

6 WORLD: A kickback scheme, says Trump as he continues to target Biden admin; Netanyahu decries release of wrong body as ceasefire violation; 8 NATION: Adani issue not personal matter but one of country: Rahul on PM Modi's remarks; Wrong to infer from Maharashtra poll results that Cong has weakened: Sapkal

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'Govt should have better things to do than running after such persons' Beef transportation case: SC slams Assam govt



NEW DELHI, Feb 21: The Supreme Court on Friday pulled up the Assam government while hearing a case against a man accused of transporting beef and it "should have better things to do" than running after such persons.

"State should have better things to do than running after these people," the bench said after the state informed about the meat sample being sent to a lab for testing.

The court said that a person who did not have an expert knowledge couldn't differentiate between packaged raw packed of various animals by just seeing it. "How will a person know only if there is beef or some other meat? If person is in possession how will he recognise it is meat of which animal? Naked eyes cannot differentiate between them," said the court.

Ruckus in state Assembly over attack on Rakibul • 10 suspects identified: CM

State govt to issue statement after probe

GUWAHATI, Feb 21: The Assam Assembly on Friday witnessed uproarious scenes over the attack on Congress MP Rakibul Hussain in Nagaon district, leading to two adjournments.

The opposition Congress, which created noisy scenes in the House demanding adjournment of proceedings to discuss the issue, re-elected after the government assured of a thorough probe into the attack.

Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia raised the demand for adjournment motion as soon as the House assembled at 9.30 am.

He maintained that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma did not condemn the assault on Hussain in his reply on the matter in the assembly.

Hussain, the Dhubri MP, his son Tanzil and his personal security officers (PSOs) were attacked by unidentified persons at Rupohihat in Nagaon district on Thursday.

The Congress MP was on his way to attend a meeting of party workers at Gunomari village on a two-wheeler when he was attacked with cricket bats by a group of people, who had their faces covered with black cloth, and were shouting slogans against the MP, police said.

The DGP later said that the MP and Tanzil were unhurt, but the two PSOs suffered minor injuries and were undergoing treatment.

Speaker Daimary said the adjournment motion cannot be allowed, as discussion on the finance bill was scheduled for the day.

Information and Public Relations Minister Pijush Hazarika, responding in absence of the CM and the Parliamentary Affairs Minister in the House to Saikia's allegation of government inaction, said the attackers have been identified and action is being initiated.

Unsatisfied with the response, the Congress legislators stormed into the well of the House and created noisy scenes.

The BJP legislators present in the assembly claimed that attacks on the party's leaders took place during the Congress regime, but no action was taken.

As the ruckus continued, the Speaker adjourned the House for 10 minutes.

Soon after it reassembled, Congress legislators once again stormed into the well and demanded discussion on the issue.

Daimary then adjourned proceedings for another five minutes.

When the House met after the second adjournment, LoP Saikia demanded a statement from the state government that the culprits will be caught and such incidents will not recur.

"We want a message to go from here that democracy will be protected. We want to know whether all culprits have been identified, whether the DGP or other top officials have visited the site, and why no additional security deployment was made for the MP's meeting," Saikia said. He also submitted records of chat messages purportedly pointing to security lapse on part of the officer in-charge of Rupohihat police (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

No 'namaz break' in Assam Assembly after nearly 90 years

GUWAHATI, Feb 21: The decades-old Assam Assembly tradition of a two-hour break to facilitate Muslim legislators to offer 'namaz' on Fridays was discontinued for the first time during the ongoing budget session.

The decision to do away with the break was taken in the last session of the House in August, but implemented from this sitting. Expressing dissatisfaction over it, AIUDF MLA Rafiqul Islam maintained that it was a decision imposed on the strength of numbers.

"There are about 30 Muslim MLAs in the assembly. We had expressed our views against the move. But they (the BJP) have the numbers and are imposing it on the basis of that," Islam said.

Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia of the Congress said provision can be made for the Muslim MLAs to offer 'namaz' nearby on Fridays.

"Today, several of my party colleagues and AIUDF MLAs missed important discussion as they went to offer 'namaz'. Since it is a special prayer requirement only for Fridays, I think a provision can be made for it nearby," he said.

The decision to discontinue the nearly 90-year-old practice was taken by the Rules Committee of the House, headed by the Speaker, in August last year. Speaker Biswajit Daimary, "in view of the secular nature of the Constitution, had (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Opposition leader urges CM Sarma to reveal intel on Pak citizen

GUWAHATI, Feb 21: Leader of the Opposition in Assam Assembly, Debabrata Saikia, on Friday urged Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to promptly disclose any information he has on Pakistani citizen Ali Tauqueer Sheikh, especially if it pertains to national security issues.

Saikia also demanded that BJP central leaders Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh be held accountable for Sheikh's alleged involvement in anti-India activities, as claimed by Sarma, particularly since the saffron party has been in power.

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

Sheikh, an advisor to the Pakistan Planning Commission and a former colleague of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn, was charged under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

The Assam CM and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha, over his wife's



alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency ISI.

On Thursday, Sarma told the Assembly that preliminary investigation found that Sheikh visited India 18 times to date. He also claimed that initial information in the case is "very fatal" for the Congress and will have a "huge impact" on the politics of Assam.

Hitting out at the CM, Saikia said, "The chief minister shouldn't make such state-

ments in the Assembly. If he has information concerning national security, he should reveal it immediately. Why wait for September, when the state will be under floods?"

"If he doesn't want to make information public, he can share it with the central government, NIA, SIB, or other agencies," Saikia said. The Congress leader further pointed out that Sheikh visited India multiple (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Indian biologist named in Time Magazine's 2025 'Women of the Year' list

NEW YORK, Feb 21: An Indian biologist and wildlife conservationist has been named by Time Magazine among this year's 'Women of the Year' in a list that honours 'extraordinary leaders' working toward a better, more equal world.

Purnima Devi Barman, 45 is the only Indian woman on Time's Women of the Year 2025 list released Thursday.

The list of 13 women also includes actor Nicole Kidman and Gisele Pelicot of France who was dragged by her husband and raped by over 70 different men and who became a global icon in the campaign against sexual violence.

The profile on Barman states that she remembers the day in 2007 when her life changed when she got a call that a tree that was home to a family of greater adjutant storks, was being chopped down in Assam, where she lives.

As she questioned why the tree was being cut, she said "Everyone surrounded me, started whistling at me."

"But all she could think about

were her infant twin daughters. Like the storks, they were so small. Barman was compelled to rescue the birds. Feeling their heartbeats moved her," the Time profile said.

It quoted her as saying that for the first time, she felt the "importance—the call of nature. From that day, my mission started."

It noted that at the time, there were an estimated 450 greater adjutant storks left in the region.

"In 2023, thanks to Barman's work, the stork was moved from endangered status under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's classification to "near threatened."

"Their population in Assam has soared to more than 1,800," it added.

Supporting Barman in her efforts is her "Hargila Army"—a team of "some 20,000 women who protect the birds' nests and educate others about the beauty of these imposing, nearly 5-ft.-tall scavengers.

The network has been expanding, from Assam to other parts of India and now (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Bangladesh should not normalise terrorism, says MEA

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: During his recent meeting with Bangladesh interim government's foreign affairs advisor Touhid Hossain in Muscat, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar conveyed that Bangladesh "should not normalise terrorism", the Ministry of External Affairs said on Friday.

The two leaders met on the sidelines of the 8th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) in the Omani capital last week.

At his weekly media briefing, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal was asked if SAARC came up during the discussions between the two ministers in Muscat.

"Yes, the matter was brought up by the Bangladesh side when our EAM met their foreign advisor in Muscat. Everyone in South Asia is aware as to which country and what activities are responsible for stymieing SAARC. The EAM conveyed that Bangladesh should not normalise terrorism," he said.

In an interactive session at a think-tank meet in 2024, Jaishankar, without naming any country, had said the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was in trouble as one of its member nations had been relentlessly backing terrorism.

The SAARC is a regional bloc comprising India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Unprecedented student-led protests in Bangladesh last year had precipitated the fall of the previous government led by Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India on August 5, leaving behind a country in political turmoil. The country is currently being led by Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus assisted by his team of advisors.

Replying to a query, Jaiswal said at the briefing, "Regarding your second question about comments being made by certain advisors and what sort of impact will they have on our dealings -- (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Massive illegal poppy cultivation worth ₹500 crore destroyed in AP

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 21: A massive illegal poppy cultivation worth ₹500 crore has been destroyed in various districts of Arunachal Pradesh over the past two months, according to officials from the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN).

Officials stated that a large-scale operation against illegal poppy cultivation was led by the CBN, in collaboration with various security forces and the state government. The drive also uncovered the links between narcotics trafficking and terrorism in Arunachal Pradesh.

The operation, which targeted districts like Lohit, Namsai, and Changlang, resulted in the destruction of poppy fields spread across over 6,000 hectares of land.

"The value of the destroyed



poppy cultivation is approximately ₹500 crore, which is a huge figure. What is even more shocking is that the teams involved in the destruction work received threat calls from militant groups like NSCN (K-YA) and ULFA (Independent), warning them to leave or face violence," the officials added. Meanwhile, according to the Assam Rifles, over 180 hectares of illegal poppy cultivation, worth ₹30 crore, have been identified, with 22.5 hectares de-

stroyed to date.

"The Assam Rifles, along with the Central Bureau of Narcotics, CRPF, and Arunachal Police, are conducting large-scale Anti-Opium Drive in Namsai District, South Arunachal Pradesh. Over 180 hectares of illegal poppy cultivation worth ₹30 crore have been identified and 22.5 hectares have been destroyed so far, leading to a disruption in insurgent funding," the Assam Rifles stated on the microblogging site X. Due to inclement weather and other factors, the CBN was able to destroy only about 50 to 60 percent of the targeted area. The officials stressed that it is now up to the government and concerned agencies to formulate and implement a robust policy to eliminate the menace at its roots.

BJP's narrative was aimed at diverting attention from own sins: Congress on USAID row

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: A row erupted on Friday over a media report, which claimed that an amount of USD 21 million approved by the USAID was meant for Bangladesh and not India, with the Congress demanding an apology from the BJP and alleging that the ruling party's narrative was aimed at diverting attention from its own use of foreign funds to destabilise past governments led by the grand old party.

The Congress also reiterated its demand from the government for a white paper on the USAID funding as well as funding by other such agencies in India.

Citing the media report, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "Lies first mouthed in Wash-

ington. Lies then amplified by BJP's Jhoot Sena. Lies made to be debated on Godi media."

"Lies now thoroughly exposed. Will the liars apologise?" he asked in a post on X.

Since the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) announced on February 16 that it had "cancelled", among a string of projects, the USAID funding of "USD 21 million for voter turnout in India", the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has accused the Congress of using external influence in India's election process.

In a speech in Miami on Wednesday, US President Donald Trump said: "Why do we need to spend USD 21 million for voter turnout in India? Wow, USD 21

million! I guess they were trying to get somebody else elected."

"Facts show all may have jumped the gun. That USD 21 million ... was sanctioned in 2022 for Bangladesh, not India," the "Indian Express" report said, citing documents.

BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya said the report discusses USD 21 million in funding to Bangladesh in 2022 but misrepresents the reference to a USD-21 million funding tranche intended to "promote" the voter turnout in India.

"What Indian Express conveniently sidesteps is the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Election Commission of India - under the leadership of S Y Quraishi (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Needed leaders in every field who understand int'l mindset with Indian mind: PM

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday that the country needs leaders in different fields whose approach is global but mindset is Indian.

"We need people who move forward understanding international mindset with an Indian mind," he said at the School of Ultimate Leadership conclave here.

Pitching for leaders in different fields who have "global thinking and local upbringing", he said what is needed is a leadership which reflects India's national vision in every field, be it bureaucracy or business or any sector.

A leadership is needed in every field which can find solution to global complexity and needs, while projecting the country's interests at the world stage, he said.

The prime minister said India is emerging as a global powerhouse, and that it needs world class leaders to speed up this momentum and to ensure that similar success are replicated in every field.

An institute like the School of Ultimate Leadership can be a game-changer, he added.

Modi stressed the role of human resources in ensuring success in different fields, and said the country should have leaders who can spearhead innovation and channelise skills.

In this context, he cited the example of Gujarat, noting that questions were raised about its future as a separate state due to its lack of natural resources.

However, the state today is doing very well due to its leaders, he said, adding that it has (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

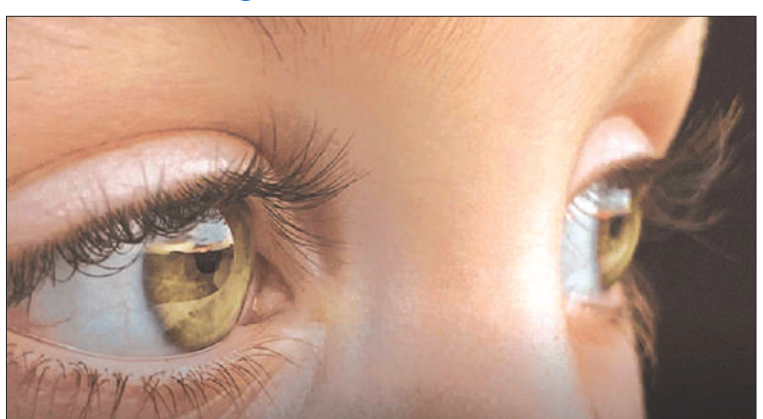
The event seeks to help shape the future of child eye health Online symposium puts spotlight on child eye health issues

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: A two-day online symposium was held with experts from multiple countries, including India, South Africa and the US, to raise awareness on children's eye health, organisers said.

The event began on Thursday evening as many health experts, scholars, optometrists, among others joined from California in the US and other locations.

Titled 'Child Eye Health Symposium: A Call to Action', the event seeks to help shape the future of child eye health, while building awareness on the crucial issue, they said.

One School at a Time, Berkeley Vision; India Vision Institute (IVI); One-Sight Essilor Luxottica Foundation; and UNICEF are partnering in this initiative, a representative of the organisers said.



One School at a Time is a programme of Berkeley Vision - Every Child Sees, designed to make eye care and low vision services accessible globally to all children. It is under the um-

brrella of the University of California, Berkeley.

Children today will be adults tomorrow, and thus an early intervention would mean protecting or correcting

their eyesight before the condition aggravates, the representative said.

A large number of child eye health experts, public health specialists, and other delegates had registered for the symposium that will focus on the urgent need for addressing related challenges and finding solutions, organisers said.

India Vision Institute (IVI) is coordinating the conference.

Since 2012, IVI has been working to provide access to primary eye care services for underprivileged people and a pair of corrective glasses to those in need across the country.

It runs two campaigns - 'I See, I Learn' (for children) and 'I See, I Work' (for adults) to build awareness and provide help to people with eyesight issues.

In October 2023, vision screening camps were held for several members of the Irula (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

MPC minutes: Rate cut appropriate monetary policy response, opined RBI Gov

MUMBAI, Feb 21: Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra opined that rate reduction was an appropriate monetary policy response at this juncture citing movement of inflation towards the central bank's 4 per cent target, said the MPC meeting minutes released on Friday.

Malhotra, along with five other members of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) had voted for a 25 basis points reduction in the short-term lending rate (repo) to 6.25 per cent. The RBI at its meeting held from February 5 to 7 effected the rate cut after a gap of five years.

"Given the macroeconomic outlook when inflation is expected to align with the target, and recognising that monetary policy is forward-looking, I view a lower policy rate to be more appropriate at the current juncture," Malhotra said, according to the minutes.

Chairing his first MPC meeting, he had also pointed out that rising uncertainties on global financial markets and trade policy front, coupled with continuing risk of adverse weather events pose risks to the inflation and growth outlook.

While the central bank had re-

duced the rate, it continued with the neutral stance of monetary policy.

"This will provide the flexibility to respond to the evolving macro-economic environment. By taking this logical course, monetary policy will be able to fulfil its mandate and play its part in the sustainable development of the Indian economy," Malhotra said.

Headline inflation, after moving above the upper tolerance band in October, has moderated and was at a five-month low of 4.3 per cent in January.

MPC member and RBI Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao said that at the current juncture, with a further alignment of headline inflation towards the 4 per cent target, there is greater space to address concerns regarding growth by way of reduction in the policy repo rate.

"This monetary policy measure in conjunction with the fiscal measures announced in the Budget should give a fillip to aggregate demand conditions. Furthermore, the government has reaffirmed its

commitment to fiscal consolidation, which should help to anchor medium-term inflation expectations," Rao said.

RBI Executive Director and panel member Rajiv Ranjan said in line with the sequencing path that the RBI followed, a policy rate cut in February 2025 is the most rational and appropriate next step as we now have greater confidence on the disinflation path.

"In line with this prognosis, we also prepared the market by infusing sufficient liquidity for better transmission. The base-line projections suggest headline inflation to average at 4.2 per cent during

2025-26," he said, according to the minutes.

The external members of the MPC -- Nagesh Kumar, Saugata Bhattacharya, and Ram Singh -- too had voted for a reduction in the repo rate.

Nagesh Kumar had flagged concern about a threat of dumping of excess capacities in China with their deep pockets and their access to the Western markets coming

under a cloud.

He also noted that some manufacturing sectors have begun to feel the pinch including steel (possibly explaining the negative growth) while labour-intensive consumer sectors, such as garments and leather goods have been facing an onslaught.

The latest Economic Survey shows FDI inflows have been subdued, with foreign investors both FDI and FPIs repatriating, leaving little investments in net terms.

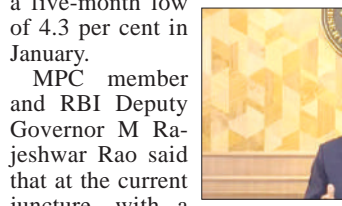
"Therefore, the case for supporting growth cannot be overemphasised," Kumar said.

External member Saugata Bhattacharya said that in view of the downward inflation trajectory, rate cut is the "appropriate policy response at this point of the economic cycle".

Bhattacharya also voted to continue with the neutral monetary policy stance.

Ram Singh said the Union Budget 2025 has given a push to demand. "However, demand push will not result in higher private capex unless interest rates are reduced immediately," Singh said.

The next meeting of the MPC is scheduled during April 7 to 9, 2025. (PTI)



Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra opined that rate reduction was an appropriate monetary policy response at this juncture citing movement of inflation towards the central bank's 4 per cent target, said the MPC meeting minutes released on Friday.

India's forex reserves drop



MUMBAI, Feb 21: Snapping the three-week rising streak, India's forex reserves dropped by USD 2.54 billion to USD 635.721 billion in the week ended February 14, the RBI said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the reserves had increased by USD 7.654 billion to USD 638.261 billion.

The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in September 2024. The forex kitty however declined thereafter due to forex market interventions by RBI to reduce volatility in the rupee.

For the week ended February 14, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 4.515 billion to USD 539.591 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

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

Gold reserves, however, increased by USD 1.942 billion to USD 74.15 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by USD 19 million to USD 17.897 billion. India's reserve position with the IMF was up by USD 14 million to USD 4.083 billion in the reporting week, the data showed. (PTI)

Stock markets fall for 4th day on FII outflows, Sensex sheds 425 pts

MUMBAI, Feb 21: Falling for the fourth straight day, benchmark Sensex declined by nearly 425 points on Friday due to selling in auto, pharma and banking shares and relentless foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dropped 424.90 points or 0.56 per cent to settle at 75,311.06. During the day, it tanked 623.55 points or 0.82 per cent to 75,112.41.

The NSE Nifty declined 117.25 points or 0.51 per cent to 22,795.90.

In four trading days, the BSE barometer tumbled 685.8 points or 0.90 per cent while the Nifty declined 163.6 points or 0.71 per cent.

From the Sensex pack, Mahindra & Mahindra tanked over 6 per cent.

Adani Ports, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Zomato, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India and UltraTech Cement were also among the laggards.

Tata Steel, Larsen & Toubro, HCL Tech, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank and NTPC were among the gainers.

"A combination of negative factors such as relentless FII selling, falling rupee, expensive valuations



and the US threat of reciprocating tariff levies continue to drive investors away from Indian equities.

"In fact, local benchmarks under-performed both Asian and European indices, which logged significant gains. Barring metals, the slump in domestic markets was led by weakness in banking, IT, telecom, auto, realty and oil & gas shares," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,311.55 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 1.18 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.43 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, auto dropped 2.60 per cent, consumer discretionary (1.49 per cent), oil & gas (1.42 per cent), realty (1.35 per cent), telecommunication (1.19 per cent) and consumer durables (0.87 per cent).

Metal emerged as the only gainer and jumped 1.23 per cent.

As many as 2,246 stocks declined, while 1,701 advanced and 113 remained unchanged on the BSE.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark declined 628.15 points or 0.82 per cent and the Nifty went lower by 133.35 points or 0.58 per cent.

The domestic market continued to exhibit broad-based weakness, primarily influenced by investor concerns over the hawkish tone of the FOMC minutes, which signalled prolonged higher interest rates that could constrain liquidity in emerging markets, Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

"Although the market has undergone a healthy correction, the uncertainties surrounding the gradual recovery of corporate earnings and ongoing tariff-related risks continue to cast doubt on valuation levels, particularly in the broader market. India is currently lagging behind its Asian peers, as FII outflows remain high, with the 'sell India, buy China' strategy continuing to yield returns for the time being," he added.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. European markets were quoting mostly higher. US markets ended lower on Thursday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.59 per cent to USD 76.05 a barrel. (PTI)

MediaTek completes Retailer Education Program

GUWAHATI, Feb 21: MediaTek, a global semiconductor company powering over two billion connected devices annually, has successfully completed its 2025 Retailer Education Program. The initiative, focused on key cities such as Delhi/NCR, Guwahati, and Indore, aimed to enhance retailer awareness of premium and flagship technologies driven by the MediaTek Dimensity 5G Series.

The program provided retailers with in-depth knowledge of MediaTek's full range of chipsets and their applications in smartphones, smart speakers, Wi-Fi routers, Chromebooks, and TVs. It also highlighted the latest advancements in 5G, AI, camera technology, video streaming, and gaming, helping retailers better guide consumers in their purchase decisions.

Anuj Sidharth, Director of Marketing & Corporate Communication at MediaTek India, emphasised the significance of the initiative in strengthening MediaTek's market presence. He noted that over the past two years, the program has engaged retailers through in-store interactions, equipping frontline employees with the expertise to address customer inquiries about the MediaTek Dimensity and Helio series chipsets.

As MediaTek expands its focus beyond smartphones to include a broader range of smart devices and automotive solutions, the company remains committed to educating retailers about its evolving product portfolio.

MediaTek's Dimensity 5G lineup, including the flagship 9000 series, premium 8000 series, and mid-range 7000 and 6000 series, offers a combination of

advanced connectivity, multimedia capabilities, AI-driven enhancements, and gaming support powered by the latest MediaTek HyperEngine Gaming Technology. With a dominant presence in the Indian smartphone market, accounting for over 50 per cent market share, MediaTek is making significant strides in the premium segment with its advanced chipsets such as the Dimensity 9400, Dimensity 8350, and Dimensity 8400. These chipsets power devices from leading brands including OPPO, vivo, Samsung, Xiaomi, POCO, Tecno, iMin, Motorola, Realme, and LAVA.

Rupam Mukherjee, Senior Sales Manager for South Asia at iMin Technology, described the program as an invaluable resource in helping retailers understand MediaTek's latest innovations. He highlighted how the initiative enables retailers to better communicate the performance and advantages of MediaTek chipsets to customers while also introducing them to the company's growing presence in AIOT and smart commercial Android devices.

The program featured comprehensive training modules, interactive discussions, and seminars designed to enhance retailer knowledge of MediaTek's smartphone and smart device portfolio. On-ground promoters also engaged directly with key retailers, reinforcing awareness of MediaTek's premium and flagship technologies. Through a combination of online and in-person engagements, the initiative aims to reach a wide network of retailers, ensuring they are well-equipped to guide consumers in making informed purchasing decisions.

Gold drops by ₹ 700 to ₹ 88,750 per 10g, silver falls by ₹ 300

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: Gold prices retreated from the record high level in the national capital on Friday, declining by ₹ 700 to ₹ 88,750 per 10 grams due to weak demand from jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity hit a record high of Rs 89,450 per 10 grams on Thursday.

Taking a breather, gold of 99.5 per cent purity depreciated by ₹ 700 to ₹ 88,350 per 10 grams due to poor demand from jewellers, traders said. Weak global trends aided losses, they added.

Silver prices also slipped by ₹ 300 to ₹ 1 lakh per kg in the local market.

In futures trade, gold contracts

for April delivery decreased by ₹ 225 to ₹ 85,799 per 10 grams on MCX.

"Gold traded weak and remained volatile. In MCX, gold moved between ₹ 85,900 and ₹ 85,400, with rupee weakness supporting prices above ₹ 85,350 despite a flat dollar index," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities.

Further, Trivedi highlighted that market participants will focus on upcoming manufacturing, services, and existing home sales data, which may add to gold's volatility in the evening session. Silver futures for March delivery went lower by ₹ 283 to ₹ 96,830 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Meanwhile, Comex gold futures

for April delivery retreated from all-time peak by declining USD 11.19 to USD 2,944.91 per ounce.

Spot gold too slipped USD 8.42 or 0.29 per cent to USD 2,930.56 per ounce.

"Gold prices fell from record highs on Friday as traders liquidated their long bets and took profits after a prolonged rally in precious metals," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Further, hawkish statements from several Fed members, as well as the FOMC meeting minutes, reinforced US policymakers' cautious stance on interest rate cuts in the face of persistent inflation, which have led to some profit-taking in gold, Gandhi added. (PTI)

Sourav Ganguly aims to operationalise steel plant project in 18-20 months

KOLKATA, Feb 21: Former Indian cricket team captain Sourav Ganguly on Friday said that the steel plant project being promoted by him in a partnership at Garbeta in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district is expected to be operational over the next 18-20 months.

The much-hyped project is expected to witness an investment of Rs 2,500 crore to establish the 0.8 million tonne per annum (MTPA) steel plant, an official said.

"We're building the steel plant. But the problem is that everybody expects it to be ready in two months. But that doesn't happen realistically. Hopefully, we're looking at operations in the next 18-20 months," Ganguly said at an event.

"This will be our third and biggest plant. There are several clearances required, including environmental, pollution, and government approvals, which take time," he said.

The project was initially proposed at Salboni, but that didn't materialise and now the company has secured land at Garbeta, which is about 26 km from Salboni.

"It will be an 8 lakh tonne (0.8 MTPA) capacity plant. The project is coming up at Garbeta and not Salboni. Total investment is estimated at Rs 2500 crore,"

a senior official from the joint venture partner told PTI declining to be quoted.

Asked about Ganguly's stake in the project, officials said it would be "substantial", refusing to divulge details.

Ganguly, also a former chief of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), has partnered with Captain Steel, a TMT bar manufacturer for the greenfield steel project.

The steel company currently operates two plants with a combined capacity of 5 lakh tonnes.

With the addition of this greenfield facility, the total capacity will increase to 1.3 million tonnes, the official said.

The project requires around 350 acres of land, and the acquisition process is ongoing.

Initially proposed at Salboni where JSW Group had proposed a mega integrated steel plant which fell apart due to lack of raw material linkages.

Ganguly first announced the steel project during Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's visit to Spain in 2023.

Banerjee at the 2025 global investment summit earlier this month, on a lighter note, had mentioned that Ganguly is also transforming as an industrialist by planning a steel plant in the state. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1.

No 'namaz break' in Assam

proposed that the Assam Legislative Assembly must conduct its proceedings on Fridays like any other day", which was placed before the Rules Committee and passed unanimously. (PTI)

State govt to issue

station, and demanded disciplinary action against him.

Responding to this, Parliamentary Affairs minister Chandran Mohan Patowary said, "The CM has mentioned about the attack during his reply to the motion of thanks on the governor's speech yesterday. Our government never supports such incidents and the CM, who is out of state today, will not allow its recurrence."

Patowary said investigation is underway and strict action will be taken against those behind the attack, including any government official for any lapse.

"We will issue a statement in the assembly after the investigation is complete," he added.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said altogether 10 people have been identified so far for attacking Rakibul Hussain and his PSOs.

"The police have identified the individuals involved in the alleged incident of assault on Congress MP Sri Rakibul Hussain," Sarma said in a post on X.

Sharing the names and the places of the accused, he said that the police will take action as per the law. (PTI)

Opposition leader urges CM

times during BJP-led NDA government at the Centre. "All Pakistani nationals are not terrorists, but if someone with doubtful credentials visited India several times when BJP was in power, then their leaders like Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah must be made answerable," he added. (PTI)

Indian biologist named in

Cambodia, with schools as far away as France teaching students about her work.

"Today, Barman proudly dons her traditional dress and shawl decorated with images of the storks woven by members of the Hargila Army who are able to earn a living by selling such items," Time said.

From clothing, songs, or celebrating baby showers for new chicks, "this bird is now a part of our tradition and culture," she said.

Time said that in deciding who makes the Women of the Year list each year, "we ask ourselves the same question: What are the most significant issues facing women and girls around the world right now? Challenges are abundant, from gender-based violence and attacks on women's rights to the dangers of a volatile climate.

But everywhere those threats can be found, so too can leaders pushing for change. The 13 women on this year's list are all, in their own way, working toward creating a better, more equitable world." (PTI)

BJP's narrative was aimed

-- and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), an organisation linked to George Soros's Open Society Foundation, which is primarily funded by USAID," Malviya said in a post on X.

Addressing a press conference at the party's 24, Akbar Road office here, the Congress's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera alleged that the entire "USD-21 million USAID funds narrative" perpetrated by the BJP, Modi government's ministers, its economic advisor, the party's IT department head, the RSS-BJP ecosystem and a section of the "BJP-friendly media" was done to divert attention from their "own sins" of using foreign funds to destabilise Congress governments of the past.

Citing the media report, Khera claimed that the truth has come out that the "USD 21 million USAID funds" were not given to India, but to Bangladesh.

"Official documents prove that. (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's best friend Trump had perhaps intentionally or unintentionally made a faux pas through the DOGE. But the fact that the RSS-BJP ecosystem shamelessly latched onto it, without examining the facts, tells you that it wanted to hide its own acts of commissions in damaging India's democracy," he said.

The Congress leader said former prime minister Indira Gandhi was right when she pointed out towards the "foreign hand" of the BJP's ideological forefathers and the erstwhile Janata Party.

"It is no secret that the RSS took the CIA's assistance during Emergency and in the run-up to it. P.N Dhar's book, 'Indira Gandhi, the 'Emergency', and Indian Democracy', clearly chronicles how 'the US showered praise on J P (Jayaprakash Narayan) and his role in fighting the Indira Gandhi government in 1974'. The Nixon administration wanted to punish her for her defiance to the US in 1971 and conducting India's first nuclear test later," he claimed.

Khera further alleged that the RSS orchestrated the Anna Hazare-Arvind Kejriwal "India Against Corruption" movement to overthrow the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government with the help of foreign aid, especially from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Ford Foundation.

"Is it not true that exactly a month ago, on January 21, former Union minister Smriti Irani attended a panel discussion organised by the USAID in Davos under the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum? Is it not true that Smriti Irani herself has stated that she has served as the USAID goodwill ambassador to India for four years?" he asked.

If collaborations with US agencies amount to deep-state activities, then why did Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis discuss opportunities on a collaboration with the USAID on November 10, 2022, the Congress leader asked.

"Let it be clear, we do not consider global partnerships, developmental agencies, aid mechanisms, such as the USAID, as unscrupulous. It is the BJP that first started the deep-state narrative and demonising the USAID. However, we have enough evidence that the RSS-BJP has been taking covert assistance from foreign agencies to destabilise Indian democracy and bulldoze our Constitution," Khera alleged. (PTI)

Bangladesh should not normalise

yes, obviously we have taken note of such remarks, which are of course not helpful. It is for concerned individuals to reflect on the implications for their particular domains."

Bangladesh's interim government has been insisting on the revival of SAARC which has been suspended for a long time.

An X post made by Jaishankar on February 16 after the meeting did not mention SAARC.

"Met Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain of the Interim Government of Bangladesh. The conversation was focused on our bilateral relationship, as also on BIMSTEC," he wrote.

A Bangladesh foreign ministry statement issued last week after the two leaders met in Muscat said, "Hossain sought to initiate discussions for the renewal of the Ganges Water Treaty signed in 1996 and emphasised the need for convening the SAARC standing committee meeting and requested New Delhi's support on the matter."

"Both sides recognised the challenges the two neighbours are facing in terms of bilateral relations and discussed the necessity to work together to address those," it added.

Bangladesh and India share over 4,000-km-long international border. (PTI)

Needed leaders in every

no diamond mine but nine out of 10 diamonds in the world pass through the hands of a Gujarati.

The School of Ultimate Leadership is an upcoming leadership institution in Gujarat to enable "authentic leaders to advance public good", an official statement has said.

"The two-day conclave will serve as a premier platform where leaders from diverse domains like politics, sports, arts and media, the spiritual world, public policy, business and the social sector will share their inspiring life journeys and discuss aspects relating to leadership," it said. (PTI)

Online symposium puts spotlight

community of snake-catchers and honey-gatherers, and of the transgender community in Tamil Nadu to reach out to marginalised sections of society. (PTI)

PARTY MEMBERS LODGE FIR

Congress stages protest against attack on MP Rokibul Hussain in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 21: Dhubri Congress MP Rokibul Hussain along with a dozen of state as well as district leaders of Congress party including Pradesh Mohila Congress Chief Mira Borthakur on Friday filed an FIR at Nagaon Sadar PS in connection with the barbaric attack on him and his son Tanzil Hussain at Rupahihat on Thursday last here.

MP Hussain had also mentioned, while addressing to local media in the campus of Nagaon PS, that he would submit a written complaint to the speaker of Loksabha against chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and alleged autocratic role of the government in the state.

Meanwhile some hundreds of Congress party workers staged a protest against the barbaric attack by a gang of miscreants covering their faces with masks near at Nagaon Swahid Bhavan on Friday



here. During the stir, the Congress leaders as well as other party workers shouted various slogans against the BJP run state government for failing to provide protection to an opposition MP of the state.

Later, the protesters took out a rally to the office of district commissioner, Nagaon as well as to the office of superintendent of police, Nagaon and also submitted two separate memorandums to district commissioner, Nagaon and Superintendent of police, Nagaon while another memorandum was submitted to the governor of Assam through the district commissioner, demanding immediate action against the accused criminals. Besides, concerning over gross failure of the state home de-

partment, the opposition Congress party demanded for adequate security arrangements to MP Rokibul Hussain, his family members and other leaders of Congress party.

On the other hand, Superintendent of Police, Nagaon Swapnanil Deka while interacting with media persons here on Friday, said that over ten alleged attackers were identified so far by Nagaon police and police investigation into the entire episode was underway.

It was pertinent to be mentioned here that police are yet to arrest anyone in connection with the barbaric incident till the filing this report.

Interestingly, it's reported that in the FIR lodged by MP Rokibul Hussain on Friday here, he had mentioned over 22 names of perpetrators who allegedly assaulted MP Hussain, his son Tanzil Hussain and his two security personnel.

KAAC CEM continues to interact with public



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 21: Chief Executive Member's (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) interaction with the public of Duarbagori Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency was held at Deithor Mini stadium on Friday. The interaction programme has been organised by

we have received many development schemes. With Rs 10 crore package we have got auditorium, mini stadium, indoor stadium with boundary wall. The repairing work on the Chowkikhola—Deithor road and Dolamora road will soon be completed. As the CEM himself came for us and everyone can ask questions and proposals for development schemes," local said.

Addressing the crowd the CEM assured the gathering that problems and grievances mentioned in the memorandum submitted by the villagers will be addressed.

"All the points that are mentioned in the memorandum for development of Duarbagori from school building to playground, open stage, potable water and medical facilities will be granted. The Chowkikhola - Deithor road and Dolamora road, as demanded by you will be completed very soon," the CEM assured. He said his next visit to the constituency will be to lay the foundation stones of development schemes. MP Amarsing Tisso was also present in the programme.

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One killed in road mishap in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 21: A young man lost his life after being hit by an unidentified vehicle here on Thursday night.

The deceased person has been identified as- Naba Gogoi, a resident of Miripathar village in Lakhola.

According to reports the incident occurred when the young rider was riding a scooter bearing registration number (AS06AJ0596).

Thereafter, the unidentified vehicle fled the scene immediately after the incident.

Such accidents were regarded as frequent in the area which led to the residents of Mohanbari urging the authorities to take strict action and ensure better road safety measures.

The incident led to a tense situation in the area, with locals expressing outrage over the increasing number of hit-and-run cases.

Multiple FIRs likely against Sankardev Sangha



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 21: Altogether 10 Ahom organisations in upper Assam has decided to lodge FIRs against Sankardev Sangha in all police stations in the state allegedly for discriminating against Ahom community and serving expulsion notice to one of the community for participating in Me-dam-Me-Phi celebration.

It was done in order to counter Sankardev Sangha's state wide protest FIRs against TAYPA.

The organisations adopted ten resolutions in a meeting held in Moranhat Kareng Rangmahal on Thursday. The organisations attending the meeting were TAYPA, ATASU, Ahom Jatiya Mahasabha, Furalung Sangha, Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha, Tai Ahom Jaatiya Parishad, Mohan Deudhai Bailung Sanmilan, Mohan Deodhai Bailung Bongshawali Parishad, Indigenous Peoples of Myun Dyun Sun Kham, and Tai Ahom Youth Forum. Bijay Rajkonwar, president TAYPA, later addressing the media said that the organizations have resolved to work for cancelling the OBC caste certificate to members of the community in Sankardev Sangha. The meeting unanimously resolved, among others,

to expel the Sankardev Sangha members from Tai Ahom Development Council, to prevent holding Sangkardev Sangha conferences in Upper Assam, to observe Me-dam-mehi with more enthusiasm and decorum in every village of Assam, and to adopt legal action against the Sangha for hurting the sentiments of the Ahom community.

Meanwhile, the Sivasagar district SC Students Union on Friday filed an FIR against the Sangkardev Sangha in Sivasagar PS alleging discriminatory attitude of the Sangha towards the SC community. In the FIR, Bitu Das and Anjan Hazarika, the president and the secretary of the Sivasagar district unit of the union, stated that one of the members of the Sankardev Sangha Anupam Dutta allegedly passed a comment that the Scheduled Caste people of Assam are the most backward. The student leaders said that the comment hurt the sentiment of the SC people and thereby the Sangha member tried to incite communal disturbance and hatred among the people. Parajyoti Das, the president of the Central committee also leveled charges against Sankardev Sangha for dividing the people.

Avijit Kro elected unopposed KAAC deputy chairman

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 21: Chinthong Member of the Autonomous Council (MAC), Avijit Kro, has been elected unopposed as the Deputy Chairman of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

Earlier, MAC Kro submitted his nomination paper for the post of Deputy Chairman of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) on Friday. Kro handed over his nomination paper to Joint Secretary, Legislative, KAAC, Michael Timung, with MAC Phenpiga Rengma and MAC Kadom Terangpi as proposers and seconders. Notably, no other elected representatives have filed for the Deputy Chairman position.

Kro was accompanied by Chairman, KAAC, Raju Tisso; CEM, KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang; MP Amarsing Tisso, and other EMs and MACs.

After submitting a nomination paper, KAAC CEM Tuliram Ronghang said that Avijit Kro was chosen as the KAAC parliamentary meeting to fill the Deputy Chairman position. Ronghang also praised Kro for his tireless efforts in eradicating child labour before entering politics and commended him as an active social worker.

It may be mentioned that the deputy chairman seat fell vacant last October 2024 after the untimely demise of MAC Ajit Dey, who represented the Howraghat MAC constituency.

Signify partners with FISS to upgrade 100 Schools in Udalguri

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 21: Signify, has partnered with Foundation for Integrated Support and Solution (FISS) under its Jagmag Pathshala CSR initiative to enhance the lighting and ventilation infrastructure in 100 government schools across the Udalguri on Friday.

Under this project, Signify will install 2800 inverter-powered lights and 1400 ceiling fans, ensuring uninterrupted lighting and ventilation for over 10,000 students and educators. Udalguri DC Pulak Patgiri inaugurated the event as he was present on the occasion as the chief guest. Patgiri appreciated the initiative for uplifting the existing educational infrastructure.

Speaking about the initiative, Nikhil Gupta, head of marketing, strategy, Government Affairs & CSR- Signify, Greater India, said, "Our CSR strategy reflects our brand purpose of unlocking the extraordinary potential of light for brighter lives and a better world. Through this meaningful collaboration with FISS, we are empowering young minds by creating an illuminated environment where the students can thrive. At Signify, we are committed to lighting up lives and driving positive change in communities across India."

Key project activities include the installation of inverter-powered LED lights and fans across 100 schools and organising capacity-building workshops to ensure long-term sustainability. "The initiative also empowered communities by improving educational facilities and promoting sustainable energy adoption, aligning with Signify's commitment to quality education, sustainability, and community empowerment. Improving education in rural schools is important for India's social and economic development. We are proud to collaborate with Signify on this project, under their Jagmag Pathshala CSR initiative to transform educational spaces in Udalguri. This initiative has enhanced the classroom experience for students," said Pradip Hazarika, director FISS.

BJP organises citizen's meeting in Dhubri

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, Feb 21: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday organised a Citizen's Meeting at the Conference Hall of Town Hotel in Dhubri district. The event saw participation from senior citizens, businesspersons, and people from various walks of life, along with different office bearers of the BJP.

The meeting was presided over by Dhyandra Kumar Surana, chartered accountant and executive member of the party, along with BJP district president Ranjit Kumar Roy, former Golakganj MLA Aswini Roy Sarkar, Debamoy Sanyal, chairman of Dhubri Municipal Board, and BJP Media Convener Deba Prasad Singha, among other party workers.

A talk on the budget was held, which was explained by Debamoy Sanyal, chairman of Dhubri Municipal Board. He discussed key budget allocations, including the UREA setup in Namrup, the development of 250 new tourism spots, enhancements in railway infrastructure, the PM Divine scheme, and the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS), most importantly on Agriculture along with other public enterprises covered in the budget.

The gathering aimed to foster discussions on local governance, development initiatives, and citizen concerns. The BJP leadership interacted with attendees, addressing various issues and emphasizing the party's commitment to the region's progress.

The presence of diverse community representatives highlighted the significance of the meeting in bridging communication between the party and the people. Discussions also revolved around developmental policies, infrastructure projects, and welfare schemes aimed at benefiting the residents of Dhubri.

Party leaders encouraged active participation from the citizens in governance and assured that their voices would be heard in policy-making. The meeting concluded with a collective commitment to work towards the betterment of the district.

Retired teacher passes away

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Feb 21: Jugomaya Singh, a respected senior citizen and retired teacher from Haflong, passed away on Friday at her residence on College Road due to age-related ailments. She was 78 years old.

She was the wife of the late Horen Singh and dedicated her career to education, serving in various institutions such as GNB Assamese LP School and Sarkari Bagan LP School. Beyond teaching, she was actively involved in numerous social organisations, earning love and respect from her community and neighbors.

Singh is survived by her three daughters, two sons, and several grandchildren. Her residence was filled with grieving relatives and well-wishers who gathered to pay their final respects. Her cremation will take place at Haflong Crematory on the morning of February 22.

NFR's initiatives for passengers travelling to Maha Kumbh

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 21: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has been operating seven to eight regular trains along with special trains for Maha Kumbh.

The NFR through a PR on Friday, stated that a total of 26 trips of special trains have been operated so far from Kamakhya, Naharlagun, Guwahati, Katihar, Joghani and Rangpara.

"Anticipating the surge in passengers, NFR has introduced these additional train services to ensure a smooth and hassle-free journey for the devotees. So far, around 3.37 lakh reserved passengers and 1.08 lakh unreserved passengers have travelled to Prayagraj on these trains. Among them, approximately 1.10 lakh passengers boarded from Guwahati, around 19,300 from Dibrugarh, nearly 54,100 from New Jalpaiguri and about 34,500 from Joghani," NFR stated.

"For security and crowd management, NFR has deployed a strong team of Railway Protection



Force, Government Railway Police and sufficient running staff to ensure seamless train operations. Control rooms have been set up at major stations and divisions for real-time monitoring and efficient crowd management. Additionally, CCTV surveillance has been enhanced across key locations to en-

sure round-the-clock monitoring and additional personnel have been stationed at entry and exit points to regulate passenger movement. Special arrangements have been made for elderly passengers, women and children to ensure their safety and convenience," it added.

Assam Rifles observes International Mother Language Day

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 21: Assam Rifles organised a poster making competition at Bakula Garogaon ME School, Chariduar on Friday to commemorate International Mother Language Day.

The event aimed to promote linguistic diversity and cultural heritage among school children. A total of 165 participants, including 80 boys, 95 girls enthusiastically showcased their creativity through vibrant posters in Assamese, Bodo and Nepali languages and celebrated the richness of their mother tongues. The initiative reinforced the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous languages, aligning with Assam Rifles' commitment of engaging with the local community. The event concluded with the distribution of prizes and certificates to outstanding participants, encouraging young minds to take pride in their linguistic heritage.

Emotional expression at risk in age of AI: Manoj Kumar Goswami

Experts analyse challenges to development of mother languages

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Feb 21: "A language has to be raised like a kid to flourish; without this, it faces an existential threat," said Sahitya Akademi Award-winning writer and noted journalist Manoj Kumar Goswami on Friday.

He said this while addressing the gathering in the programme organised by the department of Assamese, Tezpur University at the screening hall of the department of mass communication and journalism to observe International Mother Language Day.

Speaking on the occasion, he delivered a powerful message about the fragility of languages and warned about the threat posed by larger languages to smaller ones. He cited an example of Sanskrit, a language that, despite its age and importance, became "dead" due to limited access and usage.

The noted journalist also addressed the challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) to the language landscape. He expressed concern that AI could diminish the human capacity for emotional expression and thought processes through language. He pointed out the lack of a prominent Indian counterpart to AI models like GPT (US) and



DeepSeek (China). Goswami further highlighted the declining trend of conversations in the modern world, as the world became more engaged with newer tools.

Citing the importance of book reading, he said that prominent figures like Elon Musk, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg read books to gain knowledge. Drawing inspiration

from Israel's revival of Hebrew, Goswami urged for the active love and use of Assamese. He said that even though it has been now recognized as a classical language, if it dwells on linguistic conservatism and was not open to new ideas, its use might shrink.

Professor RR Hoque, dean of academic affairs at Tezpur University, emphasised the global loss incurred when a language dies, stating, "When a language is dead, knowledge is lost, and it is a global loss." He stressed the importance of education in the mother tongue for holistic development, aligning with the focus of the National Education Policy (NEP). Professor Hoque also underscored the intrinsic link between mother tongue and cognitive development. Professor Chandan Kumar Sharma, dean of the School of Humanities & Social Sciences, advocated for greater inclusiveness in the Assamese language, noting that the language can embrace vocabularies from various ethnic groups of Assam. He floated the idea of an all-inclusive dictionary featuring words from various multiethnic groups of Assam.

Juri Dutta, head of the department of Assamese, gave a brief representation of the works carried out at the department.

During the occasion, the department's annual magazine, Kixoloi, was released. Several cultural programs were also organized. Sanjib Deka, a faculty member of the Department, offered the vote of thanks.

Meanwhile, along with various organisations here, Tezpur College also observed the day with a variety of programmes. Suresh Kumar Arjya, noted writer and retired professor taking part as chief guest in the lecture programme held for the occasion thoroughly analysed the importance of mother language and its role in the progress of a nation. The event started with an enthralling presentation of a Borgeet by Mayuri Tanti was moderated by Dr Ishanijoti Gogoi. Principal of the college Manoj Kumar Hazarika also briefly addressed the gathering and insightfully highlighted the importance of mother tongue in shaping a nation as well as a person.

Rajlakshmi Basumatary, IQAC coordinator of the college introduced the chief guest to the august gathering while head, department of Assamese Mitali Saikia offered the vote of thanks. The programme concluded with presentation of the song 'Chiro Chenehi mor Bhasa Janani' by a group of students from the Assamese department.

Jail Road ROB expected to become functional by mid March: Jorhat DC

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 21: Jorhat deputy commissioner Jay Shivani on Friday said that the Railway over bridge (ROB) in front of the Jorhat Medical College and Hospital (JMCH) is expected to be open for vehicles by March 15.

During an interaction with newsmen at the conference hall of the Jorhat district commissioner's office complex said that finishing touches were being given to the ROB in front of JMCH on the Kamar Bandha Road (popularly known as Jail Road) and by middle of next month the ROB is expected to be ready for use.

"We hope by March 15 next vehicles could be allowed to use over-bridge as all the major works of the project has been completed, and now only the finishing touches of the final stage is underway," Shivani stated.

It may be mentioned here that limited movement of vehicles on both constricted sideways of the ROB project area that was allowed in the first two years during construction works was prohibited since middle of August 2023 after the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had inspected the construction site to take stock of the progress.

Sarma had reportedly directed the district administration to bar movement of vehicles through the project site in order to speed up the pace of work so that completion was not delayed. In the past two years during his vision to Jorhat had inspected several times to the construction site to review the progress of the project, the foundation-stone of which was laid by him on January 10, 2021, when he was minister for health, education, PWD and finance in the Sarbananda Sonowal-led Government.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

First love is only a little foolishness and a lot of curiosity
- George Bernard Shaw

Poll promises and new Delhi govt

BJP-led government is now in power in Delhi, that has come with too many poll-promises to keep, and a very alert and strong opposition to challenge. It was obvious in the very first cabinet decision of the government led by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, that officially took charge on February 20, and the reaction of the opposition AAP leader and former chief minister Atishi. While addressing her first press conference, CM Rekha Gupta said that her cabinet had decided in its first meeting to implement the Ayushman Bharat Yojna, and also to table 14 pending Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports in the first Delhi Assembly. BJP has come to power with too many promises given to electorate during the election campaigns and the chief among them was the promise of ₹ 2500 to every woman in Delhi. Difficulty to keep the promises given was difficult, rather too difficult, as it is reflected in the first cabinet decision of the government. AAP leader and former chief minister Atishi, after the CM Rekha Gupta's press conference, accused the BJP-led Delhi government of 'breaking its promise', showing alertness of the AAP leadership. It should be noted that AAP had lost the Delhi election to BJP by only a margin of 1.99 per cent of votes, and hence AAP has not been turned into a party of lost hope. There were only two states in the country who had refused to implement PM-ABY (Ayushman Bharat Yojna) and one of them was Delhi under AAP, on the ground that Delhi was giving medical facility of worth Rs 1 crore, while PM-ABY was giving only health insurance of merely ₹ 5 lakh. Delhi cabinet that approved the Ayushman Bharat will have two components ₹ 5 lakh by the Centre and another ₹ 5 lakh by Delhi making it ₹ 10 lakhs.

Nevertheless, BJP has certain advantages that the AAP government did not have. For example, the Delhi government officials were not listening to even AAP ministers, since they were put under direct control of Lieutenant Governor, indirectly the BJP led Union Government of India. The functioning of the AAP led Delhi government was hampered due to that. In the changed scenario, when there is BJP government's both in Delhi and at the Centre, Lieutenant Governor and the higher government officials have become very active, and now working for Delhi while they were working earlier offering hurdles before the AAP government and their schemes. For example, Lieutenant Governor has started the cleaning of Yamuna work, even before the BJP government take charge in Delhi. The same Lieutenant Governor have been acting like a party in opposition to AAP government – not only on the issues of Yamuna cleaning but also on the potable drinking water from Yamuna, which had become key political issues during the election campaign in Delhi.

Another example is the promptness of the Delhi officials, who have been earlier creating obstructions before AAP government and its ministers. Even ten days before BJP took oath, the Chief Secretary of Delhi has asked all departments on February 10 to prepare draft cabinet notes based on the BJP's manifesto, wherever it was required. He had also asked all departments to prepare a "100 days action plan".

Britain's labour government should support current peace moves to end Ukraine war

By: Ben Chacko

UK's Labour Government pledged on Thursday to pour more money and arms into the Ukraine conflict even as the prospect of peace emerged this week. Turning his back on US President Donald Trump's negotiations, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer said Britain would continue to "ramp up the money, the capability that we are putting into Ukraine."

He added that it was "really important that Ukraine is in the strongest possible position, whether that's in discussions or whether it's continuing fighting." And the gov-

"Instead we have had three years of unnecessary death and destruction with the world a more dangerous place.

"British governments have tried to prolong this war and we now see the consequences of that policy." But most MPs from all parties seemed to favour a prolongation of the conflict, with the air thick with allegations of appeasement.

Veteran Tory enemy of the peace movement Julian Lewis urged the government to "impress on President Trump at every possible opportunity that the reason why appeasement led to World War II was that it left a vacuum in Europe.

"If he is going for a settlement against the wishes of the Ukrainian people, the least he can do is guarantee directly the security of that part of Ukraine which remains unoccupied."

Sir Julian's line is supported by a group of organisations organising a Russian Troops Out protest at the Russian embassy in London on February 22.

In a letter signed by, among others, GMB general secretary Gary Smith, Aslef train drivers' union leader Mick Whelan, miners' union general secretary Chris Kitchen and Civil Service union PCS assistant general secretary John Moloney, it argues: "The similarities to the 1938 Munich Agreement and what may come from this Munich conference are obvious.

"History has taught us that partitions do not provide a sustainable peace, while Russia occupies part of Ukraine it will be impossible for Ukrainians to truly determine their own future freely." (IPA Service)



ernment recommitted to Ukraine joining NATO, despite new Pentagon chief Peter Hegseth in Munich explicitly ruling out Kiev becoming part of the war alliance in any peace deal.

Defence Minister Maria Eagle told MPs: "We've always said that Ukraine's rightful place is in NATO, and our position is that Ukraine is on an irreversible path to NATO membership. "But we've also always been clear that this is a process which takes time."

Stop the War Coalition convener Lindsey German pointed out that the deal outlined by Trump "could have been reached three years ago.

ent government has no positive data to prove that they have won the war against corruption, they have managed to worsen it further.

Noopur Baruah,
Tezpur
baroahnoopur@gmail.com

Human elephant conflict: A growing concern

Sir/Ma'am

Recently in my way to college I found a crowd gathered around a dead body which was of a man killed by an elephant. From that incident I became able to know the pathetic situation occurred because of human elephant conflict. In recent years

UN probe accuses Hasina regime of crimes against humanity

Weeks before former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India, who is now living in exile somewhere in Delhi, the country erupted in anti-government street protests that turned violent last year. Now the United Nations Human Rights Office (OHCHR) in a damning report points fingers at the crackdown by security forces and it is said to have committed human rights violations with impunity.

The brutal July-August crackdown by the Hasina regime was tantamount to crimes against humanity as stated by the former ruling party, Awami League, the security and intelligence agencies together systematically engaged in such violations against protesters of Monsoon Revolution, which ousted the 15-year-old autocratic rule of Hasina.

"To cling on to power, the former Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government with all its political apparatus – including security and intelligence forces – used systematic and brutal violence against student-led mass protests in July-August last year,". The UN Human Rights Office report is based on credible testimonies from senior officials and other evidence such as serious human rights violations by security forces during the protests, including extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force causing serious injuries to thousands, mass arbitrary arrests and detentions, and torture and other mistreatments.

The testimonies and evidence gathered by the UN fact-finding mission painted a disturbing picture of rampant state violence and targeted killings, which are among the most serious violations of human rights, and which may also constitute international crimes.

Sources have verified the deaths reported, the UN report estimates that 1,400 people, around 12 per cent of those were children, may have been killed between 1 July and 15 August (45 days) last year, and over 13,500 were injured, the vast majority of whom were shot by Bangladesh's security forces. Bangladesh Police also reported that 44 of its members were killed.

The fact-finding report found evidence to prove that Hasina oversaw the July protest killings!!! The report also states that former senior officials directly involved in handling the protests and other inside sources described how Hasina and other senior officials directed and oversaw a countrywide large-scale crackdown from a command center, in which security and intelligence forces shot and killed protesters or arbitrarily arrested and tortured them.

The fugitive home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal deployed the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) as a strike force and even specifically demanded the de-



ployment of more helicopters to scare protesters in the way that the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) had used them, the report elaborated.

"The testimonies and evidence we gathered paint a disturbing picture of rampant state violence and targeted killings, which are amongst the most serious violations of human rights, and which may also constitute international crimes. Accountability and justice are essential for national healing and for the future of Bangladesh," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk at a press conference in Geneva on 12th February.

"The brutal response was a calculated and well-coordinated strategy by the former government to hold onto power in the face of mass opposition," said Türk. At the request of Chief Adviser Prof Mohammed Yunus, the UN Human Rights Office dispatched a team to Bangladesh in September, including human rights investigators, a forensic physician, and a weapons expert, to conduct an independent and impartial fact-finding into the deadly events.

These violations raise concerns under international criminal law, warranting further investigations to determine whether they amount to crimes against humanity, torture as a stand-alone crime, or serious violations under domestic law, according to the report. It found patterns of security forces deliberately and impermissibly killing or maiming protesters, including incidents

where people were shot at a close range.

Violations during the protests included evidence of violence incitement by armed Awami League supporters, excessive use of force by Police, RAB, and BGB – resulting in extrajudicial killings – along the Army's involvement in the use of excessive force.

The report also documents cases in which security forces denied or obstructed critical medical care for injured protesters, interrogated patients and collected their fingerprints in hospitals, intimidated medical personnel, and seized hospital CCTV footage without due process, in an apparent effort to identify protesters and to conceal evidence of the extent of violence carried out by state forces.

The RAB should be disbanded, and the roles of the BGB and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), a military spy agency, must be confined to their original mandates. It has been advised that independent commissions must be created to investigate police violations and establish similar accountability and justice mechanisms for the Bangladesh Armed Forces and BGB.

The UN report recommends reforming the security and justice sectors, abolishing a host of repressive laws and institutions designed to stifle civic and political dissent and implement broader changes to the political system and economic governance.

The most crucial observation of the UN

probe report strongly recommended that the Bangladesh authorities should refrain from nominating military or police personnel for peacekeeping missions who have served with the RAB, DGFI, or Dhaka Metropolitan Police Detective Branch, or in BGB battalions deployed to the 2024 protests or other force-suppressed protests until a human rights screening mechanism is established.

The report did not hesitate to document the aftermath of the protests, and the report also found police officers being revengefully targeted, Awami League members, and the police were perceived to be aligned with the Awami League, as well as some journalists presumed to be affiliated with Hasina's regime.

Former Ambassador Humayun Kabir, chairman of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, an influential think-tank when approached to comment on what is going to happen next, said now it is clear that Hasina is likely not to be tried in Bangladesh.

The UN fact-finding report is an authenticated investigative document which would be produced at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, The Netherlands.

The ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan after a parley with Nobel laureate Prof Yunus has agreed to investigate and start a due process for the trial of Hasina for crimes against humanity. Once the ICC agrees to put Hasina on the docks to face crimes she has committed, The Hague court will seek her extradition from India, where she has been living in exile since 5 August.

It will surely be a severe diplomatic embarrassment for the bigwigs at New Delhi's South Block where they do not have enough legal reasons to scuttle her extradition to The Hague.

On the other hand, despite a formal request by Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry through diplomatic channels, Delhi has remained silent, except for the spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs who has acknowledged receiving the 'note verbale' from Dhaka of her extradition.

Well, regarding the deportation of Hasina to Bangladesh, India has several arguments for not sending her to stand trial at the International Crimes Tribunal in Dhaka. But giving excuses to the ICC will be difficult for India. (The author is an award-winning independent journalist based in Bangladesh. A media rights defender with the Reporters Without Borders (@RSF_inter). The recipient of Ashoka Fellowship and Hellman-Hammett Award. He could be reached at saleem-samad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @saleemamad)

Hopes and fears about independence of Election Commission of India

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

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. Nevertheless, PM Modi dispensation came up with the Act of 2023, which not only kept Chief Justice of India out of the appointment process, but also made a provision that Prime Minister and his appointee Union Minister, and the Leader of Opposition would be the members of the appointing committee. 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 govern-

ment 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. Rahul Gandhi had wanted that the appointment should be postponed since the Supreme Court of India would be hearing the petitions challenging the validity of the new law two days later on Wednesday, February 19, 2025.

It should be noted that the Supreme Court had earlier agreed to hear the matter before the appointment of the new CEC, since the incumbent CEC Rajiv Kumar was to retire, and the Case was posted to February 12. However, the case was not listed on February 12 and got posted to February 19.

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.

Today, when Prashant Bhushan representing the NGO Association for Democratic Reforms mentioned the case before the bench, Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta requested an adjournment, citing his appearance before a Constitution Bench on another matter. Opposing the request, Mr. Bhushan argued, "Every matter cannot be adjourned simply because the Solicitor

General is engaged elsewhere... they have 17 law officers." However, Addressing SG Tushar Mehta, Justice Surya Kant remarked, "If you become available, let us know. Otherwise, we will accommodate." Later, The Supreme Court postponed the hearing to March 19, owing to non-availability of dates in between.

The Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday had asserted that the midnight appointments of CEC and EC was "discourteous and disrespectful" when the process of appointment and the composition of the selection committee itself was being challenged before the Supreme Court.

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.

Gyanesh Kumar had retired as Secretary of the Ministry of Cooperation in January, and was secretary in the Amit

Shah led ministry from May 2022. From 2016 to 2018 he was in joint secretary in Union Ministry of Home, and from 2018 to April 2021 he was additional secretary, during which he headed the desk during abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir in August 2019. No doubt he has been a trusted officer for Modi-Shah duo. It is precisely due to this reason people have both hope and fear from him. Only time will tell if he holds the flag of independence of ECI or follow the dictates of their appointors.

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. There were other occasions in the past also when he was preferred by the BJP led governments both at the Centre and states like Uttarakhand.

It is in this backdrop, pro-BJP people and politicians hope much from both the newly appointed CEC and EC, while they are feared by anti-BJP people and politicians. In this situation both the officers will have greater responsibility to work without malice or favour. They must uphold the flag of independence of the Election Commission of India for free and fair election in the country.

In the meantime, all eyes are also on the Supreme Court of India, where the new law is pending for adjudication. Supreme Court is expected not to delay the decision for a very long time. (IPA Service)

POST BAG

India, still one of the most corrupted nations!

Sir/Ma'am

The present government has been a foremost critic of corrupt practices in the country. Over ten years of governance, the government has taken stringent measures to curb corruption in public offices. But India's recent standing of 96th position in the Corruption Perception Index tells a different story. To put these things into perspective, India is still grappling with corruption and all these measures that the government has taken over these years have turned out to be futile. It has dropped 20 places from 76th in 2015 to 96th in 2024. Big talks look good when you have data to prove it and seems the pres-

ent government has no positive data to prove that they have won the war against corruption, they have managed to worsen it further.

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Human elephant conflict: A growing concern

Sir/Ma'am

Recently in my way to college I found a crowd gathered around a dead body which was of a man killed by an elephant. From that incident I became able to know the pathetic situation occurred because of human elephant conflict. In recent years

we have seen multiple cases of these conflicts which resulted in deaths of both men and Elephant. This giant but cool animal is found generally in two continents -Asia and Africa. In India Assam accounts largest numbers of elephant population after Karnataka according to 2017 census. But the increasing problem of human elephant conflict in Assam impacted negatively in the population of elephants. People try to poison and harm the elephants in order to make themselves secure. Elephant also attack people. According to the data released by the Union Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change showed that 3938 human lives were lost due to wild elephant attacks and in Assam the number was 561.

The main reason of conflict between human and elephant is habitat loss. In Assam in recent years we tried to make the economy grow with government trying to build bridges, roads, buildings which affected in the destruction of forest areas because of the compulsion to grow the infrastructure and expand agricultural lands. People destroyed the forest areas by allowing the elephants to enter in the human settlement and create havoc. Generally in winter season the elephants come to eat rice crops and make conflict with human. Apart from the loss of lives people of Assam

suffer both socially and economically too.

Many people are trying to solve this problem but we have not seen any kind of pure solution here. The Government should make some protected areas and some zones to allow elephants to spend their time. The unused lands and areas can be converted into cultivated areas which will be helpful for elephants to consume food. By this they will find solutions of their scarcity of food and they will not enter human settlements. People of Assam should be careful also. They should not attack and harm the elephants. The government should also try to make the people wise and educated enough to deal with such situations. In conclusion, we can say that human elephant conflict is a complex issue. By addressing the root causes of this conflict, by maintaining sustainability in environment and by implementing conflict mitigation measures, we the people of Assam can reduce the problem of Human elephant conflict.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence in recruitment

By: Kaustov Kashyap

In today's fast-paced digital world, recruiting the right talent efficiently is critical to business success. Organisations are under constant pressure to optimise their recruitment strategies to stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful ally in this mission, reshaping how companies' source, engage, and onboard candidates.

With the global AI-powered recruitment software market projected to reach USD 890.51 million by 2028, it's clear that this transformative technology is here to stay. But how does AI deliver such value? From automating mundane tasks to providing actionable insights, AI is revolutionising the recruitment space and setting new benchmarks for efficiency and effectiveness.

AI revolutionising recruitment

The integration of AI into re-

cruitment has blurred the line between human input and machine capability, creating a more dynamic, efficient hiring process. Contrary to the fear of replacing recruiters, AI complements their efforts, allowing them to focus on strategic tasks like relationship building and workforce planning.

AI tools can now handle large volumes of data, streamline repetitive tasks, and even provide insights that were once difficult to attain. The result? Recruitment processes that are not only optimised and efficient but also more human-centric.

Key benefits of AI in recruitment

Increased optimisation and efficiency: AI tools are designed to handle repetitive and time-consuming tasks, such as resume screening, interview scheduling, and initial shortlisting. For example, an AI system can sift through thousands of CVs in minutes, identifying candidates who match the required skills and experience.

This frees recruiters to focus

on high-value activities like building relationships with candidates and crafting proactive hiring strategies. In fact, 42% of recruiters predict that AI will play a more strategic role in enabling them to work more effectively and foster better candidate experiences.

Data-backed decision making: AI doesn't just automate processes—it offers valuable insights. By analysing hiring data, AI tools can identify trends, predict hiring outcomes, and recommend strategies that align with organisational goals.

For instance, machine learning algorithms can detect patterns in candidate profiles, highlighting those most likely to succeed in a given role. Similarly, predictive analytics can identify long-term candidate sources, helping organisations make more informed decisions about where to focus their efforts.

Automated employer-candidate communication: AI-powered chatbots and automation tools have redefined candidate

communication. From sending updates about application status to answering queries and scheduling interviews, these tools ensure candidates remain informed and engaged throughout the hiring process.

Such automation not only expedites communication but also delivers a more personalised experience. This reduces delays, mitigates biases, and promotes a more inclusive and efficient hiring journey.

Enhanced candidate onboarding: AI extends its impact beyond hiring by transforming the onboarding process. Tools like AI chatbots provide 24/7 support to new employees, answering common queries and helping them acclimate to their roles.

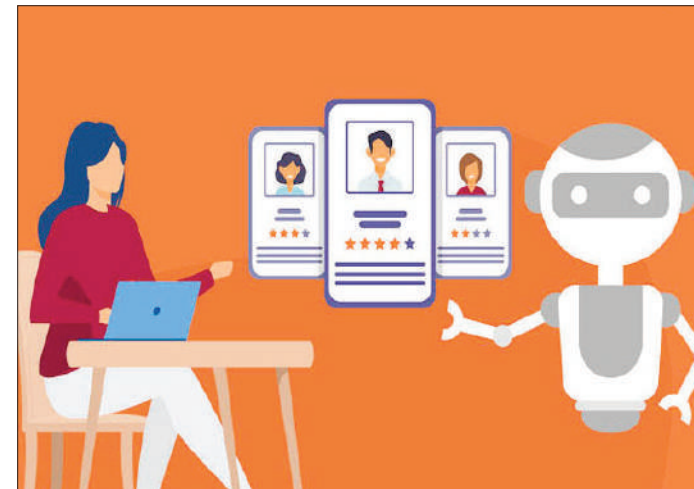
Moreover, recruiters can use AI to design personalised onboarding programmes tailored to individual roles and skill levels. This approach not only boosts engagement but also fosters a sense of belonging from day one, accelerating integration into the workplace.

Challenges and ethical considerations

While the benefits of AI in recruitment are undeniable, it's crucial to address potential challenges. AI systems can inadvertently perpetuate biases if the data they're trained on reflects historical inequalities. Additionally, over-reliance on automation might lead to reduced human interaction, which is essential for fostering trust and empathy.

To mitigate these risks, organisations must ensure transparency, regularly audit AI tools, and complement technology with a human touch. By doing so, they can create equitable, efficient hiring processes that uphold ethical standards.

The future The use of AI in recruitment is far from a passing trend—it's a transformative force reshaping the industry. As technology advances, we can expect more innovations, such as adaptive learning systems, hyper-personalised candidate experiences, and seamless integration with



broader HR tech ecosystems.

However, the future of recruitment lies in the synergy between human expertise and AI. Recruiters will remain indispensable for workforce planning, culture building, and decision-making, while AI takes on the heavy lifting of automation and data analysis. Together, they can redefine how organisations attract, hire, and retain talent.

AI is not just transforming recruitment—it's elevating it to new heights. By optimising processes, enabling data-driven

decisions, and enhancing candidate engagement, AI empowers organisations to hire smarter and faster. Yet, amidst this technological revolution, the human element remains irreplaceable. The key to unlocking the full potential of AI in recruitment lies in balance: leveraging technology for efficiency while maintaining the empathy and personal connection that define great hiring practices. *(The author is an HR & Career Consultant at Pragtree HR & Career Consultancy. He can be reached at 9957663224)*

Directorate of Economics & Statistics Recruitment – 4 Inspector of Statistics Posts

Last Date: 01/03/2025

Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 4 Inspector of Statistics Posts in the Directorate of Economics & Statistics under Transformation and Development Department, Govt. of Assam. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Inspector of Statistics

No of posts: 4 Posts [UR: 4]

Scale of Pay: ₹ 22,000/- to ₹ 97,000/-GP: ₹ 9,700/- Pay Band – 3

Educational Qualification: The Candidates must have at least a second class Master Degree in Mathematics or Statistics or Economics from a recognized University.

Age Limit: The candidates should not be less than 21 years of age and not more than 38 years of age as on 01/01/2025.

Other Criteria of Directorate of Economics & Statistics Recruitment

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

SC: 5 years
ST: 5 years
OBC/ MOBC: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years
For more details pl read the official notification.

Citizenship: Candidates must be Indian Citizens as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.

Resident-ship:

(i) The candidate must be a permanent resident of Assam.
(ii) The candidate must produce PRC issued in Assam for educational purpose/ Employment Exchange Registration certificate as proof of residency along with the application form.

Small Family Norms: The candidates have to submit a declaration regarding "The normal Family Norms" in Form-A at the time of applying for the post.

Application Fee:

General/EWS: ₹ 297.20
OBC/MOBC: ₹ 197.20
SC/ST/BPL: ₹ 47.20
PwBD: ₹ 47.20
Payment Mode: Online

How to Apply for Directorate of Economics & Statistics Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these posts by visiting at official recruitment portal of Assam Public Service Commission. They may follow below mentioned steps .

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .

Click on Online Application Form link .

A new webpage will be opened.

Enter all your personal and educational details as required .

Upload your passport sized photograph and signature and other required documents.

Pay the application fee as per your category and at the end click on submit button .

Don't forget to take a print of submitted application form .

Important Dates of Directorate of Economics & Statistics Recruitment 2025

Starting date of submission of online application: 31st January 2025
Last date of submission of online application: 1st March 2025

Indian Coast Guard Navik Recruitment 2025 – 300 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 25/02/2025

Indian Coast Guard has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 300 posts of Navik (General Duty) & Navik (Domestic Branch) in the Indian Coast Guard, an Armed Force of the Union for 02/2025 Batch. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Navik (General Duty) & Navik (Domestic Branch)

No of posts: 300 posts

Zone-wise vacancy:

North: 75 posts
West: 62 posts
East: 43 posts
South: 63 posts
Central: 57 posts

The details of area/states covered under various zones are as follows:-

North: Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chandigarh.
West: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Goa, Dadar & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu.
East: West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Sikkim, Odisha.
South: Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, Karnataka, Lakshadweep.
Central: Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar.

Name of batch: 02/2025 Batch

Name of organization: Indian Coast Guard

Mode of application: Online

Eligibility Criteria of Coast Guard Navik Recruitment

Age Limit: Candidates age should be between 18 years to 22 years. Candidates should be born between 01 Sep 2003 to 31 Aug 2007 (both dates inclusive) applying for post of Navik (GD).

Age Relaxation: Upper age relaxation of 5 years for SC/ST and 3 years for OBC (non-creamy) candidates is applicable only if posts are reserved for them.

Educational Qualification:

(a) Navik (General Duty): Candidates must have Class 12th passed with Maths and Physics from an education board recognized by Council of Boards for School Education (COBSE).

(b) Navik (Domestic Branch): Candidates must have Class 10th passed from an education board recognized by Council of Boards for School Education (COBSE).

Examination Fee:

UR/OBC: Rs. 300
SC/ST: Nil
Mode of Payment: Net banking or by using Visa/ Master/ Maestro/ Rupay Credit/ Debit Card/ UPI .

Important Dates of Indian Coast Guard Recruitment 2025

Starting date of online application submission: 11th February 2025
Last date of online application submission: 25th February 2025

Prag News Recruitment 2025 – 6 CA, CS, NEWS Producer & Sr. Desk Editor Posts

Last Date: 28/02/2025 & 15/03/2025

M/s AM Television Private Limited (Prag News) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 4 CA, CS, NEWS Producer & Sr. Desk Editor Posts in Guwahati. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. Chartered Accountant

No of posts: 2 posts

Age Limit: 30 years onward.

Educational Qualification & Experience: Must have experience of minimum 4-5 years in corporate sector; Must be Smart, Presentable & Good Communication Skills.

2. Company Secretary

No of posts: 1 post

Age Limit: 27 years onward.

Educational Qualification & Experience: Master's degree in Business Law, Corporate Governance or a related field, Familiarity with corporate governance software and systems, Certification in corporate governance or related areas, Excellent communication skills.

Languages Skill: English, Hindi, and Assamese.

3. Sr. Desk Editor

No of posts: 1 post

Age Limit: 27 years onwards

Educational Qualification & Experience: Must be a Mass Com Graduate. Experience of Minimum 2-3 years in Similar Field. Excellent communication skills

Languages Skill: Assamese.

4. TV NEWS Producer

No of posts: 2

Age Limit: 27 years onwards

Educational Qualification & Experience: Must be Mass Com Graduate. Experience of Minimum 2-3 years in Similar Field. Excellent communication skills; In-depth understanding of the production process; Solid experience with digital technology.

Languages Skill: Assamese.

Application Fee: Nil.

How to Apply for Prag News Recruitment ?

Candidates can mail there CV @ pragnewscvs@gmail.com or drop CV at reception

of Prag Tower, below Ulubari fly over, Guwahati-781007.

Last Date:

28th February 2025 (Posts 1 & 2)
15th March 2025 (Posts 3 & 4)

About Prag News

M/s AM Television Private Limited is a Private Company incorporated on 21st day of June 2005 in Guwahati Assam with an object to own Television Channel for Telecasting of News, Info-Entertainment & other Programmes, Also to act as producer & Distributor of Misc. Television program. This media Company is one of the most prestigious and respected media house not only in Assam but in the entire North East. It has produced 23 films under its production house. The major films are Dwaar (2013), Shiyor (2014), Sarvagunakar Srimanta Sankardeva (2015), Dordardshan , Eti Jantra (2016), Duronir Nirala Pojai (2017), Gangs Of North East (2017), Marksheet (2018), Xandhikhyan (2018), Leelar Pora Lailaloi (2018).

This media company is an owner of premium Assamese language and Entertainment Channel which includes Prag News, Prag Channel, Prag Cinema, and Rengoni.

Prag News, Rengoni these two satellite channels are running in regional language.

- Prag News is one of the oldest regional news channels that is dominant in North East India and is dedicated to delivering accurate and updated news reports with impartiality and integrity as its hallmark.

- Rengoni is the second GEC satellite channel, a flagship brand in the entertainment space in Assam and North East India. A combination of emotions and variety "RENGONI" under the venture of AM Television Pvt. Ltd. was launched on 3rd June 2013 and offers an entire spectrum of its emotions to its viewer.

This media company also have two Channel likewise, Prag Channel & Prag Cinema through cable in North Eastern Region.

The companies under the Brand Name of "Prag" having 1000 people direct appointment and more than 1000 indirect employment.

This media company has organized National/Regional Vide Award Programme (Prag Cine Awards) to give Recognition to N.E Cinema. Under the Umbrella of AM Television Private Limited the company has organized 14 successful Award Ceremony to give Tribute to N.E Cinema.

D Kumar Group Recruitment – 2 Project Manager & Sales Executive Posts

Last Date: 28/02/2025

D Kumar Group, Guwahati has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 2 Project Manager & Sales Executive Posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. Sales Executive

No of posts: 01

Pay: Upto ₹30,000/- CTC

Age Limit: 25 to 35 years

Educational Qualification & Experience: Sales Executive with 2-5 years of experience to generate leads, build client relationships, and drive sales in the construction, steel, or steel structure industry. Strong negotiation, market knowledge, and willingness to travel are essential.

Mandatory: Must have strong sales skills, market knowledge, and a two-wheeler for client visits.

Location: Guwahati, Assam.

2. Senior Engineer/ Project Manager

No of posts: 01

Pay: Upto ₹90,000/-CTC

Age Limit: 35 to 45 years

Educational Qualification & Experience: Seeking a Civil Engineer (B.E./M.E.) with 10-12 years' experience in river bank protection projects. Responsible for project planning, team management, budget control, site inspections, and stake holder communication. Must have prior experience in large-scale projects, strong leadership skills, and be willing to relocate to Hojai, Assam.

Mandatory: Must have experience in river bank protection projects and Water Resource Department (WRD). Should be able to join immediately.

Location: Hojai, Assam.

Application fee if any: N/A

Last date of submission of Application: 28/02/2025 .

About D Kumar Group

D Kumar Group, a 5 decade old construction firm which started its journey in 1978 is the leader in the construction segment of Assam. It's brand RAFTAAR, as the name suggests has contributed immensely to Assam's progress through landmark Transmission Line Towers, Fencing of Transformers, Sanitation Materials supply under Swachh Bharat Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission, EPC Projects, & other Government initiatives to bring a change in people's lives. We are consistently delivering solutions that exceed expectations.

A kickback scheme, says Trump as he continues to target Biden admin for USD 21 million to India for 'voter turnout'

This is the third time within a week that Trump has questioned the funding

NEW YORK, Feb 21: US President Donald Trump has claimed that the USD 21 million funding to India for 'voter turnout' was a "kickback" scheme, as he continued to attack the previous Biden administration over the now cancelled financial aid.

Trump made these remarks while speaking at the Republican Governors Association meeting in Washington DC on Thursday.

"USD 21 million for voter turnout in India. Why are we caring about India's turnout? We have got enough problems. We want our own turnout," said Trump.

"I would say in many cases, many of these cases, anytime you have no idea what we're talking about, that means there's a kickback because nobody has any idea what's going on there," he said.

This is the third time within a week that Trump has questioned the funding.

Earlier addressing the FII PRIORITY Summit in Miami on Thursday, he had raised similar concerns over funding to India and suggested that they were trying to "get somebody else elected."

On Wednesday, he questioned the purpose of providing USD 21



million to India for "voter turnout" as he reiterated that the US "can hardly get in there" because of high Indian tariffs.

His remarks came days after the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) led by Elon Musk disclosed that USAID contributed USD 21 million to the Election Commission to boost voter turnout in India.

On February 16, DOGE listed items on which the "US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent" and the list included "USD 21M for voter turnout in India."

DOGE noted that all of the items have been cancelled.

The list also included USD 29 million for "strengthening political landscape in Bangladesh", USD 20 million for "fiscal federalism" and USD 19 million for "biodiversity conservation" in Nepal as well as USD 47 million for "improving learning outcomes in Asia".

Trump during the speech at the Republican Governors Association meeting also questioned USD 29 million to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh.

"Nobody knows what they mean by the political landscape. What does that mean?" he asked.

"USD 20 million for fiscal federalism and USD 19 million for

biodiversity in Nepal, USD 47 million for improving learning outcomes in Asia. What the hell do I care about? We got a lot. We got enough problems and all of this is terminated. We terminated this stuff and we're on the track. And by the way, there were so many others I could have I could read all night long, but so many were so terrible, and were actually disgusting. And I know you're eating your dinner, so I didn't want to do that but we're draining the swamp," Trump said.

The DOGE has been put in charge of overseeing workforce reduction across the government, and as part of that, Musk announced that he would shut down USAID, which is responsible for humanitarian efforts around the globe.

According to USAID officials on February 7, all USAID humanitarian work worldwide was stopped, ABC News reported.

The agency's website was shut down before Musk's announcement. Later, a Trump-nominated judge announced a temporary restraining order that prevents the president and DOGE from placing 2,200 employees on administrative leave. (PTI)

Netanyahu decries release of wrong body as ceasefire violation

JERUSALEM, Feb 21: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed revenge Friday for what he described as a "cruel and malicious violation" of the ceasefire agreement after a body that Hamas released as part of the deal was found to not be that of an Israeli mother of two young boys, as the militants had promised.

The incident has thrown the future of the fragile ceasefire into question. Six more living hostages are scheduled to be released Saturday as part of the tenuous ceasefire that has paused over 15 months of war.

In a statement on Friday, Hamas said it would "conduct a thorough review" of the information regarding the body, and suggested a possible mix-up of remains might have occurred due to Israeli bombing of the area where the Israeli hostages were being held, where other Palestinians were also present.

Hamas turned over four bodies Thursday as part of the ceasefire. They were supposed to have been those of Shiri Bibas and her two young sons, Kfir and Ariel Bibas, and of Oded Lifshitz, who was 83 when he was abducted during the Hamas attack that started the war on October 7, 2023.

Israeli authorities said that while the remains of the two boys and of Lifshitz were positively identified, the fourth body was found to not be that of Shiri Bibas, but that of an unidentified woman from Gaza.

"We will work with determination to bring Shiri home together with all our hostages — both living and dead — and ensure that Hamas pays the full price for this cruel and malicious violation of the agreement," Netanyahu said.

"The sacred memory of Oded Lifshitz and Ariel and Kfir Bibas will be forever enshrined in the heart of the nation. May God avenge their blood. And so we will avenge."

Hamas has claimed Lifshitz, Shiri Bibas and her sons were killed in Israeli airstrikes. But Israel said the testing had found the two boys and Lifshitz were killed by their captors.

US envoy Adam Boehler described the release of the wrong body as "horrific" and a "clear violation" of the ceasefire.

"If I were them, I'd release everybody or they are going to face total annihilation," Boehler, who serves as the US envoy for hostages, told CNN.

It was unclear how the incident might affect the next scheduled swap of hostages for prisoners, set for Saturday. Hamas has said it will also release four more bodies next week, completing the first phase of the ceasefire. It is also un-



clear whether the truce will be extended beyond the end of the current phase, which expires in early March.

In another potential blow to the deal, a series of explosions struck three parked, empty buses in central Israel overnight.

There were no injuries and no claim of responsibility. But the Israeli military said in response it was beefing up its forces in the West Bank, raising the likelihood of further escalation in the area. Israel has been carrying out a broad military offensive in the occupied territory since the ceasefire took effect.

If the current phase of the ceasefire goes according to plan with the release of six hostages on Saturday and four more bodies next week, Hamas will be left with about 60 hostages, about half — all men — believed to still be alive.

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's committed to destroying Hamas' military and governing capacities and returning all the hostages, goals widely seen as mutually exclusive.

Trump's proposal to remove about 2 million Palestinians from Gaza so the US 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 that the war will resume.

Israel's military offensive killed more than 48,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants. Israel says it has killed more than 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence.

The offensive destroyed vast areas of Gaza, reducing entire neighbourhoods to rubble. At its height, the war displaced 90 per cent of Gaza's population. Many have returned to their homes to find nothing left and no way of rebuilding. (AP)

UK foreign secretary questions Russia's 'appetite' for peace; challenges Lavrov at tense G20 meet

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 21: UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy said he saw no appetite for peace from Russia in Ukraine after listening to a speech by Russia's top diplomat at a tense Group of 20 meeting in South Africa on Thursday.

Lammy was speaking to reporters after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov addressed other senior diplomats in a closed-door session at the G20 foreign ministers meeting in Johannesburg.

"I have to say when I listened to what the Russians and what Lavrov have just said in the chamber this afternoon, I don't see an appetite to really get to that peace," Lammy said.

In a transcript of his speech released by the Russian Foreign Ministry, Lavrov had repeated his long-standing criticism of the West and accused it of interfering in "the internal affairs" of other countries.

Lammy said Lavrov left his seat in the meeting room when it was Lammy's turn to speak.

The two-day G20 gathering on Thursday and Friday comes days after landmark bilateral talks between the United States and Russia over ending the war in Ukraine. Those talks sidelined Washington's European allies and Ukraine, who weren't involved.

US President Donald Trump has further upended the West's position by criticising Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and falsely blaming Ukraine for the full-scale invasion by Russia. The war's third anniversary is next week.

"At the moment, we've had talks effectively about talks," Lammy said. "We've not got anywhere near a negotiated settlement." In his own speech, which was released by the UK Foreign Office, Lammy criticised Russia for what he called "Tsarist imperialism."

"Mature countries learn from their colonial failures and their wars, and Europeans have had much to learn over the generations and the centuries," Lammy said. "But I'm afraid to say that Russia has learned nothing."

"I was hoping to hear some sympathy for the innocent victims of the aggression. I was hoping to hear some readiness to seek a durable peace. What I heard was the logic of imperialism dressed up as a realpolitik," he added. "I say to you all, we should not be surprised, but neither should we be fooled."

Lammy referred to Lavrov's speech as "the Russian gentleman's tired fabrications".

Tensions at the meeting were underlined when a photo opportunity for the foreign ministers to pose together for pictures was cancelled with no reason given.

The United Kingdom, France, Germany and the European Union have all pledged continued support for Ukraine and were expected to reinforce that position at the G20 meeting.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who led talks with Lavrov in Saudi Arabia this week, was a high-profile absentee from the meeting. Rubio boycotted amid US tensions with host South Africa over some of its policies, which the Trump administration has labelled anti-American.

The US was represented by Dana Brown, its acting ambassador to South Africa. (AP)

Facing pressure from Trump, Costa Rica, Honduras join Panama as stopovers for foreign deportees

SAN JOSE (COSTA RICA), Feb 21: A group of families and children hailing from Uzbekistan, China, Afghanistan, Russia and more countries climbed down the stairs of an airplane in Costa Rica's capital Thursday, the first flight of deportees from other nations Costa Rica agreed to hold in detention facilities for the Trump administration while it organised the return back to their countries.

The flight of 135 deportees, half of them minors, added Costa Rica to a growing list of Latin American nations to serve as a stopover for migrants as US President Donald Trump's administration seeks to step up deportations.

While Costa Rica joins Panama in holding deportees from mostly Asian origin until their repatriation can be arranged or they can seek protection somewhere, Honduras on Thursday also facilitated a handoff of deportees between the US and Venezuela from a flight coming from Guantanamo Bay.

The migrants arriving in Costa

Rica will be bused to a rural holding facility near the Panama border, where they will be detained up to six weeks and be flown back to their countries of origin, said Omer Badilla, Costa Rica's deputy minister of the interior and police. The US government will cover the costs.

The arrangement is part of a deal the Trump administration struck with Costa Rica during US secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit earlier this month. It comes as Trump has pressured countries across the region to help facilitate deportations at times under the threat of steep tariffs or sanctions.

Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves told reporters Wednesday that his country is helping its "economically powerful brother through the north."

Similar agreements have been reached with other Latin American nations, but the concept of using third countries as deportation layovers has drawn strong criticism from human rights advocates. (AP)

Macron's message to Trump: 'You can't be weak in face of Putin'

PARIS, Feb 21: French President Emmanuel Macron said he intends to tell Donald Trump that it's in the joint interest of Americans and Europeans not to "be weak" in the face of Russia's Vladimir Putin amid US-led negotiations to end the almost three-year war in Ukraine.

Macron is to travel to Washington to meet with Trump on Monday, the White House said.

In a one-hour question and answer session on his social media Thursday, Macron said he'll tell Trump: "You can't be weak in the face of President Putin. It's not you, it's not your trademark, it's not in your interest. How can you then be credible in the face of China if you're weak in the face of Putin?"

Trump's recent statements that echo Putin's narrative and plans to have direct negotiations with Moscow have left European allies and Ukrainian officials worried. But Macron suggested Trump's strategy to create "uncertainty" in talks with Russia could actually make Western allies stronger in these talks.

Putin "doesn't know what he (Trump) is going to do, he thinks (Trump) is capable of anything," Macron said. "This uncertainty is good for us and for Ukraine."

Macron added he would seek to persuade Trump that US interests and Europeans' interests are the same, telling him: "If you let Russia take over Ukraine, it would be unstoppable."

That means any peace deal must be negotiated with Ukrainians and Europeans around the table, Macron reaffirmed.

"We want peace, but we don't want a ceasefire that means Ukraine surrendering, because that's dangerous. And we know that would lead to Russia going further. We've already experienced it," he said.

Macron also appeared ready to answer Trump's call to boost defence spending. "Us, Europeans, we must increase our war effort," he said.

Asked about whether he's considering sending French troops to Ukraine, he said he would not send soldiers to fight in Ukraine but rather a security force meant to bring "guarantees" once a peace deal is achieved.

"We don't rule out, within a framework planned with our allies, the possibility of having forces which, once peace has been negotiated, could contribute to guaranteeing Ukraine's security," he said. (AP)

Macron's message to Trump: "You can't be weak in face of Putin"

Syria's national dialogue conference in flux amid pressure for political transition

DAMASCUS (SYRIA), Feb 21: An official with the committee preparing a national dialogue conference in Syria to help chart the country's future said on Friday that it has not been decided whether the conference will take place before or after a new government is formed.

The date of the conference has not been set and the timing "is up for discussion by the citizens", Hassan al-Daghim, spokesperson for the committee, told The Associated Press in an interview in Damascus Friday.

"If the transitional government is formed before the national dialogue conference, this is normal," he said. On the other hand, he said, "the caretaker government may be extended until the end of the national dialogue".

The conference will focus on drafting a constitution, the economy, transitional justice, institutional reform and how the authorities deal with Syrians, al-Daghim said. The outcome of the national dialogue will be non-binding recommendations to the country's new leaders.

However, these recommendations are not only in the sense of advice and formalities," al-Daghim said. "They are recommendations that the President of the republic is waiting for in order to build on them."

After former President Bashar Assad was toppled in a lightning rebel offensive in December, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, the main rebel group now in control of Syria, set up an interim administration comprising mainly of members of its "salvation government" that had ruled in northwestern Syria.

They said at the time that a new government would be formed through an inclusive process by March. In January, former HTS leader Ahmad al-Sharaa was named Syria's interim president after a meeting of most of the country's former rebel factions.

The groups agreed to dissolve the country's constitution, the former national army, security service and official political parties. (AP)

China issued 'disconcerting' warning of live-fire exercises to planes flying above: Australia

MELBOURNE, Feb 21: Airliners were over the Tasman Sea crossing between Australia and New Zealand when the Chinese navy warned they were flying over a secret live-fire exercise. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said on Friday.

Regulator Airlines Australia warned commercial pilots of a potential hazard in airspace between the countries as three Chinese warships conducted exercises off the Australian east coast.

But Marles said Australian authorities only learned about China's live-firing plans in international waters midway between Australia and New Zealand from the airlines.

"To be clear, we weren't notified by China," Marles told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio in Perth.

"What China did was put out a notification that it was intending to engage in live firing. By that, I mean a broadcast that was picked up by airlines or literally... commercial planes that were flying across the Tasman," Marles said.

"This was very disconcerting for the planes that were flying," he added.

Three flights from Sydney bound for the New Zealand cities of Christchurch and Queenstown were in the air on Friday morning before they were first warned by a Chinese

warship of a live-fire exercise, media reported.

All changed course. The three airlines involved, Emirates, Qantas and Virgin Australia, did not comment.

Marles said the Australian navy would typically give 12 to 24 hours' notice of a live-firing exercise to allow airlines time to properly plan around it.

But he said all flights were able to divert and no one was put in danger.

The warships — frigate Hengyang, cruiser Zunyi and replenishment vessel Weishanhu — are exercising a freedom of navigation in international waters off the Australian east coast of a kind that angers Beijing when exercised by the Australian military in the disputed South China Sea.

During a regular Chinese foreign ministry briefing on Friday, spokesperson Guo Jiakun said China's military had organized its fleet to conduct high seas exercises. "The drill was carried out in a safe, standard and professional manner in compliance with relevant international law and international practice" Guo said.

Australian defence officials were uncertain whether any live fire of weapons had occurred. The risk had since passed, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said. (AP)

clear whether the truce will be extended beyond the end of the current phase, which expires in early March.

In another potential blow to the deal, a series of explosions struck three parked, empty buses in central Israel overnight.

There were no injuries and no claim of responsibility. But the Israeli military said in response it was beefing up its forces in the West Bank, raising the likelihood of further escalation in the area. Israel has been carrying out a broad military offensive in the occupied territory since the ceasefire took effect.

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The offensive destroyed vast areas of Gaza, reducing entire neighbourhoods to rubble. At its height, the war displaced 90 per cent of Gaza's population. Many have returned to their homes to find nothing left and no way of rebuilding. (AP)

Federal judge allows Trump's mass firings of federal workers to move forward

WASHINGTON, Feb 21: A federal judge in Washington has allowed President Donald Trump's mass firings of federal workers to move forward.

US District Judge Christopher Cooper decided Thursday he could not grant a motion from unions representing the workers to temporarily block the layoffs. He found that their complaint amounted to an employment dispute and must follow a different process outlined in federal employment law.

Cooper acknowledged that the Republican president's second term "has been defined by an onslaught of executive actions that have caused, some say by design, disruption and even chaos in widespread quarters of American society."

But Cooper, who was appointed by President Barack Obama, a Democrat, wrote that judges are "duty-bound to decide legal issues based on even-handed application of law and precedent — no matter the identity of the litigants or, regrettably at times, the consequences of their rulings for average people."

The ruling comes as thousands of federal government employees have been shown the door during the first month of Trump's second administration.

The administration argued in court the unions failed to show that they were facing the kind of irreparable, immediate harm that would justify an emergency order stopping layoffs.

The unions, representing hundreds of thousands of federal workers, maintain that Trump's efforts to slash the federal workforce conflicts with Congress' power to shape the size and direction of agencies through funding decisions, as well as laws detailing how such layoffs must be carried out.

The president of the National Treasury Employees' Union, Doreen Greenwald, said that Cooper's decision was a temporary setback and that "federal employees will get their day in court to challenge the unlawful mass firings and other attacks on their jobs, their agencies, and their service to the country."

The lawsuit is among more than 80 challenging a range of actions Trump has undertaken with his blitz of executive orders. Unions also filed a separate suit challenging mass firings in California this week. (AP)

Indian student wins Memory League World Championship 2025

Rajakumar said he was crying when he achieved the feat

NEW YORK, Feb 21: Vishvaa Rajakumar, a 20-year-old Indian student, has won the Memory League World Championship 2025 by memorising the order of 80 random numbers in 13.50 seconds and 30 images in 8.40 seconds.

Memory League World Championship is an intense online competition. According to the Memory League website, Rajakumar is ranked No 1 with a score of 5,000.

Rajakumar memorised 80 numbers in 13.50 seconds and 30 images in 8.40 seconds during the championship held recently. According to his LinkedIn profile, Rajakumar is a student of Pudukcherry-based ManakulaV-inayagar Institute of Technology. Speaking to The New York Times on his technique and strate-



gies of memorisation, Rajakumar said, "Hydration is very important because it helps your brain. When you memorise things, you usually subvocalise, and it helps to have a clear throat."

"Let's say you're reading a book. You're not reading it out loud, but you are vocalising within yourself. If you don't drink a lot of water, your speed will be a bit low. If you drink a lot of water, it will

be more and more clear and you can read it faster," he said.

Rajakumar said he was crying when he achieved the feat.

"They give you 80 random numbers that they display on a screen. You have to memorize all of those numbers as fast as possible, then click a button and a recall sheet appears. I wrote down all of the 80 digits — and I got them all right. My fastest time to memorise 80 random digits in this World Championship was 13.5 seconds, so almost six digits per second," he told the newspaper.

He said after the completion of college, he would try to be a memory trainer and create a memory institution in India to teach other people these techniques.

"My goal is to make it big," he said. (PTI)

PM Modi likely to inaugurate redeveloped Tripurasundari Temple on April 7



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Feb 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to inaugurate the redeveloped Tripurasundari Temple on April 7, as the Tripura government has tentatively set this date for the event, Tripura finance minister Pranajit Singha Roy announced on Friday.

During an inspection of the pending construction work for the temple's beautification in Udaipur, Gomati District, the minister stated that all departments involved have assured completion by March 20, after which the site will be handed over.

"The redevelopment has been carried out under the PRASAD scheme, and people are eagerly awaiting its completion. Since PM Modi approved the project, we also want him to inaugurate it. Chief Minister Manik Saha has invited him and proposed a tentative date of April 7, though it is yet to be confirmed. By March 20, all construction work will be completed, and we have finalized a location for the foundation stone, which will be sent for the CM's approval," said the minister.

Roy further mentioned that due to the temple's sacred nature, restrictions on the sale of non-vegetarian items, including garlic and

chicken, might be imposed in the surrounding areas.

"We are also addressing unauthorized constructions around the temple through legal means. Officials will ensure that no non-vegetarian items are sold in the vicinity to maintain the sanctity of the site. This practice is common in temples across other states, where only vegetarian food is available," he added.

Regarding concerns about the color of the newly constructed sections of the temple, the minister dismissed speculation, criticizing those spreading misinformation.

"Some people oppose progress and do not want positive changes. No one has the authority to alter the temple's color. Those creating such conspiracies do not believe in dharma and are likely atheists. I doubt if they even visit the temple. Despite the project still being incomplete, tourist footfall has already increased significantly. Earlier, this was never the case. In the future, the number of visitors will rise even further," he asserted.

The redevelopment of the Tripurasundari Temple aims to enhance its appeal as a major religious and tourist destination, contributing to Tripura's cultural and economic growth.

Arunachal education minister flags off four college buses

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Feb 21: The education and RWD minister P D Sona on Friday has flagged-off four college buses of various in state in presence of several top officers of higher education directorates and others.

Sona informed, "Today four 50 seater bus has been flagged off to four colleges of state which include Govt College, Doimukh (50 seater bus), Wangcha Rajkumar Govt College, Deomali (45 seater bus), Jomin Taveng Model Degree College, Roing (45 Seater bus) and Govt Model Degree College, Daporijo (32 seater bus). The buses have been procured from the State Plan scheme with a fund provision of ₹ 1.5 crore during the current financial year."

The bus is being dedicated to the welfare of students studying in their respective colleges. It has been believed that the buses would be mitigating to and fro transportation problems faced by the students, as the most of the colleges are located in far-off places from township, the minister said.

Referring to recent show cause notice with ₹ 1 lakh fine served to more than 35 private schools in state, the education minister while appreciating the step of the Child Right Commission said that the step was a beginning and more such action would be initiated soon.

"Everyone should come forward and I have always been saying that many schools have not



been following the guidelines and it's a matter of investigation as how these schools have obtained NOC and permission to run the schools," he said.

I have already stopped the processing of new private schools in state before all the formalities cleared as per guidelines and safety measures, he added.

With regards to distribution of uniform of school students, the education minister said that due to quality compromise and difference in sizes, quality and quantity it was difficult for all the students to use the said cloth.

"Even in centrally procurements it has been observed that some quality has been compromised. In new session we will prefer for DBT mode and this is discussion with the district administration about the modalities," the minister said.

Director, higher & technical education Milorai Modi, OSD to HM education Pema Norbu Thongchi, joint director Joram Muthu, deputy director Minto Etc, SLO(NSS) AK Mishra among other officers were present during the ceremony held near Mahatma Gandhi Park at Niti Vihar in the city.

ADC Polls: 65.32% voter turnout recorded in Khasi, Jaintia Hills

Nongspung-Sohiong constituency in East Khasi Hills recorded the highest voting percentage at 86.14 per cent

SHILLONG, Feb 21: The two Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in the Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya held on Friday have recorded an overall voter turnout of 65.32 per cent.

Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) has recorded the voter turnout at 70.99 per cent while Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) with 57.68 per cent at the close of polls at 4 pm.

The voting began at 7 am till 4 pm in all the 58 district council constituencies, 29 each in KHADC and JHADC.

Under the JHADC, Moodymai-Nongkroh constituency in West Jaintia Hills District recorded the highest voting per-



centage at 90.8 per cent, the lowest was Jowai-North constituency in West Jaintia Hills District with only 75.21 per cent.

In KHADC, Nongspung-So-

hiong constituency in East Khasi Hills recorded the highest voting percentage at 86.14 per cent while Jirang constituency in Ri Bhoi district recorded the lowest at 51.46 per cent.

NSF demands 80% quota in Nagaland varsity appointments

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 21: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has demanded 80% reservation for indigenous Nagas of Nagaland in recruitment to teaching and non-teaching posts and also physical mode of interviews in Nagaland University.

In a representation to Nagaland University vice chancellor Prof JK Patnaik on Friday, NSF president Medovi Rhi and education secretary Temjentoshi said the varsity should be a leading institution in promoting local talent and expertise by ensuring that at least 80% of the teaching and non-teaching positions are reserved for the indigenous Nagas of Nagaland.

It said as the premier central university in the state, it was imperative that the varsity reflected the aspirations and welfare of the indigenous Nagas of the state, particularly in matters of employment.

The NSF extended sincere appreciation to the varsity for its significant role in fostering academic excellence and contributing to the intellectual growth of "our people."

"Given the unique constitutional provisions under Article 371(A), which recognise the rights of the Naga people over their land, resources, and customs, it is essential that employment opportunities at the university prioritise the local populace," the representation added.

Pradyot calls on Tipra Motha workers to expose corruption, protect party's credibility

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Feb 21: Tipra Motha founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on Friday urged party workers to take a firm stand against corruption, particularly when it is carried out in the name of the party.

In a voice note, Pradyot emphasised the importance of maintaining integrity and called upon his supporters to actively fight against corrupt practices.

"I want to ask my warriors—my name is being tarnished, and you all are sitting idle. If you lack credibility and honesty, no amount of money will bring true happiness. Corruption will only bring misery to our people and society. I urge everyone to stand against it," he stated.

As the royal scion of Tripura, Pradyot warned that remaining silent in the face of corruption would ultimately harm the indigenous community.



It pointed out that non-indigenous staff members often serve for short durations before seeking transfers or moving elsewhere, leading to frequent disruptions in the academic environment.

The NSF said lack of permanent commitment from such personnel negatively impacts students' academics, research progress, and administrative efficiency. At the same time, the indigenous staff members remain permanently, ensuring continuity, accountability, and long-term contributions to the university's growth, it said.

It added that the presence of local faculty and administrative staff also ensures that the university functions in alignment with the socio-cultural fabric of Nagaland.

Besides, it said, granting due preference to many deserving highly qualified Naga youth would

not only address this issue but also enrich the institution with dedicated professionals who have a long-term commitment to serving the university and its students.

Drawing attention that interviews for various faculty posts in the university are being conducted through virtual modes, the NSF urged that all interviews for both teaching and non-teaching positions be conducted in a physical, in-person mode at the university premises.

It said while online platforms provide accessibility and convenience, they also pose significant challenges in the fair assessment of candidates.

The federation further reminded that it will continue to be vigilant in all teaching and non-teaching recruitments to ensure the Naga candidates are not deprived of being recruited.

17 militants arrested from 4 Manipur districts

IMPHAL, Feb 21: Seventeen militants belonging to different banned outfits were arrested from four Manipur districts in the last 24 hours, police said on Friday.

Thirteen militants belonging to the banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) outfit were nabbed from Moirang Kiyam Leikai area of Bishnupur district on Thursday, a police statement said.

A total of 27 cartridges, three walkie-talkie sets, camouflage uniforms and other tactical accessories were also seized, it said.

The arrested persons were taken to Imphal for further investigation.

A militant of the banned United National Liberation Front (P) was arrested from Ngarayan Ching area of Imphal East district on Thursday, police said. "The arrested person was involved in extortion activities," police said.

Security forces arrested a cadre of Kangleipak Communist Party (City Meitei) from Ngaikhong Khullen area in Bishnupur district on Thursday, they said. (PTI)

Protests in Manipur valley districts

IMPHAL, Feb 21: Demonstrators across Manipur's Imphal Valley on Friday burnt tyres in the middle of roads to protest the arrest of village volunteers in Kakching district, officials said.

Security personnel arrested more than 10 village volunteers in an early morning operation at Panjao Pallunda in the district and later took them to a security forces camp at Phundrei in Thoubal district, officials added.

The arrests came a day after Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla urged the people of the strife-torn state to voluntarily surrender looted and illegally held weapons within seven days, asserting that "strict action" would be taken after the expiry of the deadline.

According to officials, the demonstrations were held in Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, and Kakching districts.

Protesters also forced the closure of roadside shops and markets in Wangkhei, Uripok, Thangmeiband, and Khurai areas of Imphal, they added. (PTI)

'Sports a unifying force that fosters discipline'

IMPHAL, Feb 21: Manipur Police chief Rajiv Singh has said sports is a unifying force that fosters discipline, health, and resilience, reaffirming the force's commitment to youth development through the 'Catch Them Young initiative'. The DGP claimed that youth have been the most affected by the state's ongoing violence and urged them to embrace sports instead of anti-social activities.

Inaugurating the 4th Master Boys and Girls Boxing Championship and the 1st State Level Blue Cubs Baby League at Khuman Lampak Sports Complex on Thursday, he highlighted Manipur's rich sporting heritage, which has produced Olympic medalists and international champions.

Singh also asserted Manipur Police's long-standing support for sports, with over 400 athletes in its ranks, including world-class players like Mary Kom, Sarita Laishram, and Mirabai Chanu.

He reiterated that sports provide an alternative path, fostering discipline, teamwork, and purpose. (PTI)

Mizoram Assembly pays tributes to former PM Manmohan Singh

AIZAWL, Feb 21: The Mizoram Assembly on Friday paid rich tributes to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away at the age of 92 on December 26 last year.

Chief Minister Lalduhoma recalled the great services rendered by Singh as a politician and a renowned economist.

He said Singh contributed greatly to the country's progress by holding various key positions at the Centre even before his entry into politics.

Paying rich tributes to the former PM, Lalduhoma said the economic reforms Singh had bravely introduced as the Union finance minister between 1991 and 1996 were a milestone for India's entry to a new chapter, which earned him the reputation of a "great economist" worldwide.

"Singh had been elected to the Rajya Sabha from Assam five times in 1991, 1995, 2001, 2007, and 2013 and from Rajasthan in 2019," he said.

He was the leader of the opposition in Rajya Sabha from March 1998 to May 2004 before becoming the PM, he said.

The chief minister also hailed the foreign policies introduced by Singh and said welfare schemes



such as the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and Right to Information Act (RTI) introduced and implemented during his tenure as the PM.

He said the nation deeply mourned Singh's demise and was greatly proud of him for his contributions to the country.

Opposition leader Lalchhandama Ralte, BJP leader Dr K Beichhua and lone Congress legislator C. Ngunlianchunga also delivered condolence speeches.

Hailing Singh as "a great scholar and economist besides being a Parliamentarian," Ralte said, "The importance of Singh as an economic reformist and a good leader will continue to be felt by the people."

Beichhua said Singh's ability to remain patient and resilient during his tenure "proved him a great leader." (PTI)

Manipur RS MP urges MLAs to work together to restore peace

IMPHAL, Feb 21: Manipur Rajya Sabha MP Leishemba Sanajaoba on Friday urged MLAs to work together to restore peace in the strife-torn state and establish a stable government.

President's rule was imposed in the northeastern state on February 13, four days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned from his position. The assembly has also been put under suspended animation.

Speaking to reporters after an event, the BJP MP said, "People are facing immense hardship. The conflict has been ongoing for nearly two years, and this is not the time for political games. A united effort is needed to find a solution and ease people's sufferings."

He added that those responsible for this situation must now work together to restore stability.

Sanajaoba alleged that the crisis did not arise on its own but was a result of failures at both



the central and state levels.

"Our youth were not like this before. It's time to focus on bringing them back into the mainstream. They are not anti-national or anti-India; they stepped up to protect their land when government forces were inactive," he added.

Regarding a recent meeting with the governor, he said, "I conveyed that discussions would be more effective than extreme measures, as harsh actions could prolong the crisis."

While he refrained from commenting on state politics, he reiterated the need for MLAs to work towards forming a strong and popular government. (PTI)

Awareness cum registration drive on PM Vishwakarma scheme

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Feb 21: The District Industries Centre organised awareness cum registration drive at general round Yingkiang on Friday on the occasion of 39th Statehood day 2025.

During the camp over 200 artisans attended the registration drive, more than 50 artisans and craftsmen had successfully registered and AADHAR corrections were made for another 50 artisans in various trades under PM Vishwakarma scheme.

Deputy commissioner of Upper Siang Talo Jerang, visited the Industries registration stall during the event and emphasised the significance of the multiple benefits of the scheme and asked the department to ensure that scheme is implemented in a proper way so that its advantages reach to the people who really need.

Mukkin Megu, assistant director of industries, Upper Siang, emphasised the PM Vishwakarma Scheme's commitment to product enhancement, market integration, and streamlined bank loan processing. These initiatives were de-

signed to empower artisans, enabling them to expand their market reach both nationally and internationally.

Megu also highlighted that the scheme aims to equip artisans with the necessary tools and support to improve their craftsmanship and business acumen. District officials were briefed on the verification and vetting process and were encouraged to raise awareness and assist artisans in applying for the scheme through Common Service Centers (CSCs). Addressing any pending verification stages was stressed to ensure artisans have access to skill development programs and loans.

It is to be mentioned that PM Vishwakarma scheme included 18 traditional trades, such as carpentry, boat making, blacksmithing, gold smithing, tailoring, and more. Artisans would have the opportunity to take loans of up to ₹ 3 lakh. This initiative aimed to empower artisans to scale up their businesses and showcase their craftsmanship on larger platforms. Artisans would be trained and on boarded on multiple forums such as ONDC, GeM, and MSME Mart.

Agartala's Haora Riverfront development nears completion: Official

Key elements incorporated into the project, including bridges, a crematorium, and the Dashami Ghat

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Feb 21: The Haora Riverfront Development Project, undertaken by Agartala Smart City Limited at a cost of ₹ 100 crore, has been nearing completion, according to an official from state government.

The project, aimed at revitalizing a 16.94-acre stretch along the Haora River, focused on creating green spaces, pedestrian walkways, and dedicated cycling lanes. Additionally, measures have been implemented to enhance water quality through in-situ wastewater treatment and fortify embankments to mitigate the risk of flooding.

Speaking about the progress, the official stated, "Approximately 1.5 years ago, the Haora Riverfront Development Project



was initiated as part of the larger Agartala Smart City initiative. We have developed a 2 km stretch with properly constructed embankments on both sides, integrating modern infrastructure while prioritizing environmental sus-

tainability."

The official highlighted key elements incorporated into the project, including bridges, a crematorium, and the Dashami Ghat. He also reassured the public about the embankment's durabil-

ity, explaining that a geotextile membrane and stone gapping had been used to reinforce it against potential flooding.

"In the past, people used to dump waste into the river. Now, we are systematically cleaning it and transforming the area into an engaging public space with sports facilities, food stalls, parks, and playgrounds. We have also enhanced Dashami Ghat by installing lights to improve visitors' experience. Furthermore, work on a sewage treatment plant is set to begin soon to maintain the river's cleanliness," he added.

With the project nearing completion, Agartala has been poised to witness a significant transformation along the Haora River, making it a more accessible and sustainable urban space.

Adani issue not personal matter but one of country: Rahul on PM Modi's remarks

RAE BARELI (UP), Feb 21: Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Friday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his remarks during his US visit on the controversy involving Adani Group, saying it was not a "personal matter" but one about the country.

Gandhi made the remarks while addressing youths at an event in the Lalganj area during the second day of his visit to his parliamentary constituency. The Congress leader was referring to PM Modi's media interaction during his recent US visit when he was quizzed about discussions with US President Donald Trump and the ongoing controversy about the Adani Group. The prime minister said it was "an individual issue" and such issues are not discussed when two world leaders meet, Gandhi commented.

"Narendra Modi ji, this is not a personal matter. It's a matter of the country," Gandhi said.

He alleged that PM Modi told the American press that business tycoon Gautam Adani was his friend he would not ask Trump anything



about him. A case of "corruption and theft" was pending against Adani in the US, Gandhi further alleged.

"And what our PM says, it's an individual matter and we don't discuss it! Had he truly been India's prime minister, he would have asked Trump about the matter and told him that he would get it enquired and if needed send him (to the US) for inquiry. But no, he said it's a personal matter," Gandhi told

the audience.

On February 14, PM Modi said he did not discuss the bribery charges that the US government had levelled against business tycoon Gautam Adani during his meeting with Trump. At a press briefing at the White House, Modi was asked if he raised the issue of the indictment of Adani and his key associates in a New York court over his involvement in an alleged bribery scheme.

"Firstly, India is a democratic country, and our culture and our thought philosophy are, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. We consider the whole world as one family. I believe every Indian is mine," he said.

The prime minister went on to state that such "individual issues" are not discussed when two world leaders meet. "Two prominent leaders of two countries never discuss such individual issues," he said.

Trump also made no mention of the case during the presser.

Last year, the Department of Justice under the previous president Joe Biden charged Adani for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay over USD 250 million (about ₹ 2,100 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts.

This was concealed from the US banks and investors from whom the Adani group raised billions of dollars for the project, the prosecutors had alleged last year citing US FCPA law that allows pursuing foreign corruption allegations if they involve certain links to American investors or markets. (PTI)

Cong slams BJP gov't over reports of missing of women, children in Odisha



BHUBANESWAR, Feb 21: The Congress on Friday slammed the NDA government at the Centre and the BJP dispensation in Odisha over reports of missing of more than 36,000 women and 8,400 children in the state.

Addressing media persons here, newly appointed AICC in-charge of Odisha Ajay Kumar Lal asked "why human trafficking is rampant" in the state.

"As per information given by the chief minister in the state assembly, more than 36,000 women and 8,400 children went missing in the state during the past four years. It is shocking statistics. When such a large number of women and children are missing, what is the home ministry doing? Is the union home minister sleeping?" he asked.

Altogether 36,420 women and 8,404 children went missing in Odisha over the 2020-2024 period, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi informed the state assembly on Monday. In a written statement to the assembly, Majhi said 421 women or girls were trafficked to other states through middlemen, leading to the arrest of 453 such middlemen.

Udhayanidhi hits back at Pradhan over 'politics' comment

CHENNAI, Feb 21: Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Friday hit back at Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for attacking CM M K Stalin amid the NEP row, and asserted the state will only follow the 2-language policy.

The state was seeking only its due share of funds from the Centre from the taxes paid by it, he said.

"We are asking our (share of) funds, about ₹ 2150 crore. They (Centre) want us to accept NEP and the 3-language policy. Tamil Nadu has always been opposed to three language policy and it has been made clear the 3-language policy will not be accepted. So what is there to do politics, I don't understand" he said.

The state has sacrificed lives for the "language war," he said in an apparent reference to the anti-Hindi agitation of 1965 where many pro-Tamil activists killed themselves, mostly by self-immolation, against the alleged imposition of Hindi then.

"Education is Tamils' right, please understand who is doing politics," the DMK leader added.

Pradhan had attacked Stalin over the ongoing row on the implementation of NEP and accused him of "spinning progressive reforms into threats to sustain political narratives". In a letter to Stalin, Pradhan said the Tamil Nadu CM should rise above political differences and think about the interests of young learners who will benefit from the new National Education Policy. (PTI)

Cong hits out at PM over deportation of Indians to Panama

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: The Congress hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday over the deportation of Indians from the US to Panama and asked him why he is allowing such "inhumane treatment" to be meted out to the deportees, which is an insult to the country.

Congress general secretary K C Venugopal asked why Indians are being sent to Panama instead of being repatriated to India and what deal did Modi strike during his meeting with US President Donald Trump.

"How is PM Modi allowing our citizens to be deported in this inhumane fashion? This deportation fiasco is becoming a huge insult to our country," he said in a post on X.

"Barely a week after PM Modi met President Trump and waxed eloquent about their friendship, our citizens are randomly sent to Latin American countries, instead of being respectfully repatriated to India (sic)," Venugopal said. "What deal did PM Modi strike that involved suffering total humiliation as part of our bargain?" he asked.

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

Cong fought Delhi polls as BJP's 'B' team: Mayawati hits back at Rahul

LUCKNOW, Feb 21: Hitting back at Rahul Gandhi for questioning her party's present political approach, BSP president Mayawati on Friday accused the Congress of fighting the Delhi assembly polls as BJP's 'B' team.

Her remarks came a day after the former Congress president said he was disappointed that the Mayawati-Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) did not join the opposition Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) in the Lok Sabha elections.

In a post on X, Mayawati said, "It is a common discussion that Congress fought the Delhi Assembly General Elections as BJP's B team this time, due to which BJP came to power there."

"Otherwise the Congress would not have been in such a bad condition in this election that this party could not even save the deposit of most of its candidates," the former chief minister added.

She advised the Congress leader that before pointing fingers at others, he should definitely look into his own affairs.

Mayawati also noted that the new BJP government in Delhi has the challenge of fulfilling all its poll promises. The two leaders were involved in a war of words on Thursday as well after Gandhi's utterances against Mayawati during his visit to Raebareilly Lok Sabha constituency.

"I wanted Benhenji to fight alongside us against the BJP, but for some reason, she did not. That was deeply disappointing. If all three parties had united, the BJP would never have won," Gandhi had said while interacting with Dalit students in Raebareilly.

Congress and Samajwadi Party had contested the 2024 polls together in Uttar Pradesh and succeeded in limiting the BJP's advance in the most populous state winning 43 seats, including Faizabad Lok Sabha seat. (PTI)

working closely with the host government to ensure their wellbeing after obtaining consular access to them.

The embassy of India in Panama, Costa Rica and 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 was part of a larger group of 299 migrants sent to Panama by the US government.

These people arrived in the country on three planes 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 has reached Panama from the US," the embassy of India in Panama, Nicaragua and Costa Rica said in a post 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. (PTI)

Wrong to infer from Maharashtra poll results that Cong has weakened: Sapkal

'Course correction soon'

MUMBAI, Feb 21: Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal has said it would be wrong to conclude that his party has weakened after its worst-ever performance in the recent Maharashtra assembly polls.

Calling the present scenario a "do-or-die situation", Sapkal, who recently took charge as the Maharashtra Congress chief, said he has accepted the challenge to revitalise the state unit.

"It is a wrong perception that the cadre is demoralised... election results were shocking and the cadre is eager for a course correction. We won only 16 seats but that doesn't mean we have become weak. You will see their enthusiasm once we get into the action mode," Sapkal told PTI in an interview.

The Congress, a partner of the Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) in the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) bloc, won just 16 of the 288 assembly seats in last year's Maharashtra polls despite fielding candidates in 101 constituencies.

Sapkal accused the BJP-led government of not wanting to hold local body elections, saying he doesn't foresee any such polls in the near future. Civic elections in Maharashtra have been pending for nearly two years.

"The Panchayati Raj amendments resulted in the devolution of power at the grassroots level. But the government doesn't want local body elections to happen. People have also forgotten that there were elected representatives in the form of corporators and Zilla Parishad members," he said.

Stressing the need for civic polls, Sapkal alleged that the idea of India was envisaged in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which established local self-governance in urban and rural areas, but was not being allowed to take shape.

"There are 4,250 MLAs and 750 MPs in the country. How can such a large country of 140 crore people, about 30 states, 8,000 cities, and more than 6 lakh villages function under the leadership of about 5,000 elected representatives?"

"But the BJP wants all powers in the hands of the chief minister in states and the prime minister and Union home minister at the Centre. Legal complications were created over OBC (Other Backward Classes) quota in many states and there were many litigations," he claimed.

Sapkal said he has accepted the challenge to lead the state Congress unit which saw its worst-ever performance in last year's assembly polls. "I have the support and backing of the cadre and leaders. It's a do-or-die situation for us," he said.

The prevailing political strategy is perception creation, and the BJP tried to trap us by shaping a narrative

AAP questions why ₹ 2,500 financial aid not approved in first Delhi Cabinet meeting

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: AAP leader Atishi on Friday questioned why the Delhi government did not pass a scheme to provide an honorarium of ₹ 2,500 to the city's women at its first cabinet meeting.

Atishi, a former Delhi chief minister, accused the newly formed BJP government of "failing to fulfill Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise of providing financial assistance to women under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana."

Addressing a press conference, Atishi said before the Delhi elections, Modi and BJP national president JP Nadda had assured that in the very first cabinet meeting, the scheme would be approved and every woman in Delhi would receive ₹ 2,500 in her bank account by March 8.

"After the BJP's ministers took their oath and held a cabinet meeting at 7 pm on Thursday, no such scheme was passed. If Modi's guarantee was real, this scheme should have been approved yesterday. But the first decision taken by newly appointed CM Rekha Gupta was to betray that promise," the Kalkaji MLA alleged.

Displaying posters featuring Modi and Gupta, she asked, "When will this amount be credited to their accounts? Was this just another election gimmick?"

Both the AAP and the BJP promised monthly financial assistance to women ahead of the elections and it has been a much-discussed issue during the campaign.

A day after AAP was ousted from power in Delhi on February 8, party supremo Arvind Kejriwal met



the party's 22 newly elected MLAs at his residence.

Following the meeting, Atishi said the AAP will ensure that the BJP pays ₹ 2,500 per month to women by March 8 as promised by it, provides 300 units of free electricity and continues other facilities for the people.

At the press conference on Friday, when asked about the new government's decision to table 14 CAG reports in the next assembly session, Atishi dismissed it as "routine work."

"When I was CM, I also sent the CAG report to Ram Niwas. It is part of the process," she said.

The BJP government said it will table the CAG reports "against the performance of AAP government" in the assembly in the session that will begin on Monday.

BJP's Rekha Gupta was sworn-in as Delhi CM and six other MLAs were inducted into her cabinet on Thursday.

At its maiden meeting on Thursday, the newly-formed Delhi Cabinet approved the implementation of the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme in the capital, discussed Mahila Samridhi Yojna, and also decided to table 14 pending CAG reports in the first session of the eighth Assembly. (PTI)



against the Congress, he said.

"The ground reality is all about issues connected to people's livelihood like the cost of cultivation, crop rate for farmers, unemployment and price rise, he said. But the government wants to protect the interests of a few, he alleged.

"Today, there are only two ideologies - BJP and Congress. We have to fight the ideological battle unitedly and in a disciplined way," he said.

The Congress leader claimed caste and religion are being used to create a trust deficit in society and said there was a need to maintain social harmony.

"We must work towards ensuring harmony in the state whose social fabric has been strained. We have to establish 'sadbhavana (goodwill)'. Otherwise, the crisis will affect not just the future generations but our own lifetime as well," he said.

The structure of the Congress is solid and capable of handling this social crisis, he said.

"The links of coordination among voters, cadre and leaders which have loosened need to be strengthened. Responsibility and accountability need to be fixed. Giving mass leaders responsibility, accommodating loyalists and replacing inefficient office-bearers will be my focus areas," he said.

Sadbhavana meetings and training programmes all over the state will also be his priority areas, Sapkal said. Unlike the BJP whose backbone is the RSS, the Congress's backbone is its legacy and traditions, said Sapkal.

"The Congress' DNA is the country's DNA because the Congress is a mass-based party. We need to address any loopholes within the party," he said.

Sapkal said even though the Congress faces challenging times, it trusts the people of the country and will continue to raise their issues.

"There is not a single village in the country which doesn't have a Congress worker. In times of struggle, everyone unites. At present, a lot of doubts are being raised about the party but the fact is that the Congress is still strong," he asserted. (PTI)

Congress cites report to flag trade issues being faced by India

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: The Congress on Friday cited a report prepared by the McKinsey Global Institute to highlight that between 2017 and 2024, Russia's share in India's oil imports increased from just 1 per cent to 30 per cent, and that India's imports from China are rising but its exports to that country are falling.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said what the McKinsey report suggests very strongly is that world trade networks and value-chains are of paramount importance.

"A recent research report of the McKinsey Global Institute 'Geopolitics and the Geometry of Global Trade: 2025 Update' has some significant findings relevant to India. Between 2017 and 2024, Russia's share in India's oil imports increased from just 1 per cent to 30 per cent. India's imports from China are rising but its exports to China are falling," Ramesh said.

"India's exports to the USA and Europe are increasingly dependent on China. ASEAN appears to have been the main recipient of the US shift away from trade with China. The dependence of the USA on China is shifting with countries like Vietnam now intermediating trade flows between the world's two largest economies," the Congress leader said, citing the report.

"What the McKinsey report suggests very strongly is that world trade networks and value-chains are of paramount importance. As it concludes 'shifting geopolitical geometry may create risks but carefully navigating it may deliver opportunities too'," he said. (PTI)

Ken-Betwa link project 'politically motivated', should've never been approved: Experts

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: Environmentalists and policy experts have claimed that the government's decision to go ahead with the Ken-Betwa river-linking project, despite opposition, was driven by "political motivations" and it should not have been approved in the first place.

The project, approved by the Union Cabinet in December 2021 at a cost of ₹ 44,605 crore and launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December 2024, aims at linking the Ken and Betwa rivers - both tributaries of the Yamuna - to supply water to the drought-prone Bundelkhand region, which covers nine districts in Madhya Pradesh and four in Uttar Pradesh.

According to the Centre, the project is expected to irrigate 10.62 lakh hectares of land (8.11 lakh ha in Madhya Pradesh and 2.51 lakh ha in Uttar Pradesh), provide drinking water to around 62 lakh people and generate 103 megawatts of hydropower and 27

megawatts of solar power.

Government estimates suggest that 6,600 families will be displaced and around 45 lakh trees will be cut down due to the project.

At a public discussion on "Assessing the River Interlinking Project", water expert Himanshu Thakkar said the project was presented as a solution to Bundelkhand's water problem, but its "detailed project report says that this project's primary objective is to provide water to the upper Betwa region, which is not part of Bundelkhand".

"Essentially, this project is facilitating the export of water from Bundelkhand," he claimed.

Thakkar, the coordinator of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP), said the Supreme Court-mandated Central Empowered Committee (CEC) gave a critical report on the project, but it was ignored.

"In May 2017, the Forest Advisory Committee (of the environ-



ment ministry) actually wrote in the minutes of a meeting that 'ideally, this project should not be given a clearance'. The FAC has never written like this," he said.

Thakkar recalled that in June 2016, then water resources minister Uma Bharti had "threatened to go on a strike" if the project was not given clearances. Shashi Shekhar, former secre-

tary in the then Ministry of Water Resources, said the region's hydrology does not "justify a project of this dimension".

Asked how the project was approved despite several concerns, the retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer said, "They have justified it by manipulating data.... If you consider the correct data, the ground reality and ecolog-

ical factors, this project should not have gone through."

He also questioned the government's claim that the project would irrigate 10.62 lakh hectares. "It is coming out of the air. It just does not meet the ground reality," Shekhar said.

He added that the Supreme Court has failed to act despite the CEC report opposing the project and the ground realities being known.

Asked if the Jal Shakti ministry had explored alternative solutions for Bundelkhand's water crisis, Shekhar said, "To the best of my knowledge, the alternatives were never discussed."

Prasab Singh Chouhan, former principal chief conservator of forests, Madhya Pradesh, said experts had warned against the project yet the government still went ahead with it.

One of the most-debated aspects of the project is the construction of a dam on the Ken river inside the

Panna National Park and Tiger Reserve, where tigers went locally extinct in 2009 but were reintroduced over the next decade.

"As far as wildlife is concerned, it will be a huge loss to a place that revived its tiger numbers after completely losing the big cat," Chouhan said.

According to the Centre's National Tiger Conservation Authority's "Status of Tigers - 2022" report, the Panna Tiger Reserve is connected to the Ranipur Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh through the North Panna and Satma forest divisions. In the south, the fragmented habitat of the South Panna Territorial Division helps tigers disperse towards the Bandhavgarh and Nardahi wildlife sanctuaries.

"The current estimated population of tigers in this block is 79 individuals occupying an area of 2,840 square kilometres. This represents a significant increase in the tiger population and range expansion.

"Unfortunately, a substantial portion of the biodiversity Panna Tiger Reserve is currently under the threat of submergence due to the proposed Ken-Betwa river-linking project, which poses a significant risk to the conservation efforts in the area," the report says.

Chouhan said at least three to four tigresses live in the area that will be submerged by the dam. "A lot of habitat loss will happen and around a million trees are expected to be felled in the core tiger area alone," he said.

Besides tigers, the reserve also has a critically-endangered vulture population.

An expert body under the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife had called for "an independent hydrological study of the river Ken" and said "no developmental project should destroy the ecology of the remnant fragile ecosystems and an important tiger habitat in the country". (PTI)

India, Bangladesh agree to launch new 'hotline' between border forces

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: India and Bangladesh have decided to establish a new communication link between the deputy commanders of their respective border-guarding forces and identified about 99 fresh patches for erecting a fence along their shared border.

The decisions were finalised during the biannual director general-level talks between the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) that concluded here on Thursday, sources in the security establishment told PTI.

This was the first time that a high-level meeting between the two forces took place after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh on August 5 last year.

The three-day talks, held from February 18 to February 20, went off in a "cordial manner", with the Indian side able to "convince" its neighbour about the importance of fencing on the remaining areas of the 4,096-km-long frontier that spans across five Indian states on the eastern flank, the sources said.

A total of 864.48 km of the front remains unfenced, including 174.51 km of "non-feasible" gap, according to official data.

AI should be used for improving agriculture, rural lives: Dhankhar

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday said disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) should be used for improving the agriculture sector, and asserted that the rural population represents both opportunities and responsibilities.

Speaking at the inaugural session of 21st General Session of African Asian Rural Development (AARDO) Conference, the vice president also stressed using technology to alleviate suffering.

Speaking at the event, Dhankhar said the rural regions nurture 3.6 billion lives, including 894 million rural Indians, "representing both our opportunity and responsibility."

"A challenge to our intellect is in form of emergence of disruptive technology. Artificial intelligence, machine learning...No less than industrial revolution," he said.

"They offer daunting challenges but also bring a basket of opportunities, only if we learn to unleash them," he said.

Dhankhar said these technologies should be used for improving the farm sector and rural areas.

"If we can unleash these disruptive technologies for greater good of rural India and farm sector, and of the entire world, humanity will be a safer place," the vice president said. "India has taken some flag-

Union Minister Jayant Chaudhary urges UP to study Kochi water metro model

KOCHI (KERALA), Feb 21: Union Minister of State Jayant Chaudhary said on Friday that he would request Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to study the Kochi water metro model.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the Invest Kerala Global Summit (IKGS) here, Chaudhary said, "I am going to request UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ji to study the Kochi water metro model."

The UP government recently approved the formation of the Uttar Pradesh Inland Waterways Authority to develop water transport and tourism in the state, he said.

"I travelled on the Kochi water metro—it's a unique project. It is the world's largest fleet of solar-powered boats," Union Minister of State (independent charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship said.

His remarks on the water metro came amid an ongoing political discourse comparing Kerala's development trajectory with that of BJP-ruled states. (PTI)

98th Marathi literary festival begins with ceremonial procession of books

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: Dressed in traditional attire and swaying to the sounds of drums, literature enthusiasts on Friday took out a ceremonial procession of books to mark the beginning of the 98th Marathi literary festival at the Talkatora Stadium here.

The 98th Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan has returned to the national capital after a gap of 71 years and a year after Marathi was recognised as a classical language by the central government.

Over 3,000 writers, poets and literary enthusiasts have gathered here from across Maharashtra to take part in the festival that has a history of nearly 150 years.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is formally inaugurating the sammelan in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, former Union minister Sharad Pawar



among other dignitaries.

The sammelan was first held in 1878 with noted scholar and social reformer Mahadev Govind Ranade as its president. It has been held almost annually since 1926 and brought together scholars, critics and literary figures to deliberate on a range of issues, including the relevance of Marathi in changing times.

Well known expert of

Marathi folk literature, culture, traditions and theatre artiste Tara Bhawalkar is the president of the conference.

The conference was last held in Delhi in 1954 with lexicographer Tarkatirtha Laxmanshastri Joshi as the president. The conference was inaugurated by the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Marathi books were carried in a palauquin from the Parli-

ment House premises to the Talkatora stadium that has been named as the 'Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Sahitya Nagari' for the three-day event.

The sammelan will host a diverse array of panel discussions, book exhibitions, cultural performances, and interactive sessions with eminent literary figures. It will also celebrate the timeless relevance of Marathi literature and explore its role in contemporary discourse, including themes of language preservation, translation, and the impact of digitalization on literary works.

It will feature over 2,600 poetry submissions, 50 book launches, and 100 bookstalls among others. A special train from Pune to Delhi ferried nearly 1200 participants for the sammelan, showcasing the unifying spirit of literature. (PTI)



The two sides have decided to open a new "hotline" for effective communication after the latest round of DG-level talks. This link will be between the additional director general (ADG) of the BSF eastern command based in Kolkata and his BGB counterpart posted at the force's headquarters in Dhaka, the sources said.

It was felt "necessary and important" to enhance the engagement between the two sides and hence, this new platform for commanders' interaction has been agreed upon and included in the official records for the first time, they added.

Currently, "hotlines" or links of communication exist between the

two force chiefs and officers in the ranks of inspector general (regional commander for the BGB), deputy inspector general (sector commander for the BGB) and other field-level officers.

These communication lines are used to convey real-time information and intelligence so that issues related to the front and instances of cross-border crimes can be checked promptly.

The BSF delegation, headed by its Director General Daljit Singh Chawdhary, also asked the BGB to take "stringent and effective" steps to ensure that Bangladeshi miscreants and criminals are not able to "breach" their security layer and cross the border to attack BSF per-

sonnel and Indian civilians.

Apart from "attacks and assaults" on BSF troops and the Indian population, it was categorically mentioned in the official records that instances of "abuse" against the personnel will be dealt with strongly by the force, the sources said.

The BGB delegation, led by its DG, Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui, has promised to further strengthen the joint patrolling of the border protocol and enhance vigil during the night hours.

The meeting also discussed that fencing or the creation of a single-row fence (SRF) at about 99 patches, covering around 70-72 km of the front, needs to be initiated after due consultations and a joint inspection by the two sides, according to the sources.

The fencing work at the earlier "agreed upon" 92 patches, covering about 95.8 km of the border, is already in progress, the sources said.

The visiting Bangladeshi delegation left for Dhaka on Thursday and the next round of talks (56th edition) is slated to be held in the neighbouring country in July. (PTI)

Jharkhand couple abandons baby in hospital NICU

KOCHI, Feb 21: A 23-day-old baby girl, abandoned in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of a private hospital here by her parents from Jharkhand, will receive protection of the Kerala government.

State Minister for Health, Women, and Child Development, Veena George on Friday directed the Women and Child Development Department to take urgent action.

According to an official release, officials will visit the hospital and make further arrangements.

"If the parents return, the baby will be handed over to them. If they do not want custody, the Child Welfare Committee will take legal steps to care for the child," it said. The Ernakulam General Hospital Superintendent has been asked to ensure proper medical treatment for the baby. (PTI)

SilverLine project in focus after Union Minister Goyal's mention

KOCHI (KERALA), Feb 21: The Kerala government's ambitious SilverLine project, which was stalled following mass protests, has once again sparked hope after Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal mentioned it during his address at the Invest Kerala Global Summit (IKGS) held here.

Highlighting key infrastructure projects in the state, including the Vizhinjam deep-sea port, Goyal referred to SilverLine as a transformative semi-high-speed rail corridor that would connect Thiruvananthapuram and Kasaragod, reducing travel time to just four hours.

"SilverLine, a semi-high-speed railway line connecting Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod, will reduce travel time to four hours," he said.

The proposed 530-km railway line, to be developed by K-Rail—a joint venture between the Kerala government and the Ministry of Railways—had been stalled due to widespread public protests, opposition from political parties, and delays in securing central government approvals.

However, the project received a fresh ray of hope after Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw indicated that it could move forward if Kerala addressed technical and environmental concerns.

During his visit to Kerala last year, Vaishnaw stated that he had discussed the matter with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan during their meeting in New Delhi.

Following this, officials from the Kerala Rail Development Corporation held discussions with Southern Railway authorities in December last year. (PTI)

Andhra electricity regulator okays power purchase from SECI in FY26

AMARAVATI, Feb 21: The Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APEREC) has approved the purchase of over 4000 million units of power from Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) during the next fiscal, after the state DISCOMS have approached the regulator seeking its nod.

The SECI Power Sale Agreement (PSA) with Andhra DISCOMS became controversial after Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani was charged by the US Department of Justice over his role in a years-long scheme to allegedly pay USD 250 million bribe to Indian officials including from AP, in exchange for favourable solar power contracts of 7000 MW in 2021 when YSRC was in power, an allegation refuted by the Indian conglomerate and also the AP opposition party separately.

According to an order by APEREC on "Tariff for Retail Sale of Electricity during FY 2025-26", issued on Friday, the Commission consented to the PSA with detailed reasoning subject to the outcome in the AP High Court in the pending PILs with regard to the agreement.

The Andhra Pradesh power distribution companies had decided to procure over 4,000 million units of

power from Solar Energy Corporation of India out of the total 17000 MU (7000 MW) from the next fiscal.

Accordingly, the utility companies have approached the regulator for an approval.

The SECI had earlier informed that 1000 MW will be supplied from January 15 this year onwards, 3000 MW in 2025-26 and a balance of 3000 MW in 2026-27.

According to the filings, Aggregate Revenue Requirement and Tariff Proposal for the Retail Supply Business for FY 2025-26 by Southern power Distribution company of AP Ltd (SPDCL), Eastern Power Distribution Company of Andhra Pradesh Ltd and Andhra Pradesh Central Power distribution Corporation Ltd (CPDCL), on November 30, the utilities informed the APEREC that they intend to purchase power on behalf of AP Rural Agriculture Power Limited (APRAPL).

The state government had earlier established APRAPL to channelise the solar power procured from SECI for the purpose of free supply to agriculture consumers. The entity is in the process of obtaining a license and fulfilling the other establishment activities.

According to the earlier filings, all the three Discoms have pro-

posed to purchase 4191 million units during the next financial year.

Refuting the bribery allegations, YSR Congress Party has said the agreement was between state government, Discoms and SECI which is a central government organisation and there is no third party involvement.

AP Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu last month said the state government cannot scrap power purchase agreements with the SECI without obtaining solid proofs on bribery allegations. (PTI)

India's reservoir storage levels surge above last year's mark: Central Water Commission

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: The Central Water Commission (CWC) has reported an improvement in India's reservoir storage levels, with the total live storage in 155 monitored reservoirs reaching 98.974 billion cubic meters (BCM).

This represents 55 per cent of their total live storage capacity, marking a 120 per cent increase compared to the same period last year and 116 per cent of the average storage over the past ten years, according to the weekly bulletin released by the CWC.

In the northern region that comprises Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan, the reservoirs are holding 30 per cent of their total capacity, lower than last year's 40 per cent, indicating a deficit.

While in the eastern region (Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, Bihar), the storage level stood at 54 per cent, slightly below last year's 55 per cent and the normal 57 per cent.

In the western region (Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa), the storage has surged to 67 per cent of the capacity, significantly higher than last year's 56 per cent

and the normal 51 per cent.

The reservoirs in the central region (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh) have a 57 per cent capacity, improving from 53 per cent last year and surpassing the normal level of 50 per cent.

While in the southern region (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu), a storage level of 53 per cent was recorded, outperforming last year's 30 per cent and the normal 41 per cent.

About 100 reservoirs reported higher storage than last year, while 112 exceeded normal levels. There are 20 reservoirs that have less than 80 per cent of their normal storage, with eight at critically low levels below 50 per cent. The rainfall deficiency has affected several IMD sub-divisions, particularly in Punjab, Uttarakhand, and Odisha, leading to reduced storage in affected reservoirs, the bulletin said.

Better-than-normal storage was recorded in major basins such as the Ganga, Narmada, Godavari, Krishna, and Cauvery, while the Indus and Brahmani and Baitarni basins showed a storage deficit. (PTI)

ED attaches assets of ex-CBI DSP

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) said on Friday that it has attached residential properties worth about ₹1 crore as part of a disproportionate assets case-linked money-laundering investigation against a former CBI DSP.

Rajeev Kumar Rishi, the former deputy superintendent of police of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), was first booked by his own organisation under sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act, the ED said in a statement.

According to the statement, it was alleged that Rishi had acquired "disproportionate" assets of ₹1.44 crore in his name and in the name of his family members during the check period between November 9, 2012 and January 14, 2021.

This was 113.36 per cent more than his legitimate income during the said period, the ED said. The officer could not be contacted immediately for a response on the allegations levelled against him by the ED.

The former CBI officer "utilised" the bank accounts of his family members, including his wife, to channel and integrate "illicit" funds acquired by him into the acquisition of various immovable properties.

The "proceeds of crime" generated by Rishi during his tenure as a public servant are concealed within the assets held by him and have also been spent towards personal and family expenditure during the check period, according to the ED. (PTI)

GOVT. OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (PHE) DIPHU RURAL W/S DIVISION

No.PHEE/DIP/R/WS/SOPD/

Dt

NOTICE FOR AUCTION OF SCRAP/CONDEMNED MATERIALS

In pursuance to the approval of KAAC/PHE/10/2016/26 Dt 18/01/2025, the undersigned invites quotations from interested bidders for Auction of ferrous and non ferrous scrap / condemned materials as per terms and conditions laid below. Interested Bidders may be collected Bid Documents from the office of the undersigned during 11AM to 3 PM from 20th February/2025 to 26th Feb/2025. Quotations will be opened on next day at 3 PM . Bidders or his/her representative may be present, if interested during opening of quotations, interested bidders may inspect those materials at the site during office hours from 20th February 2025 to 26th Feb/2025. Auction for scrap materials will be held "As and Where Basis" above "Upset Price" (i.e minimum base price) as finalized by the condemnation Board vide minute No KAAC/PHE/DIPHU/Scrap materials / 2019-20/R-II/6(A) Dt 12/8/2020. Details of items open for auction are furnished below:

| SL No | Details of Scrap Materials | Upset Price | Total Value | Earnest money fixed |
|-------|---|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Tank and staging of ESR (instu) 7189 kg MS (mild steel) | Rs. 4.00 per kg | Rs. 43134.00 | Rs. 2000.00 |

Terms and conditions for Auction are furnished in annexure-2 and interested bidders may collect the same along with Bid documents as mentioned above.

Sd/
Executive Engineer (PHE)
Diphu Rural W/S Division

Memo No PHEE/ DIP/R/WS/ SPOD/2/25-35

Dated 20/02/2025

Vicky Kaushal-starrer 'Chhaava' earns over ₹ 200 crore at box office

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: Vicky Kaushal-starrer Chhaava has emerged as the first Hindi film to cross the ₹ 200-crore mark at the domestic box office in 2025, according to industry data-tracking platform Sacnilk.

Directed by Laxman Utekar, the historical drama collected ₹ 219.75 crore nett in Week 1.

Produced by Maddock Films under the direction of Dinesh Vijan, Chhaava opened with a domestic collection of ₹ 31 crore nett on its opening day. The momentum carried through the weekend, with ₹ 37 crore nett earned on Saturday and ₹ 48.5 crore nett on Sunday.

The film passed the Monday test with flying colours on Day 4, with ₹ 24 crore nett added to its earnings. The collections increased marginally to ₹ 25.25 crore nett on Tuesday, followed by ₹ 32

crore nett on Wednesday. With an additional ₹ 22 crore nett on Thursday, the total domestic earnings of Chhaava stands at ₹ 219.75 crore nett in its seven-day theatrical run.

Chhaava chronicles the life of Maratha king Sambhaji, portrayed by Vicky Kaushal, with Rashmika Mandanna playing his wife Maharani Yesubai.

The ensemble cast includes Akshaye Khanna as Aurangzeb, Ashutosh Rana as Sarsenapati Hambirao Mohite, and Divya Dutta as Rajmata Soyarabai.

Based on the Marathi novel Chhava by Shivaji Sawant, the film features a musical score composed by AR Rahman.

Meanwhile, Captain America: Brave New World, the first solo film featuring Anthony Mackie as the new Captain America, which also hit cinemas on February 14, failed to make a mark at the In-

dian box office in the first week with collections totalling ₹ 16.29 crore nett in seven days.

Directed by Julius Onah, the film earned ₹ 4.2 crore nett in India on its opening day, followed by ₹ 4 crore nett on Day 2 and ₹ 4.15 crore nett on Day 3, according to Sacnilk.

On Monday, the Marvel movie earned ₹ 1.19 crore nett, followed by ₹ 0.9 crore nett on Tuesday and ₹ 1.01 crore nett on Wednesday.

With another ₹ 0.7 crore nett added to the earnings on Thursday, the total India collection of Brave New World stands at ₹ 16.29 crore nett.

At the global box office, Brave New World collected USD 208 million, including USD 109.7 million from the US market and USD 98.27 million internationally. (PTI)



Kangana Ranaut says 'Emergency' will stream on Netflix from March 17

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: Actor-politician Kangana Ranaut on Friday announced that her film "Emergency" will be available for streaming on Netflix from March 17. The film, which courted controversy over its censor certificate and allegations that it misrepresents the Sikh community, released in theatres on January 17 after several delays.

Also directed and produced by Ranaut, the film portrays the Emergency months and features the actor in the role of former prime minister Indira Gandhi.

Ranaut shared a still from the film on Instagram alongside an old image of Gandhi.

She captioned it, "17th March releasing on @netflix." Ranaut, the BJP MP from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi, documents the 21 months of Emergency imposed in 1975 by the then prime minister in the film. Following its release, "Emergency" was not screened at cinemas in Punjab after protests by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Sikh organisations.

Many politicians called for a ban on the movie, which Ranaut had labelled as a "complete harassment of art and the artist." "Emergency" also stars Anupam Kher, Shreyas Talpade, Vishak Nair, Milind Soman and late actor Satish Kaushik. It is produced by Zee Studios and Manikarnika Films. (PTI)



Leonardo DiCaprio to produce Martin Scorsese's crime movie

LOS ANGELES, Feb 21: Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio will once again team up with filmmaker Martin Scorsese on a crime movie, based on the original idea by Dwayne Johnson and Emily Blunt.

The three actors will feature in the movie, which is said to be in the same vein as Scorsese's critically-acclaimed crime thrillers "Goodfellas" (1990) and "The Departed" (2006).

Set in Hawaii, the untitled drama will be written by author and journalist Nick Bilton, known for his 2021 HBO documentary "Fake Famous".

The story will focus on a turbulent time on the island paradise when an aspiring mob boss battled rival crime factions to wrest control of the underworld of the Hawaiian islands in the 1960s-1970s, according to entertainment news outlet Variety. Scorsese and DiCaprio, who have worked together on films such as "Gangs of New York", "The Aviator", "The Departed", "Shutter Island", "The Wolf of Wall Street" and "Killers of the Flower Moon", will produce the project along with Johnson, Blunt, Bilton, Dany Garcia, Lisa Frechette and Rick Yorn. The duo are also working on "The Devil in the White City", the long-gestating feature adaptation of Erik Larson's 2003 true-crime nonfiction book.

The project will also reunite Johnson and Blunt, who co-starred in the Disney movie "Jungle Cruise" and will next appear in Benny Safdie's drama "The Smashing Machine". (PTI)

Alan Ritchson on playing 'Reacher' through different seasons: It's a hard show to make

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: There is no time to rest or recover on "Reacher", says the show's lead star Alan Ritchson while opening up about the physical toll of playing the titular character in the series.

Over the course of two seasons, Ritchson has earned praise for perfectly embodying the character's towering physique and imposing presence as described in author Lee Child's long-running book series "Jack Reacher". Getting the physique right and maintaining it for a long duration is no mean task, said Ritchson.

"I think the toll it takes on the body and mind is daunting and it's one of those things where I can't wait to get back into another season of 'Reacher' and see what kind of world we can bring to life. And on the other hand, I know how hard it is every year to film the show. 'There's never time to rest, there's never time to recover. You're constantly pushing the body... It's a hard show to make,' the actor told PTI in an interview.

The show, which returned with its third season on Thursday, requires a lot of mental preparation as well, added Ritchson.

"It's not like I just learn a couple of lines and go stand there and talk. You're abusing the body and making a lot of demands all the time. I know what it's going to take and how I'm going to feel at the end of the season because I've done it three times now. I'm going to be a little beat down at the end... but that is what it is," he said. The third chapter of the action thriller will see Reacher hurtle into the dark heart of a vast criminal enterprise while trying to rescue an undercover DEA informant whose time is running out, according to the official logline.

"There he finds a world of secrecy and violence—and confronts some unfinished business from his own past," it said.

There's a level of wish fulfillment in the show for most people, said Ritchson, explaining the reason why the show has resonated with audiences all over the world. "We want to live in a world where corruption and injustices are met with some sort of immediate retribution. So it keeps evil in check. It's kind of fun to see what that world would look like and Reacher shows us that. There's something cathartic... He's got his own set of rules, but they're generally pretty spot on. (PTI)

Artists can never point out the moment they made it big: lyricist Irshad Kamil

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: It was a cold, foggy evening in Chandigarh, exactly when budding journalist and now renowned lyricist Irshad Kamil had an epiphany. "You want to go to Mumbai," the inner voice went. And that's exactly what he did.

More than two decades later, Kamil is one of the Hindi film industry's most celebrated lyricists with songs like "Tumse hi" ("Jab We Met"), "Jo Bhi" ("Rockstar"), "Vida Karo" ("Amar Singh Chamkila") and many more to his credit.

He remembers the moment when his life took a turn. Quite literally because he was actually on the road.

"I had submitted my final story of the day on a cold foggy winter evening. And as I left on my bike, I suddenly stopped on the side of the road and thought, 'Do I really want to become a journalist?' The voice inside me said, 'No, you want to do something else. You want to go to Mumbai.' When that decision happened internally, I quit my job and landed in Mumbai," Kamil told PTI.

Twenty years and many films later, Kamil said he takes every assignment like he is beginning his journey, the Hindustani word "safar" for it often finding a mention in his songs.

His most recent songs, "Tu Hai To Main Hoon" from "Skyforce" and "Jaane Tu" and "Aaya re Toofan" from "Chhaava", are topping the charts.

"Artists never think they have made it. They will never be able to point that out because they have to sit in the same class, take the exam and excel in it again and again. You write the lyrics and hope they click with the audience

and when they do, you think about doing even better. So you keep doing the same thing," the lyricist-writer said.

Kamil, who was born in Malerkotla in Punjab, said he always knew he was meant to do something with words. That's what took him to journalism in Chandigarh. He did his graduation in journalism and later a Ph.D. in Hindi literature.

Besides the long list of songs, he has also written some scripts, including the series "Main Teri Parchhain Hoon" and "Sanjeevani." Among his first big hits was the song "Bhaage Re Mann" from Sudhir Mishra's 2004 film "Chameli."

Looking back, Kamil said the experiences he had on his journey to success are invaluable and he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I worked a lot in the beginning because when you are starting out from scratch, you face difficulties but that's what makes it interesting. You gain in experience and that's different from something that you receive on a platter. There is a saying, 'Bahut kathin hai dagar panghat ki.' You have to walk the long walk," he said.

In his view, action films are doing well at this point but it is important to have films of all hues and it is impossible to remove romance from the lives of Indian people.

"In a film, a character goes through a journey in two hours and it is not always possible to explain things through dialogues. That's where songs come, to express the internal feeling."

Kamil, who counts Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Shailendra, and

Anand Bakshi as his inspirations, believes it is important for lyricists to understand the world they are writing about, so they must get familiar with the script to understand the headspace of the characters. Which is why he prefers to be on projects that treat movie albums with respect.

"I try to ensure, most of the time, that I am the only lyricist on a project but people have short cuts, now, music companies have a different thought. So an independent music album fails to take shape. One tries to give life to the album by understanding the situation." Kamil makes it a point to reference local dialects wherever possible. "For example, 'Chamkila' has many Punjabi words because the character comes from there, similarly, in 'Gunday,' I have used words like 'Taada Taadi' to give a touch of Bengal and in 'Sultan,' the character is from Rohtak so the song 'Jug Gumeya' has the phrase 'thaare jaisa.' You change the vocabulary to reflect these things."

Many of Kamil's songs, most notably the lines 'Jo bhi main kehna chaahu, barbaad kare alfaaz mere' from 'Rockstar', 'Safarnama' and 'Agar tum saath ho' from 'Tamasha' and most recently the tragic number 'Vida Karo', have been praised for striking a deeply emotive chord. Kamil said 'Jo bhi' came from a few lines he had written years ago. When he narrated them to Imtiaz, the filmmaker suggested he make the expression more direct and Rahman elevated it with his music to the next level. "I feel now it will exist forever," he added.

Similarly, 'Vida Karo,' he said, was written in a trance-like state. (PTI)



Gill's ton of purpose gives India confidence for Pakistan, New Zealand matches

BENGALURU, Feb 21: Shubman Gill has an invincibility cloak hung around his shoulder in ODIs these days. Conditions and oppositions do not feature in his set-list.

After taking a dominant avatar against England recently at home, Gill faced a different challenge against Bangladesh in India's Champions Trophy opener in Dubai on Thursday night.

The pitch was sluggish and the bowlers consistently probed for weakness.

But Gill beat both to notch up his eighth ODI hundred that led India to a six-wicket victory. The 125-ball century was the slowest he has made so far, but was perhaps the most important in his

career.

That uncharacteristically sedate outing carried a deeper meaning as it validated Gill's growing stature as India's all-weather batter in white-ball formats.

His form is a good omen when legends like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, who have been performing that role for several years, are in the twilight zone of their careers. And with important matches against Pakistan and New Zealand lined-up, India would need him to continue in the same vein.

There were a couple of signature shots last night — a cracking short-arm pull off pacer Tanzim Hasan and a spearing, lofted cover drive off the same bowler

for a four.

Those hits in the ninth over were breathtaking, showcasing Gill's otherworldly timing, but even more mesmerising was his transformation to a batter full of self-restraint after that.

When Rohit Sharma (41) got out in the 10th over, Gill was batting on 26 off 23 balls, and a lift-off looked imminent.

But it wasn't there. His next boundary came in the 33rd over when pacer Taskin Ahmed returned to attack.

Till then, Gill was milking the spinners and pacer Mustafizur Rahman, a lethal slower ball, for singles and twos, ensuring that the quick start given by Rohit would not go in vain.

In that phase, the 25-year-old



scored just 30 runs off 52 balls, showing admirable situational awareness. It was of little surprise when Gill termed it as a "satisfying" effort.

"Definitely one of my most satisfying innings that I have

played. The message was sent from outside that I have to try to bat till the end and that's what I tried to do," Gill would say later to the host broadcaster.

Rohit was also chuffed to see the Punjab cricketer adhering to

the team order.

"He's been batting brilliantly of late and what he showed us (against Bangladesh), it shouldn't surprise anyone. What was good to see was he was there till the end," said Rohit.

Along with carrying his bat through, Gill also tweaked his tactics as per the game's evolving needs. A feature of Gill's batting was him coming down the track even against pacers, something he does not usually do.

Generally, he stays at the crease to drive, flick or pull the quicker bowlers, a minimalistic approach that reduces the risk quotient.

Gill explained that change in his approach.

"Cutting the ball wasn't easy

because the balls which were outside the off-stump weren't coming onto the bat that nicely.

"So, I thought of using my feet to even the fast bowlers and tried to go over the circle," he added. The strategic fluidity apart, Gill's willingness to look beyond easy-on-the-eye but fleeting knocks will stand India in good stead in this tournament.

If the early signs are anything to go by, then the pitches in Dubai could remain slow-burners.

While Pakistan have only one spinner in Abrar Ahmed, New Zealand will be a more formidable rival as they have two excellent white-ball spinners in Mitchell Santner and Michael Bracewell. (PTI)

Delhi Capitals eye top spot as UP Warriorz chase first win in WPL clash

BENGALURU, Feb 21: Delhi Capitals will aim to claim the top spot, while UP Warriorz will be desperate to register their first win of the season when the two sides face off in the Women's Premier League here on Saturday.

Currently sitting second on the points table behind Royal Challengers Bengaluru, DC have won two of their three games.

In contrast, UP Warriorz find themselves at the bottom, reeling from back-to-back defeats.

The two teams clashed earlier this week in Vadodra, where DC cruised to a dominant seven-wicket victory.

Pre-tournament favourites Delhi will be buoyed by skipper Meg Lanning's return to form, alongside crucial contributions from the middle order, including Marizanne Kapp and Annabel Sutherland.

However, openers Shafali Verma and Jemimah Rodrigues will be eager for more consistency with the bat in hand.

On the bowling front, veteran pacer Shikha Pandey has led the attack well but needs better support from her fellow bowlers.



For UP Warriorz, fielding lapses, including three dropped catches and several misfields proved costly in their previous encounter against DC.

They will be determined to put up a sharper display this time around.

"Only if we'd taken the catches... it's part of the game, though. The result could have

been different," skipper Deepti Sharma lamented after their last defeat.

Warriorz will also look for stronger performances from their batting unit, particularly

from Deepti, young wicket-keeper-batter Uma Chhetri, and opener Vrinda Dinesh.

Kiran Navgire's explosive half-century was a rare bright spot, but apart from Shweta Sehrawat and Chinelle Henry, the rest of the lineup faltered. With their struggles against DC's spinners last time, Warriorz will need to find answers to counter spin when they meet again on Saturday.

Teams (from):

UP Warriorz: Deepti Sharma (captain), Alana King, Gouher Sultana, Saima Thakor, Grace Harris, Shweta Sehrawat, Anjali Sarvani, Kiran Navgire, Sophie Ecclestone, Arushi Goel, Kranti Goud, Tahlia McGrath, Chamari Athapaththu, Poonam Khemnar, Uma Chetty, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Vrinda Dinesh.

Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning (Captain), Harleen Deol, Prakashika Naik, Beth Mooney, Kashvee Gautam, Priya Mishra, Bharti Fulmali, Laura Wolvaardt, Sayali Satghare, Danielle Gibson, Manant Kashyap, Shabnam Shakil, Dayalan Hemalatha, Meghna Singh, Simran Shaikh, Deandra Dottin, Phoebe Litchfield, Tanuja Kanwar. Match starts at 7.30 pm. (PTI)

SYDNEY, Feb 21: Australian

Test captain Pat Cummins is eyeing the upcoming Indian Premier League as his comeback platform from an ankle injury and has expressed confidence in regaining full fitness ahead of the World Test Championship final against South Africa starting June 11 at the Lord's.

The 31-year-old, who led Australia to their first Border-Gavaskar Trophy win in more than a decade, battled through pain during the final Test against India in Sydney.

He was subsequently ruled out of the two-Test series in Sri Lanka and the ongoing Champions Trophy in Pakistan. The injury layoff coincided with the birth of his second child — daughter Edi.

"It's been an amazing month or so just having full focus on family time and not having to do too much training or have my eye on a tour. Just being totally present has been really special," Cummins told 'cricket.com.au'.

He has resumed running and hopes to return to action with his franchise Sunrisers Hyderabad, the last year's IPL runners-up, when the tournament begins on March 22.

SRH kick off their campaign at home against Rajasthan Royals on March 23.

"That's the aim at this stage — start bowling over the next week or so, building up, and should be

right for IPL," he said.

"It's probably just making sure you're still bowling quite a few balls (during the IPL). The good thing about a T20 tournament is the intensity is really high, so that obviously helps quite a bit."

Cummins believes the IPL will provide an ideal build-up to the WTC final against South Africa, followed by a three-Test series in the Caribbean extending into July.

"The ankle is starting to come good... It's a funny one — it's not like a hamstring where you need

six weeks (to recover). It's one of those ones where it really just needs a bit (more) rest to settle down.

I've been doing loads of rehab in the gym and trying to build back up slowly. "Especially for a fast bowler, you've got to kind of step towards things. Once you have a bit of time off, you've got to start running again, and then you got to start bowling, and start building up."

Speaking about the exact nature of his injury, Cummins said it's not new but neither is it something that will be long-term.

"...but it's just one of those ones you've got to manage. A bit of a break now, hopefully it sets it up for the next year or so," he said.

"That's the aim. It's four overs in T20s. So physically it's quite a nice build up for the World Test Championship final, and then the Test matches after that," he added. (PTI)



Benefitted a lot from working with Bumrah, picked consistency from him: Rana

DUBAI, Feb 21: Indian pacer Harshit Rana, who has swiftly made his mark with international debuts across all three formats within a short span, credited seasoned speedster Jasprit Bumrah for shaping his consistency and adaptability at the highest level.

The 23-year-old earned his Test cap during the prestigious Border-Gavaskar series in December before making his T20 and ODI debuts in the recently-concluded white-ball series against England.

It was during India's tour of Australia, Rana had the opportunity to share the dressing room with one of the modern greats — Bumrah.

"I get a lot of benefit from working with Jassi bhai. He has a lot of experience. He always guided me on how to bowl in which format," Rana told reporters after India's six-wicket win over Bangladesh in the Champions Trophy on Thursday.

"We used to talk about Test matches in Australia and also about different formats. I got a lot of benefit from that... We often discussed Test matches in Australia and also about various other formats. One thing I have picked up from him is consistency."

Rana also acknowledged

India's bowling coach Morne Morkel for refining his skills, particularly his line and length.

"I have learned a great deal from him. He has worked extensively on improving my line and length," he added.

Chosen ahead of the more experienced left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh for India's Champions Trophy opener, Rana shared the new-ball duties with veteran Mohammed Shami against Bangladesh.

"Yes of course there is backing from the coach and captain, that is why I am playing."

Reflecting on his journey, the Delhi speedster expressed gratitude for his hard-earned opportunity.

"I have trained very hard. I did not get the opportunity initially but waited for my chance. I always gave my 100 per cent in practice, and always thought to deliver whenever given a chance."

With a confidence-boosting three-wicket haul against Bangladesh, Rana is eager to carry his momentum into India's highly anticipated clash against Pakistan on Sunday.

"I will take today's momentum forward. Of course, there's always a lot of hype around an India-Pakistan game, but we are treating it like any other match," he said. (PTI)



Shami's love affair with ICC events: It's all about loyalty, attention to detail

DUBAI, Feb 21: A difficult and painful injury layoff firmly behind him, seasoned India pacer Mohammed Shami says attention to detail and loyalty towards his craft make him lethal in ICC events where he only cares about breakthroughs and not his economy rate.

Shami grabbed an brilliant five-wicket haul in India's Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh to play a pivotal role in the team's six-wicket triumph. In the process, he also became the fastest Indian and the second quickest overall to reach 200 ODI wickets here on Thursday night.

"In ICC events, if my ball gets hit a little, that's okay, but I should get a wicket, then that will be better for my team. I always think about this," Shami said at the post-match press conference.

The 34-year-old quick battled a career-threatening 14-month layoff due to an ankle injury during the 2023 ODI World Cup. He returned to international action last month in the limited-overs series against England and is now leading India's attack here in the absence of an injured Jasprit Bumrah.

"I just try to complete my skill with utmost loyalty. Like I have completed my 14 months - How loyal are you to that skill? How hungry are you to achieve your goal...How you will get that rhythm again. You should be hungry," Shami said when asked about his love affair with ICC events.

While wrecking Bangladesh here, Shami became India's leading wicket-taker in 50-over ICC events. His tally now stands at 60, overtaking former



India pace spearhead Zaheer Khan.

The retired left-arm seamer had taken 59 wickets in 32 innings while Shami crossed the mark in just his 19th innings. He has 55 wickets in ODI World Cups across three editions, with 24 coming in the 2023 tournament hosted at home.

Shami said he has always focussed on minor details like rhythm, and level of discomfort while bowling to understand where he stood in terms of his form. "Is your rhythm good? Do you have any discomfort? I pay attention to those things. I don't pay attention to the result. I pay attention to the present. And I always try to meet the situation that is in demand. Am I good at that or not?" he said giving a peek into his mind.

Shami, who claimed his sixth ODI fiver here, also has the most five-wicket hauls for India in

the format. He recalled the frustration he felt while watching India's woes in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy last month when Bumrah shouldered the enormous burden of leading the attack without him at the other end.

"It was very difficult...when you see that your team is very close to the edge, or it's a very close match, at that time you miss your bowlers who you used to bowl along with, or your unit. I wish I was there," he said. "I could have contributed something...could have helped," he added.

Shami has been candid enough to admit that the injury left him devastated to the extent that he feared he wouldn't be able to play again. But the pacer said once he made a domestic comeback towards the end of 2024, his confidence rose up again. (PTI)

OCA expands Esports program for 2026 Asian Games, boosting India's medal hopes

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: India's chances of making a significant impact in Esports at the 2026 Asian Games have received a major boost, with the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) announcing an expanded lineup of 11 Esports titles for the event.

In a major development, the OCA Executive Board, during its meeting in Harbin, China, approved the inclusion of Street Fighter 6, Pokémon Unite, Honor of Kings, League of Legends — Asian Games Version, PUBG — Asian Games Version, Mobile Legends — Bang Bang, Naraka: Bladepoint, Gran Turismo Sport, eFootball Series, and Puyo Puyo Champions as medal events in the 2026 Games.

The expansion marks a step forward from the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games, where Esports made its debut as an official medal discipline with seven titles.

At the time, India competed in only four of them — DOTA 2, FIFA Online 4, Street Fighter V, and League of Legends —, while other titles were banned in the country. With six fresh titles added to the mix and two from 2022 dropped, India's Esports contingent is likely to grow, despite PUBG and Mobile Legends — Bang Bang still being banned.

This shift provides an unprecedented opportunity for Indian

gamers to compete on a bigger stage and aim for medals.

"The OCA's decision to expand the Esports program to 11 titles is a tremendous boost for India," Lokesh Suji, Director of Esports Federation of India (ESFI) and Vice President of the Asian Esports Federation (AESF) said in a release. "Not only does this increase our chances of winning a medal at Aichi-Nagoya 2026, but it also paves the way for greater awareness and participation in new titles among our youth."

Esports has been steadily gaining recognition as a competitive discipline in India, with ESFI actively scouting and nurturing emerging talent through multiple domestic tournaments and qualifiers held in the last few years.

At the prestigious BRICS Esports Championship, India secured a silver medal in Tekken 8, while at the Asian Esports Games 2024 the country earned a bronze medal in eFootball, further establishing its strong presence in the Asian Esports arena.

"The addition of new titles at the 2026 Asian Games will attract fresh talent and create more opportunities for Indian gamers to compete at the highest level. It's a fantastic and a positive step for Esports in general to create a lot more competitive opportunity in the region," Suji added. (PTI)

England face depleted Australia as Ashes rivals renew rivalry in Champions Trophy

LAHORE, Feb 21: An off-colour England and an injury-hit Australia will be eager to start their Champions Trophy campaign on a winning note in what seems like an evenly-matched Group B contest between the Ashes rivals here on Saturday.

Both teams have struggled in the ODI format recently, with world champions Australia losing to Sri Lanka (0-2) and Pakistan (1-2) in their last two rubbers.

England, who are now coached by Brendon McCullum in all formats, have not won an ODI series since their disastrous 2023 World Cup campaign.

The Jos Buttler-led side is coming off a 0-3 drubbing by India, where they appeared out of sorts and failed to match up to the hosts.

Both teams will be eager to make their mark in this ICC showpiece event.

Australia had the upper hand against their Ashes rivals the last time they faced off in England, winning a five-match series 3-2 in September last year.

However, much has changed since then, with the world champions missing five key players from their initial squad.

Their pace attack will be particularly affected, as they will be without their famed trio of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, and Mitchell Starc, all ruled out of the tournament.

They will also be without all-rounders Mitchell Marsh (back injury), Cameron Green (injury) and



Marcus Stoinis, who has made a shock retirement from the format after featuring in the initial squad for the tournament.

In such a scenario, it remains to be seen whether Australia, under stand-in skipper Steve Smith, can replicate their past success in what is often referred to as a 'mini' World Cup.

With Marsh absent, Smith is likely to come in at No. 3 and will carry the batting workload for a side that won this tournament consecutively in 2006 and 2009.

All eyes will be on explosive white-ball opener Travis Head, who had scores of 101 and 89 at this very venue during their 2022 series.

Head also smashed a career-best 154 not out at Trent Bridge against England in last year's series, making him a significant threat.

As a possible counter-strategy, England have named a three-pronged pace attack featuring Jofra Archer, Mark Wood, and Brydon Carter, supplemented by the spin of Adil Rashid.

"They're pretty much all-out fast bowling with Adil (Rashid, the leg-spinner) being their banker - he's high quality, and doesn't go underrated in this room - but there's so much excitement around Wood, Jofra, Carter and (Gus) Atkinson," head told 'cricket.com.au'.

"We're going to have to make sure we start well against them. As an opening batter, how I can counteract that and how I play against that is a great challenge." England have also included ris-

ing wicketkeeper-batter Jamie Smith, who is likely to bat at No. 3.

With the wicket expected to favour batting, Ben Duckett, who looked in explosive form against India, will look to provide a strong start, while Joe Root will be the batting backbone.

Root, who was England's second-leading run-getter behind Duckett in the India series, will look to make a significant impact here.

England, seeking their maiden Champions Trophy title, are choosing not to dwell on their recent struggles in India.

"Regardless of what happened in India, we've got that belief that we've got the talent, we've got the world-class players, the match-winners in the squad to win the tournament," Rashid said.

Teams:
Australia: Steve Smith (capt), Sean Abbott, Alex Carey, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Aaron Hardie, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Spencer Johnson, Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell, Tanveer Sangha, Matthew Short, Adam Zampa. Travelling reserve: Cooper Connolly.

England XI: Phil Salt, Ben Duckett, Jamie Smith (wk), Joe Root, Harry Brook, Jos Buttler (capt), Liam Livingstone, Brydon Carter, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Mark Wood.
Match starts: 2.30PM IST. (PTI)

Rickelton ton helps SA post 315 for 6 against Afghanistan in CT



KARACHI, Feb 21: A flawless maiden hundred from opener Ryan Rickelton and half centuries from three other batters powered South Africa to a big total of 315 for 6 against Afghanistan in their Champions Trophy campaign opener here on Friday.

Rickelton reeled off 103 off 106 balls with the help of seven fours and one six to lead an aggressive batting display from South Africa after electing to bat.

Captain Temba Bavuma (58 off 76 balls), Rassie van der Dussen (52 off 46 balls) and Aiden Markram (50 not out off 34 balls) scored half centuries to take South Africa to a big total in front of a crowd strong with Afghans supporters. Rickelton was unfortunately run out in the 36th over when he flicked back to Rashid Khan whose throw was picked up by the wicketkeeper before whipping off the bails. The batter dived full length but found his bat in the air when the bails came off.

Rickelton displayed great footwork against spinners Rashid and Muhammad Nabi and chinaman Noor Ahmed, not allowing them to dictate terms on him as he was also

very strong off his back foot with his cuts and pulls.

The left-hander shared a strong second wicket partnership of 129 runs with Bavuma who batted smoothly for his 58 off 76 balls.

Once the two were separated with Bavuma holding out into the deep, Rickelton found another able partner in van der Dussen who helped himself to a 52 from 46 balls.

Van Dussen made sure South Africa didn't feel the absence of Heinrich Klassen who was out of the match with an elbow soft tissue injury and the dropped Tristan Stubbs as he batted very well against pace and spin.

Markram then smashed a quickfire 52 from 36 balls with six fours and a six.

In the 48th over, Markram went back to Rashid Khan whose throw was picked up by the wicketkeeper before whipping off the bails. The batter dived full length but found his bat in the air when the bails came off.

For Afghanistan, veteran spinner Mohammed Nabi grabbed two wickets for 51 runs while Fazalhaq Farooqi, Azmatullah Omarzai and Noor Ahmad picked up one each. Rashid was wicketless for 59 runs from his 10 overs. (PTI)

Bogey-free Sneha pips Vani with a 25-foot putt to win 3rd leg of Hero WPGT

PUNE, Feb 21: Sneha Singh played a brilliant bogey-free five-under 66 to pip Vani Kapoor at the finish line in the third leg to grab her second straight title in the 2025 Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Friday.

Vani, who had a similar 66 a day earlier, faltered in the final round with a one-over 72 at the Poona Club Golf Course.

Sneha, who trailed by five at the start, capped the week with a monster 25-footer for the fifth and winning birdie of the day.

For Sneha, who is coached by her father Sanjay, it was a milestone as she won her tenth title on the WGAI.

"Getting to 10 (titles) is indeed great. To win twice in three starts is a big morale booster," said Sneha.

Sneha birdied the first and the ninth as Vani had three bogeys and two birdies. At the turn, Sneha from being five shots behind at the start, had cut the lead to just two.

With none of the others making a charge, Sneha kept closing in on Vani with a birdie on the 10th and there was just one shot between them. When Vani dropped a shot on the 12th, they were level at 4-under for the tournament. Sneha moved ahead for the first time with a birdie on the 14th, but Vani caught up on the very next hole, the 15th to tie for the lead. The duo parred the 16th and the 17th.

Even as a play-off looked likely, Sneha holed a 25-foot uphill putt for a final birdie. Vani managed only a par. That gave Sneha a second win in as many starts. (PTI)

Kerala enter historic Ranji Trophy final after dramatic first innings lead over Gujarat



AHMEDABAD, Feb 21: A resilient Kerala on Friday sealed their maiden Ranji Trophy final by taking a dramatic two-run first-innings lead over Gujarat, 68 years after making their debut in Indian cricket's premier domestic competition.

Going into the final day at 429/7, the home side, who won the Ranji title in 2016-17, needed just 29 runs to take a first innings lead.

However, left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate delivered under pressure, taking all three wickets to bowl Gu-

jarat out for 455 in 174.4 overs to leave them two runs short of the mark.

Making only their second semifinal appearance, the visitors had been left frustrated by a dogged 72-run eighth-wicket stand between Jaymeet Patel (74 overnight) and Siddharth Desai (24 overnight). They started the day needing three wickets with just 28 runs to defend.

Kerala, who last made the semifinals in 2018-19 after making their Ranji debut back in 1957, will face Vidarbha in the summit clash after

the latter defeat heavyweights Mumbai by 80 runs in the other semifinal.

Sarwate's breakthroughs came amid high drama, including a dropped catch, a tight stumping decision, and a successful DRS review that overturned a caught-out call to an LBW dismissal.

First it was Kerala skipper Sachin Baby, who dropped the well-set Jaymeet with Gujarat 23 runs shy of a lead.

But Jaymeet could not make it count and perished for 79 (177 balls; 2x4) in the same over when he dragged his foot outside the crease while the ball passed his outside edge for Mohammed Azharuddeen to complete an excellent stumping.

After multiple replays, umpire finally ruled him out as his foot was found to be on the line when the ball was knocked off as Kerala came wicket up in celebration.

But there was more to the contest as Gujarat left-arm quick Arzan Nagwaswalla, batting at No 10, counter-attacked and smashed Akshay Chandran for a cover boundary to take them within 14 runs of the lead.

Breakthrough for Kerala came with Gujarat 11 runs behind when

Sarwate broke the dogged resistance of Siddharth Desai, who got out for 30 that came off 164 balls with just one boundary.

Desai reviewed a caught-out decision, and while Ultra Edge showed no spike, ball-tracking confirmed it would have hit leg stump, overturning the call to LBW.

Nagwaswalla and last man Priyajitsinh Jadeja brought Gujarat within eight runs when Kerala missed a half-chance, with the ball slipping from Salman Nizar's grasp. Jalaj Saxena nearly claimed his fifth wicket as Nagwaswalla's inside edge brushed past leg stump, leaving Gujarat just two runs short.

Then came the decisive moment. Sarwate tossed one up, Nagwaswalla swung hard, and the ball ricocheted off Nizar's helmet at short leg before lobbing to Baby at slip. The Amay Khurasiya-coached side erupted in celebration, securing a historic Ranji final berth as a dejected Nagwaswalla walked back in disbelief.

For Kerala, Sarwate, who had started the day with 1/101, ended with figures of 45.4-7-111-4.

Jalaj, who toiled hard for 71 overs, returned with 4/149 including 14 maidens. (PTI)

70th Bordoloi Trophy: Tsk Barekuri FC to face 19th APBN in final



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Feb 21: In the Sivasagar cluster semi-final matches of the 70th Bharat Ratna Bordoloi Trophy Football Tournament played in Sivasagar Peoli Phukan Stadium here on Friday, Barekuri FC Tinsukia overcame spirited challenge from Navajyoti Sangha Mahomora, Charaideo district to enter the final through a penalty shoot out 4-2 in the first semi final in the morning.

In the other semifinal in the afternoon, 19th APBN Dibrugarh produced a clinical performance to outplay Sivasagar Rajmai FC 3-1. Shining Sangma scored a hatrick with his goals in 8,26 and 55 minutes. The Rajmai team could not spoiled numerous opportunities for scoring and only Sagar Giri could reduce the margin in 69 minutes.

Sachin, Yuvraj to face SL in International Masters League

MUMBAI, Feb 21: Indian cricket legends Sachin Tendulkar and Yuvraj Singh will once again don the iconic blue jersey of India as they take on Sri Lanka in the opening match of the inaugural International Masters League on Saturday.

A global cricketing legend with over 34,000 international runs and 100 centuries, Tendulkar dominated every format of the game, yet he played just one T20 International for India, making this a rare spectacle for fans to witness him in Indian colours in the shortest format once again.

Over the years, India and Sri Lanka have enthralled fans with their high-stakes encounters, delivering moments of brilliance, drama, and excellence that remain etched in the sport's history.

The pair has shared countless unforgettable battles, none more renowned than the 2011 ODI World Cup final, where India's champions lifted the trophy.

"We had some unforgettable moments playing against Sri Lanka over the years, the 2011 World Cup being the most special amongst them," Tendulkar said.

"Stepping back onto the field after so many years, and facing a team that has been such a big part of our cricketing journey, makes this even more special." Yuvraj, on the other hand, played a crucial role in India's most significant victories, including the 2011 World Cup and 2007 T20 World Cup. (PTI)

Kohli's self-imposed pressure is hindering his return to form: Kumble

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: Former India captain and coach Anil Kumble feels Virat Kohli is putting a "lot more pressure on himself" in his effort to get out of the lean patch, and advised the batting icon to remain mentally relaxed. Since the 2023 ODI World Cup, Kohli has hit just one fifty while scoring 137 runs in six ODI innings.

"I think he's trying a bit too hard. You can see that in the way he is going about his innings. He just needs to not worry about it," Kumble said on 'ESPNcricinfo'.

"Rohit comes in there, has the freedom because there is plenty of batting and all of them are in great form. Similarly for Virat, he just needs to come in and not worry about anything else," he added.

"All players go through tough moments in their career, but I get a feeling watching him bat, I think he is putting a lot more pressure on himself," Kumble added.

Kumble reckoned a relaxed approach would help Kohli in getting out of the rut.

"When you have that kind of pressure and you have that kind of expectation, you suddenly start putting undue importance to all of that and then try hard to do well."

"When you do that, you're not really relaxed. The best innings that I am sure he's played, he's not even thinking about all of that."

In India's Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh, Kohli struggled to score, and was eventually dismissed on 22 by leg-spinner Rishad Hossain, making it the Indian's sixth consecutive dismissal against spin.

"To start off against spin, on surfaces like that, you need a lot of confidence. He's certainly trying too hard to manoeuvre that. He's a good player of spin when he's in form, when he wants to just knock singles off and keep rotating the strike."

"Now he's trying too hard to score runs rather than just manoeuvre, and that's been his game plan. He just needs to relax a little bit and not worry too much about the outcome of what happens on the field rather than just go out there and have the freedom to play naturally, what he does really well."

Former India batter Sanjay Manjrekar said Kohli's lean run in Australia has left him in a "tight corner," affecting his confidence. (PTI)



India interested in hosting 2030 CWG; wants to conduct axed disciplines in 2026 edition

NEW DELHI, Feb 21: India is "interested" in hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games and also conduct all those disciplines that were axed from the 2026 edition to ensure that the country's medal tally is not affected when the event is held in Glasgow, a source in the sports ministry revealed on Friday. The last date to submit an 'Expression of Interest' to host the 2030 CWG is March 31 and the ministry source said the process will get underway soon.

"We are interested in hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games and a formal interaction has taken place with the Commonwealth Games Federation on this. We have also proposed that all the disciplines that have been removed from the 2026 CWG be held in India," the source said.

India last hosted the CWG in 2010. The ministry's push to have the axed events of the 2026 edition in India is a way to ensure that the CWG remains a high medal-yielding competition for the country.

Last year, in a huge blow to India's medal prospects, key sports such as hockey, badminton, wrestling, cricket and shooting were dropped from the programme by host city Glasgow, which announced a pruned roster of 10 disciplines to keep the event budget-friendly.

"We are merely looking to en-



sure that our medal tally does not suffer. An informal proposal (to have axed disciplines in India) has been put across, we will see how the host city responds to it," the source said.

India had given a similar proposal for the archery and shooting competitions of the 2022 CWG in Birmingham and the CGF, along with the host city, had even approved it by agreeing to add the medals won to the finally tally. However, the idea could not be executed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table tennis, squash and

triathlon were also axed by Glasgow in a bid to limit the cost and streamline logistics given that only four venues will host the entire showpiece there. The total number of events at the Games is nine less than the 2022 Birmingham edition.

The 23rd edition of Games is scheduled to take place from July 23 to August 2, marking Glasgow's return as host after 12 years.

Athletics and Para Athletics (Track & Field), Swimming and Para Swimming, Artistic Gymnastics, Track Cycling and Para Track Cycling, Netball, Weightlifting and

Para Powerlifting, Boxing, Judo, Bowls and Para Bowls, and 3x3 Basketball and 3x3 Wheelchair Basketball will form the sports programme in the 2026 CWG.

India is also eyeing the hosting rights of the 2036 Olympic Games for which a letter of intent was sent to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) last year.

"We are now waiting for the IOC elections to wind up next month for things to move ahead. The final decision on this is not coming before March next year in any case," the source said. (PTI)