplomacy and tested the resiliency of the country's democracy.

Yoon's conservative supporters rioted at the Seoul Western District Court after it authorized his arrest last month, while his lawyers and ruling party have openly questioned the credibility of courts and law enforcement institutions handling the case.

Yoon has continued to express contempt for his liberal rivals for obstructing his agenda and endorsed baseless conspiracy theories about election fraud to justify his ill-fated authoritarian push. (AP)

Senate GOP budget bill back on track hours after Trump threw it into turmoil

WASHINGTON, Feb 20: Back on track, Senate Republicans pushed ahead on Wednesday with their USD 340 billion budget bill focused on funding the White House's mass deportations and border security agenda after Vice-President JD Vance gave a green light to proceed despite a morning dust-up caused by President Donald Trump.

The package was in jeopardy after Trump publicly bashed the approach from the Senate Budget Committee chairman, Sen Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. Trump said he favoured the "big beautiful bill" from House Republicans, a more politically fraught package that includes USD 4.5 trillion in tax cuts but slashes government programmes and services. Senators want to address those priorities later, in a second package.

"We are moving forward," said Sen John Barrasso of Wyoming, the GOP whip, after a lunch meeting with Vance at the Capitol.

The start-stop process is complicating what's already a heavy legislative lift for Republicans, who have a rare sweep of power with majority control of Congress, but face big hurdles enacting Trump's agenda as Democrats prepare to counter with steep objections at

every step.

Ongoing GOP divisions over whether to do one package or two -- the House thinks they can only muscle one package to passage, while the Senate believes two will be easier -- has created a push-pull dynamic that Trump is leveraging as he goads the two chambers of Congress to compete with each other.

Trump, in his own private talks with the senators, including last weekend at Mar-a-Lago, has essentially told them just to "get the result". It all comes as Democrats, without the votes to stop Trump's plans, are warning Americans what's at stake.

"These bills that they have one purpose -- and that is they're trying to give a tax break to their billionaire buddies and have you, the average American person, pay for it," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York told AP.

Schumer convened a private call over the weekend with Democratic senators and agreed on a strategy to challenge Republicans for prioritising tax cuts that primarily flow to the wealthy at the expense of programme and service reductions in health care, scientific research, veterans services and elsewhere. (AP)

DOGE notches courtroom wins as Elon Musk crusades to slash US federal govt

WASHINGTON, Feb 20: Although some parts of US President Donald Trump's agenda are getting bogged down by litigation, Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency is having better luck in the courtroom.

Labour unions, Democrats and federal employees have filed several lawsuits arguing that DOGE is running roughshod over privacy protections or usurping power from other branches of government.

But judges appointed by Democratic and Republican presidents haven't always gone along with those arguments, at least so far. Most notably, DOGE critics are failing to obtain temporary restraining orders that would prevent Musk's team from accessing sensitive government databases.

"It is not the job of the federal courts to police the security of the information systems in the executive branch," wrote US District Judge Randolph Moss in a case involving the Office of Personnel Management. Moss was appointed by President Barack Obama.

The success is striking given the

other challenges that Trump has faced in the judicial system, which has blocked -- at least temporarily -- his efforts to limit birthright citizenship, freeze congressionally authorised foreign aid and stop some healthcare services for transgender youth.

If Musk's opponents continue struggling to gain traction with lawsuits, he could be largely unencumbered in his crusade to downsize the federal government and workforce.

"The continued successes in the courts in favour of the Trump administration shouldn't be a surprise to anyone who has ever read our great Constitution, which clearly lays out the role of the Executive Branch, and which President Trump and his entire administration are following to a T," Harrison Fields, the White House deputy press secretary, said in a statement.

An exception to DOGE's legal victories has been a suit regarding Treasury Department systems, which are used to distribute trillions of dollars in federal money.

A judge in Washington re-

stricted DOGE's access to two staff members, while another judge in New York has temporarily blocked DOGE altogether.

Norm Eisen, a lawyer who worked for House Democrats during their first impeachment of Trump, said it was too early to say that the legal efforts wouldn't work. He noted that US District Judge Tanya Chutkan, also appointed by Obama, expressed concern about Musk's apparent "unchecked authority" in a case involving federal data and worker layoffs.

Although she didn't issue a temporary restraining order by Democratic attorneys general from 14 states, Chutkan said they could still make a strong argument Musk and DOGE violated the Constitution as the case progresses.

Eisen is representing current and former employees at the US Agency for International Development, which was shut down by Musk and Trump. His lawsuit alleges that Musk and DOGE are exercising powers that should only belong to those elected by voters or confirmed by the Senate. (AP)

US top diplomat Rubio visits UAE after landmark talks with Russia over Ukraine war

ABU DHABI, Feb 20: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met Wednesday with the leader of the United Arab Emirates, wrapping up an overseas trip that saw the highest-level outreach between the United States and Russia since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Rubio's talk with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, also the ruler of Abu Dhabi, comes as the US also tries to continue a shaky ceasefire in the Gaza Strip between Israel and the militant Hamas group.

The UAE, which diplomatically recognised Israel in 2020 during President Donald Trump's first term, also has been key in mediating prisoner swaps between Russia and Ukraine. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with Sheikh Mohammed on Monday. Rubio offered his thanks in the meeting to the UAE "for the strength and enduring

nature of the relationship, one marked by strong economic ties, defense cooperation and mutual interests in regional stability," State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement.

The meeting included discussions on artificial intelligence, the Gaza Strip, Syria, Lebanon and the Red Sea, which had been the site of attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels until the Gaza ceasefire, Bruce added.

The UAE's readout focused on comments over the Gaza Strip and the Palestinians during the meeting between Rubio, Sheikh Mohammed and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's foreign minister, that lasted roughly 30 minutes.

The state-run WAM news agency reported Sheikh Mohammed had told Rubio "that the UAE strongly opposes any attempt to displace the Palestinian people from Gaza." (AP)

Indian deportees from US arrive in Panama; Embassy team gets consular access

PANAMA CITY, Feb 20: Panama has informed India about the safe arrival of a group of Indians deported from the US and the Indian mission in the country is working closely with the host government to ensure their wellbeing after obtaining consular access to them.

The Embassy of India in Panama, Costa Rica & Nicaragua took to X on Thursday to share the information but did not provide data on the number of Indians arriving in Panama. The group of Indians is part of a larger group of 299 migrants sent to Panama by the US government.

These people arrived in the country on three flights last week after President Jose Raul Mulino agreed that Panama would become a "bridge" country for deportees.

The Trump administration has pledged to deport millions of people who crossed illegally into the US.

"Panamanian authorities have informed us that a group of Indians have reached Panama from the US," the Embassy of India in Panama, Nicaragua and Costa Rica posted on X.

"They are safe and secure at a Hotel with all essential facilities. The embassy team has obtained consular access. We are working closely with the host Government to ensure their wellbeing," it said.

Three batches comprising a total of 332 Indians have already been sent back to India from the US amid an intensified crackdown by the Trump administration against illegal immigrants. (PTI)

US Agriculture Department tries to rehire fired workers tied to bird flu response

OMAHA, Feb 20: The Agriculture Department is scrambling to rehire several workers who were involved in the US government's response to the ongoing bird flu outbreak that has devastated egg and poultry farms over the past three years.

The workers were among the thousands of federal employees eliminated on the recommendations of billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency that is working to carry out Trump's promise to streamline and reshape the federal government.

Republican Rep Don Bacon said the administration should be more careful in how it carries out the cuts.

"While President Trump is fulfilling his promise to shed light on waste, fraud, and abuse in government, DOGE needs to measure twice and cut once. Downsizing decisions must be narrowly tailored to preserve critical missions," said Bacon, who represents



a swing district in Nebraska.

The bird flu outbreak has prompted the slaughter of roughly 160 million birds to help control the virus since the outbreak began in 2022. Most of the birds killed were egg-laying chickens, so that has driven egg prices up to a record high of USD 4.95 per dozen on average. The federal government has spent nearly USD 2 billion on the response, including nearly USD 1.2 billion in pay-

ments to farmers to compensate them for their lost birds.

A USDA spokesperson said the department "continues to prioritise the response to highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)" and several key jobs like veterinarians, animal health technicians and other emergency response personnel involved in the effort were protected from the cuts. But some employees of the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service were

eliminated.

"Although several APHIS positions supporting HPAI were notified of their terminations over the weekend, we are working to swiftly rectify the situation and rescind those letters," the department spokesperson said.

Politico and NBC News reported that the jobs that were eliminated were part of an office that helps oversee the national network of labs USDA relies on to confirm cases of bird flu and other animal diseases. It wasn't immediately clear how many workers the department might be trying to rehire and whether any of them worked at the main USDA lab in Ames, Iowa.

Trump administration officials said this week that the USDA might change its approach to the bird flu outbreak, so that maybe entire flocks wouldn't have to be slaughtered when the disease is found, but they have yet to offer many details of their plan. (AP)

South Korea's Yoon in court for hearing in his criminal trial

SEOUL, Feb 20: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol appeared in court on Thursday for a hearing where his lawyers contested his arrest on a criminal charge alleging he was orchestrating a rebellion when he briefly imposed martial law in December.

Security was heightened as the motorcade transporting Yoon arrived at the Seoul Central District Court and dozens of his supporters rallied nearby. The preliminary hearing will involve discussions of witnesses and other preparations for his criminal trial, and the court was also to review the request by Yoon's lawyers to cancel his arrest and release him from custody. Such challenges are rarely successful.

Yoon was indicted January 26 on the rebellion charge carrying a potential punishment of death or life in prison. In South Korea, presidents have immunity from most criminal prosecutions but not on charges of rebellion or treason.

The indictment alleges his imposition of martial law was an illegal attempt to shut down the National Assembly and arrest politicians and election authorities. (AP)

Prez, HM, other leaders greet people of Mizoram on statehood day



AIZAWL, Feb 20: President Droupadi Murmu, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and several other leaders on Thursday greeted the people of Mizoram on the occasion of statehood day.

Mizoram turned 38 years on Thursday after it became the 23rd state of India in August 1986 following the signing of Mizoram peace accord between the Centre and Mizo National Front (MNF), the erstwhile underground headed by late Lal Leng, on June 30, 1986.

Conveying her greetings to the people, Murmu said that blessed by Mother Nature and having rich cultural heritage, both Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh represent India at its best.

She wished that the people of both the states would script new chapters of progress and excellence.

"Greetings to the people of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram on statehood day. Blessed by Mother Nature and having rich cultural heritage, both states represent India at its best. I am sure that the people of both the states will preserve their extraordinary natural heritage and cultural traditions. I wish the wonderful people of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram script new chapters of progress and excellence," the President said in a post on X.

Greeting the people of Mizoram, Union Home Minister Shah said

that the people of Mizoram have always made the nation proud and he prayed for the continued growth of the state.

"Greetings to our sisters and brothers of Mizoram on statehood day. Blessed with a rich heritage the people of Mizoram have always made the nation proud. I prayed for the continued growth of the state," Shah said in a post on his official X handle.

Several other leaders, including Defence minister Rajnath Singh, Union Health minister JP Nadda, DoNER minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minority Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju and neighbouring Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also greeted the people of Mizoram on statehood day.

Meanwhile, mass prayer is being held at Lammual or Assam Rifles ground in Aizawl, to mark the statehood day. Chief Minister Lalduhoma will address the event.

Mizoram's first statehood day was inaugurated by then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on February 20, 1987 as a result of the 1986 peace accord, which ended 20 years-long insurgency in the north-eastern state.

Subsequently, Mizoram became the 23rd state of India on August 14, 1986 after the President gave his assent to a bill to make Mizoram (then union territory) a full-fledged state. (PTI)

397 Nagaland villages not covered with mobile phone towers

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 20: A total of 397 villages in Nagaland are not covered with mobile phone towers.

Informing this at the inaugural programme of the two-day training on online system of Right of Way portal for telecom infrastructure and online inner line permit (ILP) system at the conference hall of directorate of information technology and communication in Kohima on Thursday, commissioner and secretary, information and technology and communication, Mohammed Ali Shihab said the government is trying its best to provide these villages with 4G network.

Shihab urged all the participants of the training programme to pay attention and understand the problem of different network systems.

He asked them to address the mobile network problems in their area after they complete the training programme. He also called upon them to emphasise the importance of my Bharat net to empower the

future of the internet.

Addressing the inaugural programme as the special guest, Nagaland home commissioner Vyasan R asked the trainees to play an additional role in filling the gap in providing mobile network since there is no office of information technology and communication at the district level.

He also asked them to make good contact with the service providers in the region so that proper network is available. Vyasan said the Right of Way provides a single platform for telecom companies for all necessary permission and approval, adding that without clear understanding and streamlining its policies, connectivity projects face often delays leading to poor internet services.

Officials from 17 districts are attending the training hosted by the directorate of information and technology and communication.

The training schedule also includes hands-on training on Right of Way for telecom.

PM Modi's tireless efforts behind BJP's winning streak: Tripura CM

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Feb 20: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday said that due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tireless work for the welfare of the poor, youth, women, and farmers, PM Modi only thinks about development. He is also working for the protection of the country. I believe this victory will make us more powerful, and in the coming days, more progress will happen in Delhi," he said.

He further added, "I want to congratulate the new Chief Minister of Delhi, Rekha Gupta, and her entire cabinet. They will work for the betterment of Delhi, following PM Modi's directions."

"Due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP has been winning one state after another. He has been working tirelessly for the welfare of the poor, youth, women, and farmers. PM Modi only thinks about development. He is also working for the protection of the country. I believe this victory will make us more powerful, and in the coming days, more progress will happen in Delhi," he said.

He further added, "I want to congratulate the new Chief Minister of Delhi, Rekha Gupta, and her entire cabinet. They will work for the betterment of Delhi, following PM Modi's directions."

Frontier Highway game changer for Arunachal's border development: Rijiju

ITANAGAR, Feb 20: Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday asserted that the multi-crore Frontier Highway project will be a game changer for the border areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

Speaking at the 39th Statehood Day celebrations here, Rijiju said this is the "highest allocation ever made by the Centre for a single project" in the country.

"The Frontier Highway is going to be the largest road project in the history of India. It is going to be around 1,400 kilometres long, and close to Rs 42,000 crore will be invested. It is going to transform the border areas of the state," he said.

The Union Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs

Minister, however, expressed concern over potential hurdles due to compensation issues.

"My appeal to the people is, please don't try to inflate bills to claim compensation. Don't create obstructions. If a land issue comes up, it will delay projects," he said.

He cited the East-West Corridor, also known as the Industrial Corridor, which is "facing delays due to compensation and forest clearance issues".

Rijiju said that prior to

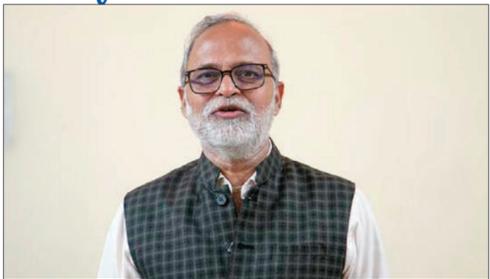
Naga peace talks Centre's emissary A K Mishra meets Naga groups

KOHIAMA, Feb 20: Centre's emissary for Naga peace talks, A K Mishra, on Thursday arrived in Nagaland to hold separate meetings with Naga groups, an official said.

Upon his arrival, Mishra, who is also the Northeast advisor in the Ministry of Home Affairs, engaged in dialogue with the Working Committee of the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs).

In a statement, the media cell of WC NNPGs said that its leaders led by the newly inducted convener M B Neokpao and working conveners P Tikhak Naga and Isak Sumi met the Centre's representatives headed by A K Mishra at Dimapur.

During the meeting, the WC NNPGs leaders apprised them of the recent developments and also the need for an early consolidated and inclusive political solution to the conflict, it said.



The meeting also deliberated on developing political consensus among Naga political groups and stakeholders so as to expedite resolving the issue in a broad-based manner without excluding any stakeholder, it said.

The ongoing efforts by various Naga civil society organisations to bring unanimity among conflicting Naga political groups has also been reviewed, the statement said.

Further, the closed-door meeting between central representatives and WC NNPGs also stressed the need to maintain consistency and continuity of the process with patience, commitment and clarity until the logical conclusion of the issue.

The Centre's representative is likely to meet NSCN-IM representatives on Friday, sources said.

The Centre and NSCN-IM entered into a ceasefire in 1997, beginning negotiations for a political resolution to the long-standing conflict. After more than 70 rounds of talks, the Centre signed the Framework Agreement with NSCN-IM in 2015.

However, the Centre has not accepted NSCN-IM's persistent demand for a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas, which has led to prolonged negotiations.

The Centre also entered into parallel negotiations with the WC NNPGs, a coalition of seven Naga groups, in 2017, and inked the Agreed Position in the same year.

While the WC NNPGs have expressed willingness to accept whatever is possible and continue negotiations on other contentious demands, the NSCN-IM has declared it will not accept any solution without a separate flag and constitution. (PTI)

Four militants arrested from various Manipur districts

IMPHAL, Feb 20: Security forces have arrested four militants belonging to at least two different outfits from Manipur's Churachandpur, Thoubal and Imphal East districts, police said on Thursday.

Those arrested include an active member of the United Kuki National Army from Churachandpur on Tuesday, and three active cadres of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) from Thoubal and Imphal East on Wednesday.

The militants were involved in "extortion activities, kidnapping, weapon smuggling and drug trafficking", they said.

The security forces also recovered a huge cache of arms and ammunition from Thoubal and Tengenpoual districts during the last two days, a police officer said.

Rifles, pistols, hand grenades and mortars were among the seized arms, he said. (PTI)

Arunachal Guv highlights development, education, social reforms on Statehood Day

ITANAGAR, Feb 20: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) on Thursday reaffirmed the state government's commitment to improving infrastructure, digital connectivity, and public services to enhance the quality of life for all citizens.

Unfurling the national tri-colour at IG Park here, on the occasion of the 39th Statehood Day, the governor acknowledged the state's remarkable progress but emphasised the need to address ongoing challenges.

He stressed the importance of education, urging efforts to reduce dropouts and ensure all children complete their studies. He stated that only when students complete their education can Arunachal nurture its own teachers, engineers, and doctors, thereby reducing dependence on other states.

He called for a disciplined and motivated student community that contributes to the state's growth.

Focusing on cleanliness and environmental management, Parnaik urged citizens to work in a mission mode to maintain hygiene and manage waste efficiently. He emphasized that waste disposal must be systematic, starting from villages to cities and tourist circuits.

"A green and well-planned state must be free from illegal structures, encroachments, and unregulated construction," he said and called for village volunteers to take responsibility for cleanliness and suggested using technological solutions to convert waste into power and useful products.

He stressed that roads and highways should inspire travellers and that community efforts should play a role in maintaining a clean and organised environment.

Addressing the growing drug menace in the state, the governor called for a two-pronged approach - prevention and rehabilitation. He noted

that drug abuse is eroding the social fabric and must be tackled by identifying and disrupting drug distribution networks.

He suggested using satellite imagery to track the cultivation of illicit substances and urged parents, community leaders, and teachers to report cases of addiction. He emphasized that rigorous awareness campaigns led by the government, police, universities, and social organizations can help curb the issue.

He also called for effective counselling and rehabilitation measures, with recovered individuals being engaged in sports and skill-building programmes. He proposed that reformed persons could serve as anti-drug ambassadors to assist those undergoing rehabilitation.

Parnaik underscored the need for leveraging technology in governance, education, and administration. He suggested adopting e-governance practices, automating data systems, and developing applications to monitor project progress.

These measures, he said, would ensure timely project completion, reduce malpractices, and improve efficiency in administration.

He emphasised the need for better tourism infrastructure and hospitality services to attract visitors.

While the state government is making strides in this direction, Parnaik called upon individuals to contribute by fostering a positive and welcoming environment for tourists.

Highlighting key infrastructure and power sector developments, Parnaik said the government had constructed over 4,000 km of roads, ensuring connectivity to remote villages and linking all district headquarters via two-lane highways.

The 1,748-km Frontier Highway project, aimed at enhancing inter-valley connectivity, is progressing in mission mode.

He noted that the state has a power generation capacity of 58,000 MW, nearly 40 per cent of the country's total potential and further highlighted the progress of major hydropower projects, including the Lower Subansiri Hydro Project (2,000 MW), which is set for commissioning in 2026, and the Dibang Multipurpose Hydro Project (2,880 MW), one of India's largest, currently under construction.

He also mentioned that 13 stalled projects with a combined capacity of 12,723 MW have received approvals. Among these, the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project is of strategic national importance, ensuring safety for the Adi community and the Siang belt while generating surplus power, which is expected to bring in over Rs 10,000 crore in annual revenue for the state.

In the education sector, he highlighted that 30 higher secondary schools are under construction, while 50 schools are being upgraded to Golden Jubilee Schools. Additionally, New Age Learning Centres are being established in all districts, and ten Eklavya Model Residential Schools have been sanctioned, with five already completed.

A Tribal Research Institute is also under construction, he added.

Calling for transparency, accountability, and collective progress, Parnaik urged people to work together to build a prosperous and harmonious Arunachal Pradesh. He emphasised the importance of harnessing the state's cultural heritage, investing in education, and empowering the youth to create a brighter future.

"Let's build bridges of understanding, embrace our diversity, and draw strength from unity. The choices we make today will resonate for generations. Let us choose wisely and act boldly for the success and harmony of our state," he added. (PTI)

Housing complex for state govt employees, general public opened

AIZAWL, Feb 20: The Federation Enclave Sample Flat and Community Centre, a housing complex where state government employees and the general public can own homes, has been opened, an official said on Thursday.

The housing complex located in Ainawm neighbourhood in the western part of state's capital Aizawl was inaugurated by Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Wednesday, the official said.

The housing complex is expected to be completed by 2027 with bookings opening from Wednesday, he said.

For the first year, the housing units will be available exclusively to government employees. After one year, the units will be open for purchase by the public.

The housing project was initiated jointly by Mizoram Government Employees Housing Society (FMGE&W) and Blue Mountain Engineering & Services Limited.

In his inaugural speech, Lalduhoma had said that the federation enclave will play a vital role in the urban development of Mizoram, the official said. The chief minister had also said that the initiative will contribute to transforming Aizawl and its surrounding areas into a well-planned city in the future, he said.

The complex will accommodate approximately 350 families and 2,000 residents. (PTI)

Nagaland holds 1st meet on 8th economic census

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 20: Nagaland held the first meeting of the State Level Coordination Committee (SLCC) on the 8th Economic Census under the chairmanship of chief secretary J Alam at the chief secretary's conference room in Kohima on Thursday.

The meeting was convened to identify the mechanism through which the state intends to fulfill the requirement of contractual manpower and IT personnel and identification of master trainers.

Initiating the meeting, secretary economic and statistics Akunu S Meyase said the economic census is the head count of all establishments/entrepreneurial units and workers employed within the geographical boundary of the country with particular focus on non-agricultural sector.

He said the census will be conducted in collaboration with states and UTs using advanced information communication technology platform which would facilitate geo-codes embedded data collection on mobile devices, real-time data validation and scrutiny and interactive management information system dashboards for monitoring and supervision.

The meeting also discussed the activation of district-level coordination committees in



the districts and requirement of IT experts for each district to resolve IT-related issues.

It was informed that the services of government employees from various departments will be utilised in conducting the census and they will be deployed as enumerators and supervisors.

Chief secretary Alama asked the heads of departments concerned to issue instructions to the district-level officials to provide all support and necessary assistance whenever called for. He also asked all the DCs to conduct meetings in their respective district and then start the census operations.

He also called for using social media platforms to promote awareness and sensitise the public on the economic census.

The 1st week of April is tentatively scheduled for roll out of the 8th economic census across the country.

GI expert Dr Rajni Kant calls on Governor

HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, Feb 20: Dr. Rajni Kant, a renowned Geographical Indication (GI) expert from Uttar Pradesh, called on the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt. General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd.) here at Raj Bhavan in Itanagar on Thursday. They discussed the significance of GI tagging in safeguarding the traditional arts, crafts, and unique products of Arunachal Pradesh's tribal communities.

During the meeting, the Governor emphasised the critical role of GI certification in preserving the identity, authenticity, and economic value of indigenous products of the state which has a large number of tribes with distinct traditions and cultural heritage.

"Drawing from his observations during district tours, he highlighted that GI tagging not only ensures the protection of traditional knowledge and craftsmanship but also fosters sustainable economic growth by enhancing the marketability of local products," said an official statement. It further said that the Governor

said that GI tagging will guarantee quality, build consumer confidence, and promote Arunachal Pradesh's rich cultural heritage on a national and global scale.

The Governor had earlier felicitated Dr Rajni Kant during the 39th Statehood Day celebrations in the state capital, recognising his pivotal role in securing GI registration for 18 indigenous products of Arunachal Pradesh.

"Acknowledging his significant contributions, the Governor urged Dr. Kant to continue supporting the state in its efforts to preserve and promote its unique cultural and traditional identity," it added.

Dr Kant, general secretary of the Human Welfare Association, Varanasi, is a Padma Shri awardee and is widely known as the 'GI Man of India' for his instrumental role in securing GI certification for 59 products across 20 states in India.

His expertise has helped bring global recognition to various indigenous crafts and products, reinforcing their cultural significance and economic value.

No DPRD/BTC/(15th FC)UT(VI)UdI-37/2024/11, Dated Kokrajhar, the 18th Feb., 2025

PRESS NOTICE
(e-Procurement)

The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for implementation of work "Const. of road with earth filling and sand gravelling from Gwjwnpuri village to Maonapara village alongwith 1 HPC and 1 box culvert" for an amount not exceeding of Rs.50,00,000.00 (Rupees fifty lakhs) only in respect of Mazbat Dev. Block, Mazbat under 15th Finance Commission to BTC for the year 2023-24 during 2024-25 under Untied Grant from the registered contractors of Class -I & Class- II (A,B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads) / (Building), BTC.

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

Sd/-Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1528

No.BDB/Tender/46/2023-24/9316 Date 19/02/2025

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER.

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & twenty five paise) only with a validity period of 180 days which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors of Class-I (A, B & C), Class-II & Class III category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under 15th FC (Tied Grant) under P&RD Dept. BTR Kokrajhar for the year 2023-24 during 2024-25 as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00PM on 13/3/25 and will be opened on the day after tomorrow date as on 15/3/25 (Saturday) & place at 2.30 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of activity	A.A amount. (Rs. In Lakh)	Tender Value (in Lakhs)	EMD/Bid Security (Earnest Money) (in Rs.)	Cost of Tender paper (in Rs.)	Pre-bid date and Time	Last date & time of bid submission	Date & Time of bid opening	Time of completion of Work
1	"Const. of Community Toilet at Nonapara Calvary Baptist Church	11,00,000/-	11,00,000/-	1% for ST, SC & 2% for Gen, Enterprise	330	21/2/25	13/3/25	15/3/25	6 month

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 21/2/25 to 15/3/25 up to 1.30 PM. In the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of demand draft/bankers cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC Kokrajhar payable at Kokrajhar.

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1520

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

UGC draft regulations will bring higher education under those promoting communal ideology: Kerala CM

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 20: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said the "Draft UGC regulations 2025" was part of the efforts to place higher education "under the control of those promoting religious and communal ideologies" and therefore, "it cannot be allowed to pass".

After inaugurating a National Convention on these regulations here, chief minister said the guidelines were aimed at not only diminishing the role of state governments in higher education but also completely sidelining them.

He said that under the draft regulations, the states have no role in the appointment of vice chancellors (VCs) and assistant professors in state-established universities and termed them as "undemocratic and excessive".

Vijayan said that this was despite the fact the state governments fund nearly 80 per cent of the expenses for running varsities and other higher educational institutions.

He further said that there was every possibility of the present po-



litical dispensation at the centre substituting people with academic excellence by those of political choice," as has happened in many iconic institutions, ranging from the Pune Film Institute to the ICHR".

"The approach of appointing Vice-Chancellors from outside academia, even from the private sector, needs to be seen as an attempt to commercialise higher education," he asserted.

At the event, attended by ministers from the neighbouring states of Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, Vijayan also accused the Centre of "spending money on establishing myths as facts and beliefs as science".

"Even at the helm of research institutes we have those peddling falsehoods and superstitions as facts and scientific truths. Yet, the Draft Regulations do not seem to worry about these dangerous trends

that are creeping into our higher education sector, which will undoubtedly send us backwards," he said.

Referring to the concerns he has regarding the regulations, CM said that powers for appointing VCs have been given to Chancellors, who are the Governors appointed by the Centre.

"If the Chancellor can appoint anyone from a panel, undoubtedly the appointment will be at the behest of the political powers that have appointed the Governor, as in almost all state universities, Governors are Chancellors. Such politically motivated interventions can seriously impinge upon the standards of higher education in the country," he said.

Vijayan claimed that "gubernatorial excesses" were experienced by many opposition-ruled states including Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Kerala, in the country.

The CM also highlighted his government's experience with Arif Mohammed Khan as a governor and how he had declined assent to various bills related to the administration of universities in the state,

forcing the state government to approach the Supreme Court.

Vijayan said that the draft regulations also carried "new and arbitrary criteria" for promotions of academic staff as it proposes to do away with the Academic Performance Indicator (API) system of evaluation. He said that the regulations were "not an isolated incident in terms of the Union government infringing upon the states' rights".

"Over the years, we have seen the Union government repeatedly enact laws that encroach upon the states' powers and duties in several sectors, even on law and order, which is absolutely in the States List in the Constitution," Vijayan said.

The CM also raised the issue of the Centre allegedly eating into the states' financial resources as "share of Union allocation for their own schemes was coming down year-after-year, with the state governments having to chip in more-and-more". He also alleged that the Union government will go to any extent to usurp the rights of the states. (PTI)

'Skoda Volkswagen can't play victim, will have to fall in line on tax demand'

MUMBAI, Feb 20: Skoda Auto Volkswagen India will have to "fall in line and not play victim," the Customs department told the Bombay High Court on Thursday, justifying its tax demand notice of USD 1.4 billion to the company for allegedly providing misleading information about its imports.

Additional Solicitor General N Venkatraman, appearing for the customs department, said the rule of law is the same for everyone.

"You have to follow the law. You have to fall in line. The rule of law is the same for everyone. Similar importers are already paying 30 per cent," he said.

The customs department was not at fault for sending the show-cause notice but "it is the company's fault for not classifying the items properly," the ASG added.

"Don't be the victim here. If you don't follow the law then we will initiate action in accordance with the provisions of law," Venkatraman said.

A division bench of Justices B P Colabawalla and Firdosh Pooniwalla was hearing a petition filed by the company, challenging the tax demand notice by terming it as "arbitrary and illegal".

The company said the over ₹

12,000 crore demand was "exorbitant". The court will continue hearing the arguments on Friday.

The customs has claimed that the company "misclassified" its imports of Audi, Skoda and Volkswagen cars as "individual parts" instead of "Completely Knocked Down" (CKD) units, thereby paying significantly lower import duties. The court, while hearing the ASG's argument, said the contention of Volkswagen was that until the notice was issued, it had been classifying its imports as individual components and paying tax at the rate applicable to that category.

"Their (Volkswagen) argument is that once you (customs) have classified them under one category all these years, can you now re-classify them," the bench pointed out. Venkatraman said this was possible, and there was no harm in doing so when the department came across new facts.

"Until now, no commissioner had an iota of (idea of) what the company was doing all these years. How they were importing their material, how they were assembling it, no one in the world knew. Our investigation revealed the truth," he told the court. (PTI)

SOA among four universities in India listed in World reputation rankings

HT Correspondent BHUBANESWAR, Feb 20: Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (SOA) deemed to be university has got a significant achievement by finding place among four institutions in India in the Times Higher Education (THE) World Reputation Rankings 2025.

The list, which includes Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi and Indian Institute of Technology-Madras besides SOA, was published on Tuesday.

Only four institutions in India have been included in the list of which SOA is the lone private institution. All the four institutions were positioned in the 201-300 brackets in the ranking. They had ranked 300 institutions from 38 countries this year using a revamped methodology.

Harvard University has been ranked first in the list this year among the institutions worldwide for the 14th consecutive year followed by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and University of Oxford (joint 2nd), Stanford University and University of Cambridge (joint 4th).

SOA was ranked 14th in the country among universities by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) in 2024 while it was accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) with highest Grade A++.

It has been conferred with Category-I Graded Autonomy Status by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2022.

The university has also been globally placed in the QS and THE world university rankings.

Kapil Mishra: From bitter critic of PM Modi, BJP, RSS to Hindutva posterboy

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Activist and now a Delhi minister, Kapil Mishra has undergone a complete transition -- from being an avowed AAP member and a bitter critic of the BJP, RSS and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a controversial politician often regarded as the "posterboy of Hindutva".

On Thursday, Mishra took oath as a minister in the newly formed Delhi government at a grand ceremony at the historic Ramlika Ground. His induction in the Rekha Gupta-led Delhi Cabinet is seen as a strategic move by the BJP as it consolidates its governance approach in the national capital.

Mishra, 44, was an activist before he started his political journey. He was actively involved in anti-corruption movements during the 2010 Commonwealth Games held in the national capital.

He began his political career with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) representing Karawal Nagar in the Sixth Legislative Assembly of Delhi in 2015. He defeated BJP candidate and four-time MLA Mohan Singh Bisht by a margin of 44,431 votes.

Considered close to poet Kumar Vishwas, who was one of the

founders of AAP, Mishra was inducted by AAP convener and the then chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in his cabinet as the water resources minister in 2015.

Mishra would level serious allegations against Modi, BJP and RSS inside and outside the Delhi Assembly. Several video clips of Mishra speaking against Modi and RSS are doing the rounds on the social media, including X, on Thursday after he was sworn in as a cabinet minister in the BJP government.

In one of the clips posted by Congress leader and former president of Indian Youth Congress, B V Srinivas, Mishra is heard speaking against the BJP leaders.

However, Mishra lost the trust of Kejriwal after the chief minister and Vishwas fell apart. Besides Vishwas, Mishra also opened a front against Kejriwal. He levelled serious allegations of corruption by Kejriwal and another ministerial colleague Satyendra Jain.

Mishra was sacked as a minister in 2017. But this did not discourage Mishra. He kept criticising and embarrassing Kejriwal and AAP. Despite being an AAP MLA, he would be seen taking part in BJP's programmes.

He was disqualified as an MLA in 2019 due to his anti-party activi-

ties. He soon joined the BJP in 2019 and rose to the post of vice president of the party's Delhi unit. He contested the 2020 Assembly elections on a BJP ticket from Model Town but lost.

Mishra slowly changed to a Hindutva poster boy of the BJP, speaking against the Muslims. He is accused of making hate speeches during the 2020 Delhi riots.

He defeated AAP's Manoj Kumar Tyagi by a margin of 23,355 votes in the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections. "Corruption free Delhi is my mission," says his X bio.

"BJP government is being formed. We will implement PM Modi's vision for Delhi," said Mishra before taking oath.

Throughout his political career, Mishra has been a vocal advocate on various issues and has played an active role in party campaigns.

A prominent political figure in Delhi, Mishra has completed his higher education at the University of Delhi, earning a Master of Arts in Social Work.

His transition from AAP to BJP highlights the evolving political landscape in Delhi. As he assumes office, his role in shaping policies and governance in the city will be closely observed. (PTI)

Odisha plans to construct 16 dams, 15 barrages on Mahanadi river: CM

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 20: Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday informed the state assembly that 16 dam and 15 barrage projects have been planned for securing sustainable water development with equity for Mahanadi waters in the interest of the state.

In a written reply to a query by BJD legislator Ranendra Pratap Swain, the chief minister said, "Due to excess unplanned use of Mahanadi water in the upstream catchment of Mahanadi basin by Chhattisgarh, flow of water to the downstream of Odisha is gradually reducing as observed at Hirakud dam site located near the interstate border of Chhattisgarh and Odisha."

To this effect, the state has taken the shelter of the Mahanadi Water Dispute Tribunal and filed its claims through a number of pleadings and the matter is now sub-judice, he said.

Similarly, in another written statement to the House, Majhi informed that the government has also planned to build 41 in-stream storage structures on Mahanadi river.

Prasanna Acharya, BJD deputy leader in Assembly, had raised the issue during Question Hour. Acharya said that the Chhattisgarh government has constructed 8 or 9 barrages on the upper basin area of Mahanadi river, due to which, water flow in the river at the starting point in Odisha drastically reduced during summer. (PTI)

Cong spreading myths about UCC, does not believe in Constitution: Dhami

DEHRADUN, Feb 20: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Thursday accused the Congress of spreading myths about the Uniform Civil Code as it does not believe in the Constitution and supports atrocities against women.

"On Congress' opposition to the UCC's provision regarding compulsory registration of live-in relationships, he said it is meant for the safety of partners in such a relationship.

The Congress has been vehemently opposing the UCC especially because of its provisions regarding mandatory registration of live-in relationship as it looks upon the clause as an infringement on people's right to privacy.

Registration of live-in relationships will keep the authorities and parents of partners in such a relationship informed about them because many such alliances become abusive and sometimes even turn violent, Dhami told a press conference at the state assembly here.

Citing the brutal murder few years ago of Shraddha Walkar by her live-in partner Aftab who chopped her

into pieces, kept her body parts in a fridge and disposed them gradually, Dhami said mandatory registration of live-in relationships and availability of their records with authorities will guard against such eventualities.

"Congress is spreading these myths about the UCC because it does not believe in Ambedkar's Constitution and wants to give protection to perpetration of atrocities against women," he said.

Another myth being spread by the detractors of UCC is that if a man from outside Uttarakhand marries a girl from here he will get the rights of an original inhabitant of the state, Dhami said.

"These are all unfounded rumours being spread to mislead the people," he said.

The UCC was drafted after widespread consultations with a cross section of people. Every political party was invited to the dialogues including the Congress, Dhami said.

He said the credit goes to the people of Uttarakhand for making it the first state in independent India to implement the UCC. (PTI)

Congress part of Omar-led J-K govt: Karra as he dismisses rumours of rift with NC

JAMMU, Feb 20: Jammu and Kashmir Congress chief Tariq Hameed Karra on Thursday dismissed rumours of any rift with the National Conference and said his party is very much part of the Omar Abdullah-led government in the Union Territory.

"He expected the formation of a coordination committee, comprising members of Congress and National Conference, soon.

"We are on a campaign for restoration of statehood and meeting people and workers. The Congress has its own constituency and wherever we talk to the people about our programmes on issues like statehood, they also talk about various concern and it is our duty to raise these issues with the government for redressal," he said.

"We are a part of the government. We can give advice to the government. We can raise the issues of the people and if you want that the issues of the people should not be discussed, then it will not be fair to the people," Karra told reporters here.

He said they are expecting that a coordination committee will be formed soon to avoid unnecessary misgivings.

UP budget lacks emphasis on public welfare, basic needs of common man: Mayawati

LUCKNOW, Feb 20: Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati on Thursday criticized Uttar Pradesh's budget for the financial year 2025-26 and said it lacked emphasis on public welfare such as inflation, poverty, unemployment and the basic needs of the common man.

In a series of posts on 'X', Mayawati said, "If the budget had been more about the wider public interest and public welfare, it would have been better. There is a clear lack of adequate government intention and policy towards eliminating inflation, poverty, unemployment and backwardness. How is true development possible?"

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister criticized the budget presented by Yogi Adityanath government as being more focused on appeasing the well-off middle class rather than addressing the needs of the broader population.

Mayawati said the core responsibility of any government should be to fulfil the objectives of "Sarvajam Hitaya" (welfare of all) and "Sarvajam Sukhaya" (happiness for all) by tackling poverty and improving the living conditions of millions of families in the state.

"The real concern and constitutional responsibility of governments should be to remove poverty from the lives of crores of families, bringing them happiness and peace.

71 per cent of newly-sworn in Delhi ministers face criminal cases: ADR

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Five, including the chief minister, out of seven newly sworn-in ministers in Delhi have declared criminal cases against themselves, while two are billionaires, according to poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms.

The findings are based on the self-sworn affidavits submitted by the ministers ahead of the 2025 Delhi Assembly Elections.

According to the analysis by the ADR, five out of seven ministers (71 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves, while two ministers (29 per cent) are billionaires. The report highlighted that five ministers, including Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, have declared criminal cases against themselves.

Among them, one minister, Ashish Sood, faces serious criminal charges.

On the financial front, two ministers, accounting for 29 per cent of the cabinet, are billionaires. The



It is a matter of concern that this is not happening," she added in her post.

Pointing out that Uttar Pradesh's population is grappling with insufficient infrastructure and inequality, Mayawati said there is lack of basic amenities in the cities, villages and regions of the state.

The BSP chief criticized the state government's approach and said offering "other dreams" is not the solution to these fundamental issues.

The former chief minister also refuted the BJP's claim that Uttar Pradesh was in a bad state before its rule.

"The claim that UP was in a bad state before the BJP is not correct," Mayawati asserted.

"Under my BSP government, there was excellent rule of law at every level in terms of public interest and welfare as well as in crime control and law and order. This is something people are yearning for now, while the Bahujan Samaj is suffering due to the policies of the BJP," she said. (PTI)

minister with the highest declared total assets is Manjinder Singh Sirsa from Rajouri Garden constituency with assets worth ₹ 248.85 crores and the minister with the lowest declared total assets is Kapil Mishra from Karawal Nagar constituency with assets worth ₹ 1.06 crores.

The average assets of the seven ministers analysed stand at ₹ 56.03 crores. All seven ministers have declared liabilities, with Parvesh Sahib Singh of the New Delhi constituency having the highest liabilities at ₹ 74.36 crores.

Six ministers (86 per cent) have declared educational qualifications of graduate level or above, while one minister has completed only the 12th standard.

In terms of age, five ministers (71 per cent) are between 41 and 50 years old, while the remaining two (29 per cent) are aged between 51 and 60 years. The cabinet includes only one woman minister which is the chief minister herself. (PTI)

Budget 2025 in alignment with Sanatan culture: Yogi Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Feb 20: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said the state Budget 2025-26 is in alignment with the principles of 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah' and is dedicated to India's Sanatan culture.

The Budget for FY26 holds great significance as it marks the Amrit Mahotsav of the implementation of the Indian Constitution and the establishment of Uttar Pradesh in January 1950, he said while addressing a press conference after the presentation of the Budget.

"This Budget of 2025-26 embodies the concept of 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah' (may all be happy), which is dedicated to the Sanatan culture of India. "It focuses on the upliftment of youth, women, and farmers, with a clear vision inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's priority for the deprived sections of the society," said Adityanath.

"I am pleased to announce that, under the esteemed leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this double-engine government is driving Uttar Pradesh forward with the 5T



mantra -- "Trade, Tourism, Technology, Tradition, and Talent," said the Chief Minister. "Today, the state is rapidly advancing toward transforming its workforce into a powerful economic force," he added.

The CM said that the 2025-26 Budget, aligned with Prime Minister Modi's vision, features a time-bound

year journey, this is a crucial Budget that lays the roadmap for the state's future, outlining plans for the next 25 years," he added.

"On this occasion, I humbly pay my respects to Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. In his name, our double-engine government is establishing the Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Memorial and Cultural Center in Lucknow. This center will serve as a beacon to promote the principles of prioritizing the deprived, as laid out in the Constitution," he said.

The Chief Minister outlined that the newly established center will be a key institution for advancing Ambedkar's thoughts and creating a platform for implementing the constitutional spirit in Uttar Pradesh.

He further said that the 2025-26 Budget is crafted with these ideals in mind, setting the stage for the state's future growth with a focus on social equity and empowerment. Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna on Thursday tabled a ₹ 8,08,736-crore Budget for 2025-26. (PTI)

Yogi also paid tribute to B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution. "With a glorious 75-

Govt updates scheme to provide free coaching for PM CARES beneficiaries

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: The government has introduced an updated scheme to provide high-quality coaching to children covered under the PM CARES scheme along with students from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Originally launched during the Sixth Five-Year Plan, the free coaching scheme has undergone multiple revisions over the years to enhance its effectiveness.

The latest update extends its benefits to PM CARES beneficiaries, removing caste and income-related restrictions for these students.

Under the scheme, students will receive coaching for a wide range of competitive examinations, according to the guidelines of the updated scheme.

These include Civil Services examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and State Public Service Commissions, as well as officer-grade recruitment tests for banks, insurance companies, and public sector undertakings (PSUs).

Additionally, the scheme covers



entrance exams for premier institutions in fields such as engineering (IIT-JEE), medicine (NEET), management (CAT), and law (CLAT). Students aspiring for international studies will also receive coaching for standardized tests like GRE, GMAT, IELTS, TOEFL, and SAT.

Furthermore, coaching will be provided for defence-related examinations such as those for the National Defence Academy (NDA) and Combined Defence Services (CDS).

A total of 3,500 students will be selected annually under this

scheme.

Among these, 70 per cent of the seats will be allocated to SC students, while 30 per cent will be reserved for OBC students. Additionally, 30 per cent of the total seats in each category will be reserved for female candidates.

If there are not enough female applicants in any category, the remaining seats will be filled by male candidates from the same category.

In the case of PM CARES beneficiaries, there will be no limit on the number of students admitted under the scheme.

To be eligible for the scheme, SC and OBC students must come from families with an annual income of ₹ 8 lakh or less.

Applicants must also have scored at least 50 per cent in their previous board examinations to qualify.

The selection process will be conducted online, with Central Universities empanelled under the scheme reviewing applications and preparing a merit-based shortlist. However, students covered under the PM CARES scheme will not be subject to the selection process and will be granted direct admission.

The government will fully cover the coaching fees for students, which will range from ₹ 20,000 to ₹ 75,000, depending on the course. Additionally, students will receive a monthly stipend of ₹ 4,000 for up to 12 months to assist with their expenses.

To further support candidates who pass the mains stage of Civil Services and State Services exams, an additional ₹ 15,000 will be provided to help them prepare for interviews, the guidelines said. (PTI)

'Compulsory, unquestionable': Delhi HC quashes arrests for want of written grounds by NIA

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: The Delhi High Court on Thursday said it was "compulsory and unquestionable" to give grounds of arrest in writing irrespective of the law and quashed the arrests of self-styled army chief of the proscribed separatist organisation United National Liberation Front (UNLF) Thokchom Shyamajai Singh and others.

Justice Anup Jairam Bhambhani referred to the Supreme Court's verdicts in Pankaj Bansal, Prabir Purkayastha and Vihaan Kumar, which he said were founded on Article 22(1) of the Constitution of India. Therefore, the court said there remained "no doubt that the requirement of serving grounds of arrest in writing to an arrestee is compulsory and unquestionable regardless of whether an arrest has been made under the PMLA or the UAPA or under any other criminal statute".

"Moreover, the burden to prove compliance with the requirements of Article 22(1) of the Constitution always rests with the investigating agency," added the high court.

Article 22(1) prescribes that no person who is arrested should be "detained in custody without being

informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for such arrest nor shall he be denied the right to consult, and to be defended by, a legal practitioner of his choice".

While granting the relief to Singh, the court also quashed the arrests of "lieutenant colonel" Laimayum Anand Sharma, the head of the organisation's intelligence department, and organisation's member Ibomcha Meite, who were picked up by the National Investigation Agency from Manipur and brought to Delhi.

"The arrest of all three petitioners on March 13, 2024 is accordingly vitiated and is hereby set-aside. Consequently, the remand order dated March 14, 2024 and all subsequent remand orders passed by the special court are also quashed," held the court.

The trio was directed to be released from judicial custody unless required in any other case and a copy of the judgment was ordered to be served to the jail superintendent for expeditious compliance. From the special court's orders, the high court noted that the former did not look into whether the grounds of arrest in writing were

served upon the accused persons.

No transit remand or other order of a court was obtained by the NIA before bringing the petitioners to Delhi after taking them into custody in Manipur's Imphal, it added.

The verdict therefore said it appeared that no legal representation was given to the trio at the relevant stage.

"As a sequitur to the above discussion, and notwithstanding the seriousness of the allegations made against the petitioners, there is only one inference that can be drawn, namely that in the present case the NIA has failed to comply with the mandate of serving the grounds of arrest upon the petitioners in writing, whether at the time of arrest or even later-on, whether in the arrest memos or in the remand applications," said the court.

The trio challenged their arrests by the NIA under IPC and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Following their arrests in Manipur in March 2024, they were produced before a court in Delhi by the NIA. (PTI)

SC stays Lokpal order to entertain complaints against sitting HC judge, says its 'very disturbing'

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the Lokpal order entertaining complaints against a sitting high court judge, terming it "something very, very disturbing" and concerning the independence of the judiciary.

A special bench headed by Justice B R Gavai issued notice and sought responses from the Centre, the Lokpal registrar and the person who has filed complaints against the sitting high court judge.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said a high court judge would never fall within the ambit of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

The bench, also comprising Justices Surya Kant and Abhay S Oka, issued an injunction to prevent the complainant from disclosing the name of the judge and directed him to keep the complaint filed by him confidential. The apex court was dealing with a suo motu proceedings initiated over the January 27 order passed by the Lokpal.

"Issue notice to the Union of India, the registrar of Lokpal and the complainant. The registrar (judicial) is directed to mask the identity of the complainant and serve him through the registrar (judicial) of the high court where the complainant resides," it said.

"In the meantime, there shall be stay to the impugned order," the bench said. As soon as the special bench assembled, Justice Gavai told Mehta, "We propose to issue notice to the Union of India."

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who also appeared in the matter, said he would like to assist the bench in dealing with the matter.

"Something very very disturbing," Justice Gavai remarked. It is fraught with danger, Sibal said while seeking a stay on the Lokpal's order. He said, "I think a law should be laid down."

The bench said the matter would be heard again on March 18, subject

to directions of the chief justice of India.

The bench noted that Sibal and another senior advocate had offered to assist the court "since the matter is of a great significance concerning the independence of judiciary".

"Once the finding that the Lokpal has a jurisdiction stands stayed, I think they are aware what are the ramifications of this order. If they don't understand this, then we are here," Justice Gavai observed.

The Lokpal passed the order on two complaints filed against a sitting additional judge of the high court. The complaints alleged that he influenced an additional district judge in the state and a judge of the same high court who had to deal with the suit filed against the complainant by a private company to favour that firm.

It was alleged that the private company was earlier a client of the named high court judge while he was practising as an advocate at the Bar. In its order, the Lokpal directed the complaints and relevant materials received in its registry in two matters be forwarded to the office of the CJI for his kind consideration.

"Awaiting the guidance of the Chief Justice of India, consideration of these complaints, for the time being, is deferred until four weeks from today, keeping in mind the statutory time frame to dispose of the complaint in terms of Section 20 (4) of the Act of 2013.

"We make it amply clear that by this order we have decided a singular issue finally -- as to whether the judges of the high court established by an Act of Parliament come within the ambit of Section 14 of the Act of 2013, in the affirmative. No more and no less. In that, we have not looked into or examined the merits of the allegations at all," the Lokpal bench headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar said on January 27. (PTI)

Police station in Mumbai becomes home for Pakistani national awaiting deportation

MUMBAI, Feb 20: For the last four months, a police station in south Mumbai has become the temporary home of a 65-year-old Pakistani man who has served a sentence for illegal entry into India and is now awaiting deportation.

Nadir Munir Khan, a cloth merchant from Karachi, has been living in a room at Mata Ramabai Ambedkar (MRA) Marg police station since last October.

He can not leave the police station until the deportation, said senior inspector Santosh Dhanavate. Police have issued him a restriction order, forbidding him from stepping outside the premises.

Khan was arrested by officials of the MRA Marg police station on April 11, 2024, after he was found roaming in a suspicious manner near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus in the city.

He told police that he was a Pakistani national. But he had no visa and other necessary documents, so the police arrested him on the charge of illegal entry into India under the Foreigners Act and the Passport Act, the official told PTI on Thursday. In view of his nationality, the Intelligence Bureau and R&AW (Research and Analysis Wing) too questioned Khan besides the police, the official said.

He was then prosecuted for illegal stay in the country, and a local court sentenced him to six months in prison. He was released on October 11, 2024.

After completing the prison sentence, Khan was again sent to the MRA Marg police station, where he is now waiting for deportation.

"We have contacted Pakistani authorities. We are waiting for their response," the official said.

The police are looking after his daily needs, including food.

According to Khan's statement to the police, he ended up in India via Nepal.

In 2023, he travelled to Kathmandu on a business trip. Some local vendors who had ordered leather jackets cheated him by not making payment for the goods, he told police.

When he confronted them, he was allegedly assaulted and his passport and other documents were stolen. The Nepal authorities imposed a fine on him for overstaying, following which he crossed into India through Sonauli land port in Uttar Pradesh, from where he went to New Delhi, Khan told police.

After staying in New Delhi for some days, he came to Mumbai in November 2023.

"We have confirmed that he is a resident of Karachi. The Mumbai police's special branch has contacted the Ministry of External Affairs about Khan's deportation. We are now waiting for a response from Pakistani authorities," said inspector Dhanavate.

But until the process is complete, he is the police station's responsibility, the official said. (PTI)

Experts hail ban on vaping in Vietnam, Maldives

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Mothers Against Vaping, a united front of mothers combating the vaping crisis among our youth, has lauded the governments of Vietnam, Maldives and Belgium for taking definite steps to ban and restrict new-age gateway devices in their respective countries.

Experts, including doctors and child psychologists, also have supported these bans and have brought out the dangerous potency of the new-age gateway devices like vapes, e-cigarettes and electronic heat-not-burn devices on the health of children and youth.

Dr Rajesh Gupta, Additional Director Pulmonology and Critical Care, Fortis Healthcare Noida said vapes and different kinds of e-cigarettes are highly efficient at delivering nicotine into the body of the inhaler.

"When an e-cigarette is used, the nicotine vapour is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream. This triggers the release of dopamine, the brain's pleasure chemical, which reinforces and sustains the addiction," Dr Gupta said. (PTI)

Naxalites kill two men on suspicion of being informers in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada

DANTEWADA, Feb 20: Naxalites have killed two men after accusing them of being police informers in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, police said on Thursday.

Baman Kashyap (29) and Anis Ram Poyam (38) were killed by unidentified assailants at their village Todma under Barsoor police station limits on Wednesday evening, a police official said here.

After being alerted, a team of security personnel was rushed to the village which is located deep in the forest on Dantewada-Bijapur district border, he said.

More details about the killing were awaited, he added.

Kashyap, one of the victims, was working as a 'shiksha doot' (temporary visiting teacher) at a government school in the area. A pamphlet of the Aamdaai Area Committee of East Bastar division of the Maoists, found at the spot, accused him of acting as a police informer, the police official said.

Kashyap had provided information to Dantewada police about the movement of Maoists

Lokayukta police files 11,000 page final report to court in MUDA case

BENGALURU, Feb 20: The Karnataka Lokayukta Police submitted a 11,000 page final report in the MUDA site allotment case to the court on Thursday.

The development came a day after the clean chit given to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah by the Lokayukta police was officially made public.

Lokayukta police have submitted the 11,000 page final report to the Special Court that exclusively deals with criminal cases related to former and incumbent MPs/MLAs in Bengaluru, a senior official told PTI. Siddaramaiah is facing allegations of illegalities in Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) allotting 14 sites to his wife Parvathi B M.

Siddaramaiah, his wife, brother-in-law B M Mallikarjun Swamy, Devaraju -- from whom Swamy had purchased a land and gifted it to Parvathi -- and others were named in the FIR registered by the Lokayukta police establishment located

in Mysuru on September 27 after the special court gave an order to this effect. The FIR was registered based on a complaint filed by RTI activist Snehamayi Krishna

On Wednesday in a notice to Snehamayi Krishna, the Lokayukta police had said that they conducted the investigation and the allegations against the first four accused have not been proven due to lack of evidence, and they are submitting the final report to the court.

The notice stated that the Lokayukta police have found that the case was civil in nature, not fit for investigation, a case of misinterpretation of law or facts, and not fit for any action.

"If the complainant has any objection, he can challenge it before the magistrate of the Special Court within a week from the date of the notice," it further said.

However, the Lokayukta police would further investigate the case related to the sites allotted by MUDA on a 50:50 ratio on alterna-

tive developed areas from 2016 to 2024 and would submit an additional final report as per column 173(8) of CRPC, the notice added.

In the MUDA site allotment case, it is alleged that 14 compensatory sites were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife in an upmarket area in Mysuru (Vijayanagar Layout 3rd and 4th stages), which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been "acquired" by MUDA.

The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of 3.16 acres of her land, where it developed a residential layout. Under the controversial scheme, MUDA allotted 50 per cent of developed land to the land losers in lieu of undeveloped land acquired from them for forming residential layouts.

However, after the site allocation turned into a major controversy Parvathi wrote to MUDA asking it to cancel 14 sites allotted to her and the MUDA had accepted it. (PTI)

Command Hospital Air Force Bangalore conducts major organ retrieval operation

BENGALURU, Feb 20: Command Hospital Air Force Bangalore (CHAFB) conducted a significant organ retrieval operation, marking a milestone in its commitment to organ donation and life-saving medical interventions. The operation was carried out on Wednesday, officials said on Thursday.

The donor, a serving soldier on leave, suffered severe head trauma in a road traffic accident in Kasaragod, Kerala. He was evacuated to CHAFB on February 17 after being stabilised, they said.

"He was subsequently declared brain dead. His relatives, including his wife and brother, selflessly agreed to donate his organs to save the lives of other patients," the Defence PRO said in a statement.

According to the statement, after coordination with the Karnataka State Organ Transplant Authority, an organ retrieval team immediately flew in from Army Hospital (Research & Referral), New Delhi, aboard an Indian Air Force (IAF) Airbus 321 to retrieve the corneas, liver, and one kidney. "Another kidney was transplanted locally at CHAFB. A team from Chennai, using a commercial flight, arrived to retrieve the heart and lungs for MGM and Gleneagles Hospitals, respectively, to provide life-saving transplants to patients in urgent need," it stated. (PTI)

On February 3, Naxalites hacked to death two men, one of them their former colleague, in neighbouring Bijapur district.

Earlier on January 26, Naxalites killed a 41-year-old man in Bhairamgarh area of Bijapur, accusing him of leaking information about the outlawed CPI (Maoist).

On January 16, Naxalites killed a 48-year-old man in Mirtur area of Bijapur on the suspicion of being a police informer. (PTI)

Maharashtra's 'Ladki Bahin' financial aid scheme mainly benefits married women: study

MUMBAI, Feb 20: Married women make up as many as 83 per cent of the beneficiaries of the Maharashtra government's 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana', as per official data.

The scheme, which is supposed to have played a role in the BJP-led coalition's victory in the November 2024 assembly elections, provides monthly assistance of ₹ 1,500 to women aged 21 to 65 who are married, divorced, widowed, deserted, or destitute, and whose family income is below ₹ 2,50,000 per year.

The benefit is also provided to one unmarried woman per family.

The scheme has, as of now, some 2.5 crore beneficiaries, though the government is now carrying out a scrutiny to omit those who are ineligible.

Data indicates that married women constitute 83 per cent while unmarried women constitute 11.8 per cent of the beneficiaries, a senior official said on Thursday.

Widows account for 4.7 per cent of beneficiaries, while "divorced, destitute or deserted" women collectively make up less than 1 per cent of the cohort.



Divorced women account for 0.3 per cent, deserted women 0.2 per cent, and destitute women for 0.1 per cent of beneficiaries.

The highest 29 per cent of beneficiaries are from the 30-39 age group, followed 25.5 per cent from 21-29 age group and 23.6 per cent from 40-49 age group.

Women aged 60 to 65 account for only five per cent of beneficiaries.

Pune district has recorded the highest number of applications for the scheme, followed by Nashik and Ahmednagar. On the other hand, Sindhubudurg and Gadchiroli

districts have recorded the lowest number of applications.

The scheme was rolled out in July last year. Before the November elections, the ruling Mahayuti alliance of the BJP, NCP and Shiv Sena promised to increase the amount under the scheme to ₹ 2,100 per month. After coming to power, the new Devendra Fadnavis-led government said the promise would be kept, and an announcement to this effect is expected in the coming Budget.

After coming to power, the new Mahayuti government ordered a review to remove ineligible recip-

ients. So far, five lakh beneficiaries have been excluded, with officials estimating that the number could rise to 15 lakh.

Women owning four-wheelers, those in government employment or those already receiving benefit exceeding ₹ 1,500 from other schemes would be disqualified.

At the time of its launch, the scheme was said to cost the state exchequer ₹ 46,000 crore annually.

It has also faced allegations of fraud and political manipulation. Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar on Thursday accused the government of misleading women voters by rolling out the scheme before the elections and slashing the number of beneficiaries after coming to power.

"The government distributed funds to women as an incentive to get votes. After assuming office (after the elections), it imposed various conditions that have significantly reduced the number of eligible beneficiaries," he said.

The Fadnavis government intends to reduce the number of beneficiaries by as much as 25 per cent, the Congress leader claimed, calling it a betrayal of voters. (PTI)

DEVELOPMENT OF ECO PARK AT DHARMANAGAR STATION

E-Tender Notice No. SCL-Engg-19-2025 dated: 17-02-2025. Works tenders through E-Tendering System for and on behalf of the President of India are invited for the works as detailed below: **Brief Description of Item:** Development of ECO Park at Dharmaganar station under DENV/Silchar. **Tender Value:** ₹2,26,43,466.59/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹2,63,200/-. **Date and time of closing of tender:** 15.00 hrs. of 17-03-2025 & opening at 15.00 hrs. on 18-03-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 17-03-2025 in website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

TRD WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION

E-Tender Notice No.: TRD/LMG/20 of 2024-25; Dated: 17-02-2025; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Tender No.:** EL-TRD-NFR-LMG-OHE-MOD-31; **Name of work:** Modification of TRD existing OHE arrangement in connection with changing 13 set points from 1 in 12 to 1 in 16 at Mahur, Maibong, Daotuhaja, Dibolong-Langling and Dibolong-Manderdisa under Lumding Division. **Advertised Value:** ₹94,95,713.42/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹1,89,900/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 14-03-2025.** For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in the website www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DEE/TRD & GS, Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

NAME CORRECTION

My late husband's name has been incorrectly recorded as 'Daya Ram Barman' in the Pension Payment Book vide Order No. DIS-COM/CA/PEN/78/08/38/3(a) dated 02/12/2008 issued by Central Assam Electricity Distribution Company Limited Regd. Office, Bijuley Bhawan (2nd Floor), Paltan Bazar, Guwahati-1 instead of the correct name 'Dayaram Hasnu'.

The names 'Dayaram Hasnu' and 'Daya Ram Barman' belongs the same and single person. And, for all intent and purposes it will be used as such.

Smt. Marmila Hasnu,
W/o- Late Dayaram Hasnu,
Vill.- Pub-Gajalipar, PO-
Howraghat,
PS- Howraghat, Dist.- Karbi
Anglong, Assam

NAME CHANGE

I Bishnu Jyoti Bhagawati, S/O-Bapuram Kalita, R/O-Vill-Bakarigaon, P.O-Morigaon, P.S-Morigaon, Dist-Morigaon (Assam) & (ii) Najrul Islam, S/O- Sayed Ali, R/O- Vill-Morimuslimgaon, P.O- Morigaon, Dist-Morigaon, Assam do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that we have decided to change the name of our brick industry from 'M/S MSR BRICK INDUSTRY' to 'M/S BBN BRICK INDUSTRY' due to ownership replacement. This change is being made voluntarily and with full consent. We affirm that the change of name shall not affect the existing rights, liabilities, or obligations of the industry in any manner. All previous agreements, licenses, and legal responsibilities shall continue under the new name.

NIKHAT KHAN HEGDE BOARDS MOHANLAL-STARRER 'L2: EMPURAAN'



NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Actor Nikhat Khan Hegde, known for films such as "Pathaan" and "Mission Mangal", is set to feature in "L2: Empuraan", fronted by Malayalam superstar Mohanlal.

Directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran, the action film will release in theatres on March 27 in Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi.

"L2: Empuraan", a sequel to Prithviraj's 2019 release "Lucifer" which also starred Mohanlal, is produced by Lyca Productions and Aashirvad Cinemas.

Nikhat, who is the elder sister of Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan, will play a character named Subhadra Ben in the upcoming movie.

"Character No: 14 Presenting Nikhat Khan Hegde as Subhadra Ben in #L2E. The rise of #Empuraan continues! #L2E Releasing on 27th March 2025 | Malayalam | Tamil | Telugu | Kannada | Hindi @mohanlal @PrithviOfficial #MuraliGopy @LycaProductions #Subaskaran @gkmtamilkumar

@antonybvr @aashirvadcin @prithvirajprod #SureshBalaje #GeorgePius @ManjuWarrier4 @ttovino @Indrajith_S @deepakdev4u #SujithVaassudev #NirmalSahadev #Mohandas #SilvaStunt #EMPURAAN #L2EFrom27March2025," Lyca Productions said in an X post.

In the second installment of the action franchise, Mohanlal reprises his role of Stephen Nedumpally aka Khureshi-Ab'raam.

Sukumaran also features in "L2: Empuraan" alongside Manju Warrier, Tovino Thomas, Indrajith Sukumaran, Saniya Iyappan and Arjun Das. (PTI)

Indian Film Festival in Israel kicks off amid efforts to make the country a global film production hub

NETANYA (ISRAEL), Feb 20: Amid government efforts to make India a global film production hub, and in the build up to WAVES 2025, an Indian film festival kicked off here with the screening of filmmaker Kiran Rao's acclaimed feature "Laapataa Ladies".

"Dangal", "Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara", "Mimi", "English Vinglish" and "777 Charlie" are the other five movies to be screened in the film festival, which will run till March 8.

The lineup showcases India's diversity, rich traditional heritage, contemporary challenges and its creative genius.

"Laapataa Ladies", which was India's official entry to the 2025 Academy Awards, is a family drama about discovering oneself, womanhood, and life itself. The film drew huge applause from movie enthusiasts in Israel after the screening on Wednesday.

"I laughed and cried and had no control over my emotions as the beautifully crafted movie kept me spellbound all along. I had no control over my emotions", Lev Aran, a senior Israeli journalist, told PTI after the screening.

The film festival is being organised by the Embassy of India in collaboration with Movieland, Netanyahu.

India's Ambassador to Israel, JP Singh, discussed the role of the Indian Film Festival in providing the opportunity to explore the commonalities that unite the two countries. "As we celebrate these films, I am hopeful that this film festival shall not only provide a glimpse of quality entertainment to the audiences here, but also pave the way for further cooperation between the film industries of our two countries", Singh said.

Highlighting ongoing activities of cooperation, including several other screenings, delegational visits of film producers as well as interactions between filmmakers and other stakeholders of the two countries, the Indian Ambassador also mentioned that the first official film under the India-Israel Audio-Visual Co-production agreement is at an advanced stage of post-production.

"I would like to highlight that the Government of India is committed to making India a global film production hub by offering significant incentives, including up to 40 per cent reimbursement of production costs. India has stunning locations, skilled technicians, large market and cutting-edge technology, making it an ideal destination for international filmmakers," Singh said. Calling upon Israeli producers to explore opportunities for co-productions with India, Singh invited stakeholders from the Media & Entertainment (M&E) sector to attend the first edition of the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) in Mumbai from May 1-4, 2025.

"With India's M&E industry poised for significant



growth with a potential market size of USD 50 billion by 2029, WAVES will shape its future", he stressed.

The Indian envoy also encouraged participation in the Create in India Challenge (CIC): Season 1, a precursor to WAVES 2025, featuring competitions across animation, gaming, comics, films, broadcasting, music, new media, emerging technologies etc.

In his remarks, deputy mayor of Netanya, Adir Benyamini, underscored the role of the India Film Festival in broadening the understanding of Indian cinema amongst the Israeli audience.

"Netanya is proud to host the Indian Film Festival 2025. An event that brings together culture, creativity and shared appreciation...We all hope that this event will not be a one time event but the beginning of a tradition", the deputy Mayor said.

"I believe that this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship", he said.

Tsahi HaLevi, one of the most well-known actors in Israel who featured in the popular series "Fauda" and also acted in Bollywood film Akelli, also participated in the event.

He recalled his visit to India where he met a lot of people from the Indian film industry and said he hopes that "there would be future opportunities to know it better and more cooperation between the two countries".

"It is also an opportunity to thank India as a whole for such a good, warm relationship with the state of Israel with the ongoing support of what we are experiencing...We truly believe that art is a great way to build bridges, to build friendships. So I truly believe that we will keep on developing this great relationship," HaLevi said.

He had the audience at their feet, singing the popular track "Tujhe dekha to ye Jaana Sanam" from Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's 1995 hit "Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge". (PTI)

Ibrahim Ali Khan's debut film 'Nadaaniyan' set for March 7 release on Netflix



NEW DELHI, Feb 20: "Nadaaniyan", the debut film of actors Saif Ali Khan and Amrita Singh's son Ibrahim Ali Khan, will premiere on Netflix on March 7, the streamer announced on Thursday.

Also starring Khushi Kapoor, the romantic drama film is backed by Dharma Entertainment, the digital arm of filmmaker Karan Johar's banner Dharma Productions.

The streamer shared the news in a post on Instagram along with a promotional video.

"Kuch Kuch Hota Hai aisi Nadaaniyan dekh kar. Watch 'Nadaaniyan', out 7 March, only on Netflix," Netflix said.

In the movie, Ibrahim essays the role of Arjun Mehta and Khushi stars as Pia Jai Singh.

Directed by Shauna Gautam, "Nadaaniyan" follows a South Delhi diva, a middle-class overachiever boy, and one outrageous plan.

"Hire him as her fake boyfriend to save her squad. But when real feelings crash their party, can they handle the mess of falling in love?" read the official synopsis of the film. The film's cast also includes Mahima Chaudhary, Suniel Shetty, Dia Mirza and Jugal Hansraj. Johar serves as a producer alongside Apoorva Mehta and Somen Mishra. Ibrahim earlier served as an assistant on Karan Johar's 2023 directorial "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani". Khushi, daughter of late star Sridevi and producer Boney Kapoor, made her acting debut with Zoya Akhtar's Netflix movie "The Archies", co-starring Suhana Khan and Agastya Nanda. She was most recently seen in "Loveyapa", opposite Aamir Khan's son Junaid Khan. (PTI)

'THE WHITE LOTUS' STAR JASON ISAACS ON HIS TRANSFORMATIVE INDIA TRIP: SAW MASSIVE WEALTH GAP

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: British star Jason Isaacs has vivid memories of filming his 2018 movie "Hotel Mumbai" in India where the massive wealth gap between the rich and the poor made him reflect on what material possessions mean. The actor, known for his performances in films such as "The Patriot", "Black Hawk Down", "The Death of Stalin", and the "Harry Potter" franchise, said the trip to India was quite transformative for him. "Hotel Mumbai" was based on the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. "I think about transformation a lot because I'm older... And I think probably the first time I really thought a lot about it was when I worked in India. Well, they made a film called 'Hotel Mumbai'.

"We travelled around India a lot and we saw the highs and the lows and the massive wealth gap there. It does make you reflect on what material possessions mean... It's something that I think about all the time," Isaacs told PTI in a round-

table interview.

His new show "The White Lotus" focuses on a group of tourists and how their lives change during the course of an ultra luxury vacation and Isaacs said he had a similar experience in Thailand where the third season of the HBO show is set. "I made some friends but also got to see a country where people live very differently with massive disparity. We're actors, we're endlessly curious about who people are, how they are, and choices they make. And also for me, different cultures, different politics, different attitudes to life and death... So, it was a very three-dimensional experience."

"The White Lotus", which currently streams on JioHotstar, is created by Mike White. Each season of the show revolves around the dynamics between rich guests and employees of a fictional resort chain, called White Lotus. The first season was set in Hawaii and the

second season was shot in Sicily, Italy.

"Mike chose Thailand for a reason because people go there for a spiritual odyssey as well as for all the normally entertaining things. He wanted to make the series have more resonance and he achieved it in spades," the 61-year-old actor said.

Isaacs plays the role of Timothy Ratliff, a US-based financier, who visits the resort with his family -- wife Victoria (Parker Posey), sons Saxon (Patrick Schwarzenegger), Lochlan (Sam Nivola) and daughter Piper (Sarah Catherine Hook). While on vacation, Ratliff gets to know that his business is in serious trouble. "I had some big acting to do. I mean, there's some extreme emotions. There's a pressure cooker which is exploding... His entire life and future. And along with all the other sex, drugs, and tofu that Mike writes about, this series has questions of identity and what is the self," he said about the new season.

According to Isaacs, the USP of White's writing is that it can't be slotted into easy categories.

"There are no cliches here. What he does so brilliantly is that you meet the characters and you think you understand who they are. Sometimes you can even make comparisons with previous characters in the show, but he's far too sophisticated for that.

"So how does it compare? Timothy is Timothy, and there's no one like him specifically, and his particular dilemma has never been seen before," he added.

In his long career, Isaacs has played some of the most compelling characters whether it is Lucius Malfoy from the "Harry Potter" movies, Colonel William Tavington in "The Patriot" or Georgy Zhukov in "The Death of Stalin".

Asked about his fascination for morally complex characters, the actor said they are the most interesting parts. (PTI)



PRO LEAGUE

INCONSISTENCY, POOR PENALTY-CORNER CONVERSION IN FOCUS AS INDIA TAKE ON IRELAND

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 20: India men's hockey team captain Harmanpreet Singh would be wary of his side's inconsistent performance, which has dogged them so far this season, as the hosts take on Ireland in the FIH Pro League here on Friday.

Having ended 2024 on a high following their Paris Olympic Games bronze-medal success and a bagful of accolades at the FIH annual awards, Indian is finding it difficult to gather momentum and perform consistently.

The hosts opened the tournament with a 1-3 defeat to Spain, bounced back with a 2-0 win against them last weekend but were outplayed 1-4 by Germany. The team then eked out a 1-0 win against the world No.4 side with Harmanpreet and his deputy Hardik Singh, who missed the first leg against Germany due to injury, returning.

But as No.5 India gear up for the contest against Ireland, ranked five places below the hosts, captain Harmanpreet said being consistent and building on the momentum is the way forward.

"These upcoming matches are vital for us as we look to find consistency and build momentum in the Pro League. Every game is an opportunity to improve and gather crucial points, and we know Ireland will present a tough challenge."

"Even though they are lower in the standings, they're a team that fights hard and can surprise any opponent, so we can't afford to take them lightly," said Harmanpreet.

Ireland had finished last in the 2023-24 edition of the Pro League and are unlikely to significantly trouble India, but given wobbly start the hosts have had, they may cause some problems.



India's penalty-corner conversion still doesn't instil confidence and continues to be their Achilles heel, and the captain once again pointed it out ahead of the Ireland clash.

"Our main focus will be on improving our penalty corner conversions, which have been an area we've struggled with. We've been creating opportunities, but we need to be more clinical in executing them," said Harmanpreet.

The team members also tend to come under pressure once

they are in the lead, as was evident during their 1-3 loss to Spain in the Pro League opener here. Despite leading by a goal, India were swamped in the last two quarters when they became ultra-defensive and conceded several penalty corners.

Despite earning 14 penalty corners across four matches, the Indians have yet to convert any of these opportunities into goals. The team did well to bounce back in the second game against the Spaniards, but the perennial issue resurfaced

against Germany.

"The team has been working hard in training to address these issues, and we're confident that we'll show progress in the next matches. We're ready to give it our all, and we hope to carry forward the momentum from our last win (against Germany) and keep improving as we move forward in the league," added Harmanpreet, about his side, which is placed seventh in the standings with six points from four games.

Ireland, too, have struggled in

the tournament so far and are currently at the bottom of the points table with just one point from four games. They have lost three matches in regulation time and one in a shootout, making them eager for a turnaround in form.

Historically, India have had the upper hand against the European side, having won seven out of the nine encounters between the two teams since 2013. Ireland have managed just one win, while one tie ended in a draw. (PTI)

Lumbajong MAC lift 3rd Inter-MAC Cup

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 20: Lumbajong Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) team has lifted the championship of 3rd Inter-MAC Cup, 2024-25, after a final showdown against the spirited Rongkhang MAC team, here at Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) stadium on February 18.

The Lumbajong boys in their blues last evening have demonstrated it well again to take home a cheque of Rs. 3 lakhs and a trophy defeating the whites Rongkhang boys by a solitary goal. The runners up Rongkhang MAC team was also handed a cheque of Rs. 2 lakhs and a trophy.

Meanwhile, for the third and fourth place match played earlier on the day, Borjan MAC team secured third place receiving a cheque of Rs. 1 lakh and fourth place Singhason MAC team received a cheque of Rs. 50,000. The stipulated time of 90 minutes was a tie of 2-2. However, in the extra time of 20 minutes Borjan converted two more goals to make the final score 5-2 for the third place.

Lumbajong boys last evening managed to hold the remaining 45 minutes of the match, as they took an early goal in the 8th minute of first half through a combination from winger Malong Kiri Tisso and striker Calvin Songate.

Played under the floodlights with supporters of both sides and dignitaries Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, also president, KASA along with MP Amarsing Tisso and EMS, KAAC were at the stadium to cheer the teams. The two teams made a good start with attacks and counter attacks on each other. Winger Malong Kiri Tisso took the ball from the left wing and made a cross to striker Calvin Songate to find the back of the net in the 8 minutes of the first half.

With the score by the blues the Lumbajong supporters at the gallery were in celebration. The

white Rongkhang boys with a deficit of one goal made a good attack on their opponent to take chances. However the Lumbajong boys were not behind them and managed to foul their attempts. Though both sides took on several chances, but failed to find the back of the net and the first 45 minutes ended with a lead of 1-0 by the blues.

Resuming after the lemon break and the remaining 45 minutes show a tougher battle. The whites of Rongkhang boys regaining fresh energy were more determined. They made stronger attacks taking the ball into their position. On several occasions the whites have created dangers for the blues by making shots on targets. To foul the attempts by their opponent, the blues of Lumbajong boys also made good counter attacks and pushed the ball forward. The blues managed to hold on till the end of the remaining 45 minutes. In taking all chances they failed to convert goals by both sides and at the end of the stipulated 90 minutes the match ended with a score of 1-0 by Lumbajong boys.

The Lumbajong team has collected all three individual awards. Sarlong Teron was awarded the Best Goalkeeper, while Deuri Kro with a total score of 31 goals in the whole tournament was awarded the Highest Scorer award and winger Malong Kiri Tisso was awarded with the Best Player award. At the post prize distribution ceremony MAC Johny Timung, who sponsored the Lumbajong team congratulated the players and team members for displaying their spirited effort and winning the final. By winning the final it is a chance for the Lumbajong team to play in the Assam Premier League, Timung stated.

The MAC also thanked the CEM Ronghang for introducing the Inter-MAC Cup as it has been an initiative for development of grassroots football. Many young talents from grassroots level will find opportunities, Timung further added.

70th BRLGB Cluster 5 football tourney kicks off at KASA Stadium



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 20: The 70th Bharat Ratna Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi (BRLGB) Cluster 5 Football Tournament was inaugurated on Thursday at KASA Stadium, Diphu, with an exciting match between Indigenous United Brothers FC and Dima United FC. Dima United secured a dominant 5-0 victory. The event was graced by Rah Kro, vice president of KASA

and chairman of DMC, as the chief guest, along with Zagir Khan, observer of BRLGB Cluster 5 and DSO of Dima Hasao; Dr. Bishnu Ram Nunisa, chairman of BRLGB Cluster 5; Pradip Ronghang, assistant secretary of KASA; and Mani Ram Gogoi, Match Commissioner of BRLGB Cluster 5. The grand opening set the stage for a thrilling tournament, celebrating sportsmanship and unity.

Opening ceremony of 7th Assam Premier Club Championship 2024-25 held successfully



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 20: The 7th Assam Premier Club Championship 2024-25, organized by the Assam Cricket Association (ACA) and hosted by the Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA), commenced with a grand opening ceremony.

The event was graced by Dr. Bishnu Ram Nunisa, member of the Senior Tournament Committee, ACA, as the chief guest, along with Kensing Engti, Treasurer of KASA; Pradip Ronghang, assistant secretary of

KASA; Sanjay Timung, Cricket Secretary of KASA; and Jemson Kro, Executive Member of KASA, among other distinguished guests.

The tournament kicked off with an exciting match where Itkhola AC (Silchar) emerged victorious against Harangajao United, setting the stage for a competitive and thrilling championship ahead. The Assam Premier Club Championship continues to be a vital platform for promoting cricket and nurturing talent in the state.

Harry Kane's fitness in doubt as Bayern prepares for tough Frankfurt test

DUESSELDORF (GERMANY), Feb 20: Harry Kane's fitness is dominating the buildup to Bayern Munich's tricky game against third-placed Eintracht Frankfurt in the Bundesliga.

The England captain went off at halftime with a calf problem on Tuesday in the second leg of Bayern's 3-2 aggregate win over Celtic in the Champions League. The club says he'll "take a break from training" because of a hematoma.

It's been a bruising few days for Kane, who needed treatment on an injury to his face following a collision against Bayer Leverkusen last week.

Key matchups—Bayern's game against Frankfurt on

Sunday will be a test of fitness after Bayern came through two gruelling games against Celtic and a 0-0 draw with Leverkusen. Goalkeeper Manuel Neuer called the run "exhausting." Frankfurt's only game in that time was a 3-1 stroll against Holstein Kiel.

Borussia Dortmund is 11th as it hosts Union Berlin on Saturday and new Dortmund coach Niko Kovac is still searching for a first Bundesliga win after two losses.

Leverkusen needs goals against Kiel on Saturday after Xabi Alonso's team did a good job shutting down Bayern last week but couldn't score.

Players to watch—If Kane can't play, Jamal Musiala will likely be expected to take on a

bigger role attacking through the center, possibly in combination with Michael Olise, Serge Gnabry or the experienced Thomas Müller.

Dortmund striker Serhou Guirassy is the Champions League top scorer with 10 but needs to start scoring more in the Bundesliga. Guirassy has nine goals from 19 German league games. Only two came since the start of December.

Injury list—Stuttgart is set to welcome back Jacob Bruun Larsen after the Danish winger missed two games with illness. He could play on Sunday against his former club Hoffenheim. Forward El Bilal Touré, who's been out with a broken foot since November, is back in light training.

United States midfielder James Sands suffered a broken leg and torn ankle ligament while playing for St. Pauli last week on loan from New York City.

Transfer news—German media have reported Leverkusen is considering making defender Nordi Mukiele's loan deal from Paris Saint-Germain permanent. Mukiele was impressive against Bayern last week.

What they're saying—"We've had a decent season in the Champions League so far. We want to win the game here at home on Saturday. We know that we have a lot to make up for in the Bundesliga." — Borussia Dortmund captain Emre Can, broadcaster DAZN after beating Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League playoffs on Wednesday. (AP)



Slide continues for Guardiola and Man City in Champions League exit

MADRID, Feb 20: The search for answers will continue for Pep Guardiola and Manchester City, with the manager saying he wants continuity with the club but admitting that a new cycle is beginning.

Guardiola couldn't find a way to keep City alive in the Champions League on Wednesday, when another poor performance led to a 3-1 loss to Real Madrid and a 6-3 aggregate defeat to the Spanish powerhouse in the playoffs.

"I still want to continue," said Guardiola, who signed a two-year contract extension earlier in the season.

He acknowledged, though, that a new cycle is coming.

"We already started it, it's normal," he said. "Nothing is eternal. Some players are at an age that they can still give us a lot. Nothing is forever, but we can't deny what this group of players have done, winning six Premier League titles in seven seasons and reaching the quarterfinals, semifinals and final in this competition. This time we had to play these two matches against a very strong team and they were better than us."

At one point, Madrid fans at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium iron-

ically chanted for "Guardiola to stay" with City.

Guardiola looked agitated at times while trying to convey instructions to his players. On other occasions, he looked resigned and desolate, sometimes with his hands in his pockets or with his arms crossed.

Guardiola turned around in apparent disgust after seeing Kylian Mbappé score the opening goal in the fourth minute. Guardiola went back to his bench for a few moments after the France forward added the second goal in the 33rd, and again after Mbappé completed his hat trick in the 61st. The coach took a much longer time to return to the sideline after the goal that sealed the hat trick by the France star.

When goalkeeper Ederson resorted to a long kick while under pressure in the first half, Guardiola twice turned to him with his arms spread wide, as if asking "Why?"

After the final whistle blew, Guardiola congratulated Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti before going back into the locker room.

Guardiola had not failed to reach the last 16 in his previous eight seasons with City, his three



with Bayern Munich and his four with Barcelona. City had reached that stage every time since 2012-13.

"This year, for several reasons, we lost consistency," he said. "We achieved something unique in our country and in Europe, making it to finals that we had never made it before. This year we couldn't do it. We have to learn and start to make decisions regarding the team and everything else, and try to finish in the top 4 or top 5 to have an opportunity to be back next season."

Guardiola was hoping he could

fix the team's issues in time to avoid the early elimination this season, the first in which the league phase and the playoffs stage was introduced. But the poor performances that affected the team the whole season proved costly, as it couldn't qualify high enough to avoid the playoffs, where it was drawn to play 15-time European champion Madrid.

"The best team won," Guardiola said. "We've had a poor season. When you finish 22nd (in the league phase), it's a sign that you haven't played well."

Guardiola, who led City to its

first Champions League title in 2023, has been saying his team is "miles away" from where it should be, though it had showed spurts of the dominant squad that he led to a series of titles in recent years, including in the 4-0 rout of Newcastle in the Premier League on Saturday.

City sits in fourth place after 25 rounds in the Premier League, 17 points behind leader Liverpool.

A series of injuries have not helped Guardiola this season, with two of them affecting the team on Wednesday — Erling Haaland couldn't start because of a knee injury sustained against Newcastle and John Stones had to be substituted less than 10 minutes into the match, also because of an apparent knee problem.

Guardiola has been without world player of the year Rodri for nearly the entire season because of a knee injury.

Rodri's absence helped explain the team's inability to dominate ball possession as it previously did in recent years, and the defensive woes have also proved costly this season. The Spanish midfielder is set to return soon, giving Guardiola some hope for the rest of the season. (AP)

CT: Dark horses Afghanistan eye another good show, Proteas aim to shed chokers tag

KARACHI, Feb 20: Debutants Afghanistan will aim to continue their impressive rise in white-ball cricket, while South Africa will once again attempt to shed the 'chokers' tag when the two sides kick off their Champions Trophy campaign here on Friday.

The inaugural Champions Trophy in 1998, which was called the Knockout Trophy at that time, remains the only ICC men's senior title that South Africa have secured despite having produced some of the world's greatest cricketers, especially in limited-overs format.

The Proteas boast of a well-balanced squad with a formidable batting lineup.

While skipper Temba Bavuma, Tony de Zorzi, Rassie van der Dussen, and Aiden Markram will anchor the top order, the big-hitting trio of Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller and Tristan Stubbs are well-equipped to provide the final flourish.

South Africa's biggest challenge heading into the tournament is their depleted bowling attack as key pacers Anrich Nortje, Nandre Burger, and Gerald Coetzee ruled out due to injuries.

Known for his pace, aggression, and the knack of striking at crucial moments, Kagiso Rabada will be the Proteas' key weapon in both the powerplay and death overs.

Marco Jansen, too, will be expected to step up significantly. His ability to build pressure and deliver impactful spells will be crucial.



Meanwhile, Lungi Ngidi will be looking to rediscover his rhythm and confidence after a below-par showing in the recent tri-series.

In the spin department, Keshav Maharaaj and Tabraiz Shamsi will have vital roles. Since the 2023 ODI World Cup, South Africa have won only four of the 14 ODIs they have played. They enter the tournament on the back of a six-match losing streak.

But one cannot overlook the fact that they were not able to field a full strength team in any of these games due to multiple reasons.

Clubbed alongside an off-colour England, injury-plagued Australia and Afghanistan, South Africa have a good chance of advancing to the knockout stage. But the Afghans could prove to be

the proverbial banana peel.

The war-torn nation has emerged as strong contenders to make the semifinals.

Their impressive performances in recent ICC events include dominant wins over England, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in the 2023 ODI World Cup and reaching the semifinals of the T20 World Cup last year.

They have proved more than once that they are no longer underdogs but a force to be reckoned with. The Afghans have won four of their five bilateral series since the ODI World Cup, including one against South Africa in the UAE.

Their biggest strength expectedly remains their spin attack comprising the redoubtable Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi and left-armers Noor Ahmad and Nangeyala Kharote.

They will play all three group matches in Pakistan where spin will be a decisive factor.

Pacer Azmatullah Omarzai has been a key figure in Afghanistan's ODI success, with his ability to swing the new ball providing them the powerplay edge.

Fazalhaq Farooqi will be another crucial weapon with ability to provide early breakthroughs and effective variations at the death.

In the batting department, Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran will once again be expected to provide a solid start.

Their weakness, however, lies in their middle order, which has often struggled to maintain momentum. This inconsistency has been a concern, and addressing it will be crucial for their success in the tournament.

Squads:

South Africa: Temba Bavuma (c), Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen, Corbin Bosch.

Afghanistan: Hashmatullah Shahidi (c), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah, Ikram Alikhil, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharoti, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Farid Malik, Naveed Zadran.

Match starts 2:30pm IST. (PTI)

Hridoy makes gritty ton but Shami's fifer helps India restrict Bangladesh to 228

DUBAI, Feb 20: A cramping Towhid Hridoy made a courageous maiden ODI hundred but led by five-wicket man Mohammed Shami India managed to keep Bangladesh to an underwhelming 228 in their Champions Trophy opener here on Thursday.

Hridoy (100, 118b, 6x4, 2x6) and an equally gutsy Jaker Ali (68, 114b, 4x4) added 154 for an doughty sixth-wicket stand to drag Bangladesh back from the depth of 35 for five after they elected to bat.

Shami also eased a lot of worries over the absence of injured pace ace Jasprit Bumrah with a five for 53 effort, and during the spell he also became the fastest Indian bowler to reach 200 ODI wickets. Hridoy's innings was an example of how to construct an innings yet maintain a healthy run-rate as he reached the milestone in just 114 balls. He and Ali also showed excellent composure under pressure.

However, both the Bangladesh batters benefited from the largesse of Indian fielders, as Ali was dropped on zero off the first ball he faced off left-arm spinner Axar Patel (2/43). It also robbed Axar of a hat-trick after he dismissed Mushfiqur Rahim and Tanzid Hasan off successive deliveries.

Hridoy had the fortune when he was grassed by Hardik Pandya at mid-off off Kuldeep Yadav when he was on 23.

KL Rahul, who was sharp behind the stumps, floored a stumping chance to give the second reprieve for Hridoy. Indian fielders were also sloppy in the middle passage, allowing the Bangladesh batters to steadily



collect singles and twos to ease some pressure. But those moments of slip-ups should not take anything away from the way Indian bowlers, especially Shami, used the new ball on a rather slow but smooth pitch.

Shami, who had an average outing against England in T20I and ODI series recently at home, did not disappoint on the big stage and took the wicket of opener Soumya Sarkar in the first over itself. He did not take much time to grab his second wicket when he ousted Mehdy Hasan Miraz — caught brilliantly by Shubman Gill in the slips.

The Bengal pacer later returned to break the determined stand between Hridoy and Ali, dismissing the latter.

He later took two more wickets, and now the 34-year-old is India's highest wicket taker in ICC tournaments, going past former pacer Zaheer Khan (59).

Harshit Rana (3/31), who was preferred over left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh, gave good backing to his senior partner. (PTI)

WPL: Mandhana's RCB eye hat-trick of wins against Harmanpreet's Mumbai Indians

BENGALURU, Feb 20: Having set the pace with back-to-back emphatic victories, defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru would be eyeing a hat-trick of success against a star-studded Mumbai Indians in a WPL match at home here on Friday.

Smriti Mandhana's RCB hasn't



put a foot wrong so far, be it chasing an imposing 200-plus target against Gujarat Giants or overhauling a tricky 140-odd runs against Delhi Capitals.

Their overall strength has come to the fore in the two games they have played this season and are now leading the five-team chart with four points and a healthy net run rate. No other team so far has won all its matches.

RCB would be guaranteed of an incredible reception when they play their first game this season at their iconic Chinnaswamy Stadium, and Mandhana, who had broken DC's back with a blazing 47-ball 81 in the previous game, would be eyeing an encore.

The India vice-captain has been in red-hot form, bagging the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year award for 2024 and also being named to the ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year, and that streak of genius was evident in the way she disdainfully amassed her runs against DC.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Smriti Mandhana (c), Kanika Ahuja, Ekta Bisht, Charlie Dean, Kim Garth, Richa Ghosh, Heather Graham, VJ Joshitha, Sabbhineni Meghana, Nuzhat Parween, Jagravi Pawar, Ellyse Perry, Raghvi Bist, Sneha Rana, Prema Rawat, Renuka Singh, Georgia Wareham, Danni Wyatt-Hodge. (PTI)

easy, winning by six wickets with plenty of balls to spare.

Though RCB looked a bit thin on the bowling front, leaking far too many runs with teenage pacer VJ Joshitha conceding 43 in her four overs and Australian stalwart Georgia Wareham giving away 50 in her three overs, it was a much-improved bowling performance against DC.

But Mumbai Indians, the inaugural edition champions, would be tough customers with India captain Harmanpreet a hard taskmaster.

They did lose to DC despite Nat Sciver-Brunst's peerless batting (80 off 59 balls) and her 73-run run partnership with Harmanpreet, but the class and calibre of the side is something RCB would be wary of.

To add to the batting firepower is one of the most destructive top-order batters Hayley Matthews, along with Amelia Kerr. But MI's batting will still revolve around Sciver-Brunst, who has scored consecutive half-centuries, and Harmanpreet.

If the team wants to go the distance, the two will, however, need the help of others. On the bowling front, the side has performed admirably with Sciver-Brunst and Shabnim Ismail creating a lot of problems for the rivals with the pace they generate.

Teams:

Mumbai Indians: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Yastika Bhatia (wk), Nadine de Klerk, Sanskriti Gupta, Saika Ishaque, Shabnim Ismail, Jintimani Kalita, G Kamalini, Amandeep Kaur, Amanjot Kaur, Sathyamoorthy Keerthana, Amelia Kerr, Akshita Maheshwari, Hayley Matthews, Sajeevan Sajana, Nat Sciver-Brunst, Parinika Sisodia, Chloe Tryon.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Smriti Mandhana (c), Kanika Ahuja, Ekta Bisht, Charlie Dean, Kim Garth, Richa Ghosh, Heather Graham, VJ Joshitha, Sabbhineni Meghana, Nuzhat Parween, Jagravi Pawar, Ellyse Perry, Raghvi Bist, Sneha Rana, Prema Rawat, Renuka Singh, Georgia Wareham, Danni Wyatt-Hodge. (PTI)

Inconsistent India look to turn things around against Germany in women's Pro League

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 20: Having registered just one victory in four games so far, an inconsistent Indian women's hockey team will look to turn around its fortunes when it takes on Germany in an FIH Pro League match here on Friday.

After a challenging start, India are determined to bounce back and collect crucial points to improve their position in the standings.

The Salima Tete-led side is currently placed eighth with four points from as many matches.

The Indians began their campaign with a thrilling 3-2 win over England but fell short in the second match against the same opponents, losing 1-2 in a shootout after a 2-2 draw in regulation time.

In their third game, against Spain, India fought hard but lost 3-4.

The script was the same in their next match, where they were edged out 1-0 by Spain.

The Indian team has shown flashes of bril-



liance, but now it will be hoping to find consistency as it gears up for the German challenge.

Germany, on the other hand, will also be searching for their first outright win of the tournament.

In six games so far, the Germans have lost four in regulation time and one in a shootout. They managed to secure a bonus point in

a shootout victory.

They are currently placed at the bottom of the standings with three points, making this a crucial match for both teams.

"We know these upcoming games are very important for us, especially after the close matches we've had. The team has shown a lot of

heart and effort, but we need to be more clinical in key moments, especially in converting our chances," said India captain Salima Tete ahead of the game.

"Germany are a tough team, and we expect a challenging battle, but we are determined to turn things around," Salima said.

"We have worked hard in training, focussing on our defence and penalty corner execution. Everyone is motivated and ready to give their best in these crucial games. We know what's at stake, and as a team, we are confident that we can rise to the challenge and deliver a strong performance," she added. (PTI)

Had doubts if I'd ever play for India again after injury: Shami

DUBAI, Feb 20: Veteran Indian pacer Mohammed Shami has revealed that following his ankle injury, there were moments when he feared his international career was over but his unwavering desire to play for the country again kept him going.

Shami suffered an ankle injury during the 2023 ODI World Cup final against Australia in November, which required surgery.

His recovery was further complicated by swelling in his left knee, as he was sidelined from international cricket for 14 months.

"From being in great form during the World Cup to suddenly finding myself on the operating table, from that form to being injured was really tough," Shami told the ICC.

"For the first two months I often doubted whether I would be able to play again as an injury like this followed by a 14-month break can pull you down," he added.

The 34-year-old, however, made a successful international comeback, playing in two T20Is and as many ODI matches against England earlier this month.

With Jasprit Bumrah injured, Shami will lead the Indian pace attack in the Champions Trophy.

"My first question to the doctor was 'how many days until I can be back on the field'. He said my priority is to get you to walk, then jog and then run and thinking about playing competitive cricket is still a distant goal."

The transition from being an active athlete to relying on crutches was mentally challenging for Shami.

"I always wondered when I would be able to put my feet on the ground again, someone who is used to running on the field constantly was now in crutches."

The first two months were especially dif-



icult, as self-doubt crept in.

"A lot of thoughts used to run through my mind. Will I be able to do it again? Will I be able to walk without a limp?"

Shami said he was gripped by a sense of fear when he was asked to put his feet on the ground after three months and it felt like he was learning to walk again.

"After 60 days when they asked me to put my feet on the ground, you won't believe me, but I have ever (never) been more scared

to put my foot on the ground," Shami said.

"It felt like I was starting over, like a toddler learning how to walk and I was worried about any complications."

Shami's unwavering desire to don the India jersey once again kept him motivated during the toughest phase of his recovery.

"Courage and passion to play for the country are the biggest motivators, and the desire to wear the India badge on my chest kept me going."

"You endure the pain and take it one step at a time without complaints or bitterness. The passion for representing my country has brought me this far. It was tough and there was pain, but with resilience and patience I made it through."

"My motivation has always been to serve my country for as long as possible because once you step away, you're just like anyone else," Shami said. (PTI)

Just forgive and move on, can't worry about everything: MS Dhoni

MUMBAI, Feb 20: "Even if it's tough to do...just forgive and move on." Mahendra Singh Dhoni became a life coach for once to share his secrets for a stress-free existence, describing himself as a carefree person who would not give up on a good night's sleep by paying attention to what others think of him.

The 43-year-old former India wicket-keeper-batter, considered one of the game's greatest for captaining India to two World Cup titles in a storied international career, set a high benchmark for a leader with his calm and focused approach on the field.

He is now gearing up for what most believe is his final IPL season as a player with Chennai Super Kings and at an event here, he turned philosophical when asked to give advice to fans and followers.

"I think, keep life simple. Be honest to

yourself, have gratitude towards people for whatever they have been doing for you. Don't always think, 'this is my birthright' and ask for more," the enigmatic big-hitter said here on Wednesday evening during the launch of his app 'DHONI' powered by Single.id where injured India keeper-batter Sanju Samson was also present.

"I know the whole app (DHONI) says 'thoda aur' (a little more), but the whole thing is to have that gratitude, to say thank you, to respect the elders (and) to give love to the younger ones," he added.

He then went on to stress on the need to have a forgiving attitude, which he feels is in short-supply right now.

"I always felt having a smile on your face solves half the problem. Even if you're not in a comfortable position, even if it's tough to do, have the power to for-



give. That is one thing that not many of us have," said the cricketer who has never responded to the personal attacks on him by

anyone, including former teammates or critics, some of whom have even accused him of hurting careers.

"We have become a very revengeful people. Inse mujhe aisa bola, main aisa bola (He said something to me, I said something back)...Just forgive, move on, be happy in life, because whatever we do... when we're growing up, we always wanted to be happy in life," he further stated.

Dhoni said being carefree towards a few things helps in balancing the pressure of day-to-day life.

"We all feel the pressure. We always say the grass is greener on the other side. We always feel that his or her life is better, but what is important is how you manage that stress, how prepared you are," he said.

"I keep it very simple. Growing up, we were told 'you cannot be carefree'. But I feel in today's environment, it is important to be a bit carefree because you can't worry about each and everything that is

happening around you. You cannot do things that are not in your control," he added.

Dhoni said those who are obsessed with perception are not particularly constructive. He felt not every opinion merits a response or even consideration.

"If you get carried away with what others are saying, what others are feeling, then that important thing of what needs to be done, often you are not really giving utmost attention to that," he said.

"I am a bit carefree in life. I don't give everything my 100 per cent attention because I feel this is important, (or) that's not important," he explained.

"Even if I am listening to something (and) I can't do anything about it so, what is the point of giving half an hour or whatever to it... and (also) having a good night's sleep," Dhoni concluded. (PTI)