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- Russia, US agree to work toward ending Ukraine war in remarkable diplomatic shift
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- Modi has already declared Adani issue personal matter: Cong
- 'J-K emerging out of 'evil eye' shadow to become prominent tourism destination'

## Media must exercise utmost caution before publishing any statement, news or opinion: SC



**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The Supreme Court has said persons working in key positions in the media must exercise utmost caution and responsibility before publishing any statements, news, or opinions and observed the right to freedom of speech and expression was paramount.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan reiterated that the power of the media in shaping public opinion was significant and the press possessed the ability to influence public sentiments and alter

perceptions, with remarkable speed.

The bench's observation came when it quashed a defamation case against English daily Times of India's editorial director and other journalists, who were accused of publishing alleged defamatory contents over the authenticity of certain paintings to be auctioned by Bid & Hammer - Fine Art Auctioneers. "We find it necessary to emphasise that right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India is paramount. At the same time, it is reiterated that those working in the media, particularly, individuals in key positions, authors, etc., must exercise utmost caution and responsibility before publishing any statements, news, or opinions," the bench said in its February 18 judgement.

The top court quoted English writer Bulwer Lytton as saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword". Given the vast reach, the court said, a single article or report could resonate with millions, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Two more bodies found after 44 days

Dima Hasao coal mine tragedy: Toll touches six

**GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** Divers fished out decomposed bodies of two more miners trapped inside a coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district on Wednesday, 44 days after they went missing in the quarry, an official said.

With this recovery, six of the nine miners who had been trapped there on January 6 were found.

Dewatering operation in the mine at Umrangshu has been continuing for over one month. The two highly decomposed corpses were spotted by the divers who went in and brought them out.

The bodies are yet to be identified, the official said. Nine workers were trapped inside the mine on January 6 and the body of one was recovered two days later while those of three others were found on January 11.

An ex-gratia payment of ₹ 10 lakh each has been paid by the gov-



ernment to the next of kin of the four miners whose bodies were recovered earlier and Rs six lakh each to the family of those trapped inside.

The state government had announced that the family of all trapped inside the mine would be paid a total of ₹ 10 lakh each.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said that if the dewatering continues at the current rate, it will take about 25 to 60 days for the process to be completed, and it will continue till (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## House witnesses uproarious scenes on five issues Speaker adjourns session three times

**GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** Assam Assembly was adjourned thrice on Wednesday when both the ruling and opposition members demanded discussions on various issues by suspending other routine businesses of the day.

The opposition brought four adjournment motions, while the treasury bench sought a discussion on a recent report on APSC cash-for-job scam.

The adjournment motions were on coal mine tragedy of Umrangshu by the Congress, coal and other syndicate by CPI (M), alleged torture of Indian citizens in a detention centre by AIUDF and the cash-for-job scam in Assam Public Service Commission by Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi.

As soon as the Question Hour was over, both sides trooped into the well of the House and pressed for their demands.

In a rare instance, the ruling al-



liance led by BJP raised slogans and clapped inside the well while asking the Speaker to allow a discussion on the report of the one-man Justice (Retd) Biplab Kumar Sharma Commission on the APSC scam.

Although the entire opposition was demanding that the Speaker accept their four notices, AIUDF dis-

played placards demanding justice for people allegedly tortured in the name of being foreigners and kept at a detention centre.

Speaker Biswajit Daimary rejected all the five demands and said, "You can raise the topics through other devices. Please go back and raise the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Akhil suspended for 10 minutes

**GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi was on Wednesday suspended briefly from the Assam Assembly for disrupting the reply of Public Health Engineering Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah.

Baruah was responding to a query raised by AGP MLA Ramendra Narayan Kalita regarding the water supply scheme of Guwahati, during Zero Hour.

Gogoi then rose from his seat and said, "The PHE department is totally useless. It's looting public money. There is no water supply to people's homes. I request the CM to order an inquiry into the works of the PHE department."

Deputy Speaker Numal Momin asked him to sit down several times, but the MLA did not pay any heed and continued to attack the minister.

Momin also warned Gogoi of suspension if he did not keep quiet, but he still did not listen to the Chair. "Akhil Gogoi, you are suspended for 10 minutes," he said and asked (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Uddhav wanted to make Shinde CM in 2019 but BJP, MVA allies stood in the way: Raut

**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday claimed that Uddhav Thackeray planned to make Eknath Shinde the chief minister of Maharashtra after the 2019 polls, but first the BJP and later MVA allies including Sharad Pawar played a spoilsport.

"The BJP did not fulfill the promise of sharing the CM's post with the Shiv Sena, that was why Shinde lost the chance to head the government," he told reporters.

Thackeray, then head of the undivided Shiv Sena, broke off the party's alliance with the BJP over the CM post after the 2019 assembly elections, and formed the Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance with the Congress and undivided NCP to become chief minister himself.

"Shinde wanted to become CM, but top leaders of the MVA refused to work under him as he was junior to them," Raut further stated.



"It was Sharad Pawar, then president of the Nationalist Congress Party, and Ajit Pawar who opposed the plan to make Shinde chief minister," the Rajya Sabha member claimed.

Notably, Sharad Pawar's praise of Shinde at a recent event did not go down well with the Thackeray-led party.

Shinde rebelled against Thackeray and split the Shiv Sena to form a government with the BJP in June 2022. He is now a deputy chief minister, along with Ajit

Pawar who split the NCP a year later, in the Devendra Fadnis-led government.

On Tuesday, without naming Thackeray, Shinde had said the Shiv Sena split because of the attraction of the chief minister's post. "You started treating your colleagues like they are your servants. A party can't grow in such a manner," he said.

According to Raut, Uddhav Thackeray wanted to make Shinde the CM in 2019. "Shinde was made the leader of the Shiv Sena legislature party which was a signal that he would be the CM candidate," Raut said. Shambhuraj Desai, Shiv Sena leader and Maharashtra minister, countered Raut's claim. In 2019, Thackeray "pointed to Shinde and told party MLAs that he wanted to make a common Shiv Sena worker the CM, but then things changed overnight," he said. BJP leader (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Shalimar Bagh MLA Rekha Gupta to be new Delhi CM



**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** First-time MLA Rekha Gupta will be the new chief minister of Delhi, the BJP announced on Wednesday.

Gupta was chosen as the Leader of the House in the Delhi Assembly at the BJP legislature party meeting. The party has returned to power in Delhi after over 26 years, ending the 10-year rule of the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP.

Gupta and her Cabinet ministers will take the oath of office at the Ramlila Ground on Thursday. She will be the fourth woman chief minister of Delhi after Sushma Swaraj, Sheila Dikshit and Atishi.

She will be the only woman chief minister among the states being ruled by the BJP at present. The 50-year-old leader won from Shalimar Bagh, defeating AAP candidate Bandana Kumari by over 29,000 votes in the February 5 Assembly polls.

All 48 newly-elected BJP MLAs attended the legislature party meeting in the presence of Central observers Ravi Shankar Prasad and O P Dhanekar. Gupta's name was proposed by senior party leaders Parvesh Verma, Vijender Gupta and Satish Upadhyay.

The announcement came 11 days after the results of the Delhi Assembly polls were declared on February 8. The CM-designate will now meet Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena at Raj Niwas to stake a claim in forming a BJP-led government in Delhi. Soon after the announcement, Gupta thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and

said she would work with full honesty, integrity and dedication for the welfare, empowerment and overall development of every citizen of Delhi.

"I am fully committed to this important opportunity to take Delhi to new heights," Gupta said in a post on X. "I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the top leadership for trusting me and entrusting me with the responsibility of the post of chief minister. This trust and support of yours has given me new energy and inspiration."

In the recent assembly polls, the BJP won 48 out of the 70 assembly seats while the AAP got 22 seats and the Congress drew a blank.

Rekha Gupta is a former president of the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) and civic body councillor. The Law graduate of Delhi University entered politics as an Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) member in 1992. She enjoys close ties with the RSS and is actively engaged with women-related matters. Gupta is also the national vice president of BJP Mahila Morcha and a member of the party's national executive.

Around 50,000 people, including Prime Minister Modi, his cabinet colleagues and the chief minister of NDA-ruled states among others, will attend her oath-taking ceremony on Thursday. More than 25,000 security personnel will be deployed in the central, north, and New Delhi areas of the city for the oath-taking ceremony. (PTI)

## 1.66 lakh illegal foreigners detected in Assam, 30,115 deported

**GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** Nearly 1.66 lakh immigrants have been identified as "illegal" according to Assam Accord norms and just over 30,100 of them have been deported from the state, the Assembly was informed on Wednesday.

In a written reply to a query by Congress MLA Abdur Rahim Ahmed, Implementation of Assam Accord Minister Atul Bora said a total of 1,65,531 immigrants staying illegally in Assam have been detected till December 31 last year, 2024.

"Out of them, 32,870 came between 1966 and 1971, and 1,32,661 came after 1971," he added. The government has so far deported 30,115 illegal foreigners from Assam, the Minister said without sharing details of their country of origin.

The Assam Accord was signed in 1985 after a six-year-long violent anti-foreigner movement. The pact stated, among other clauses, that names of all foreigners coming to Assam on or after (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India has been victim of terror acts perpetrated by Pak through groups such as JeM: New Delhi tells UNSC

**UNITED NATIONS, Feb 19:** India has been a victim of terror acts perpetrated by Pakistan through groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and it is a "supreme irony" when the global epicentre of terrorism pats itself on the back claiming to fight against the scourge, Delhi's envoy told a UN Security Council meeting chaired by China.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish delivered a strongly-worded retort after Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed Ishaq Dar made remarks about Jammu and Kashmir during an open debate on Tuesday on 'Practicing multilateralism, reforming and improving global governance' held under China's presidency of the Council.

"Pakistan is a global epicentre of terrorism harbouring more than 20 UN-listed terrorist enti-

ties and providing state support to cross-border terrorism," Harish said.

"Hence it is a supreme irony when Pakistan pats itself on the back as being at the forefront of the fight against terrorism. India has been a victim of acts of terror perpetrated by this country through terror groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Harkat Ul Mujahidin, among dozens of others," he said. Several Pakistan-based terror entities and individuals are listed under the 1267 Al Qaida

Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council and are subject to an assets freeze, arms embargo and travel ban. In the past, China, a fair-weather friend of Pakistan, has often put holds and blocks on proposals submitted by India and its partners like the US to blacklist Pakistan-based terrorists at the UN. Harish asserted that there cannot be any justification (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



'The 33 per cent reservation for women is expected to provide them with a stronger voice'

## Asam Sahitya Sabha adopts 'One Person, One Post' policy, 33% women's quota

**JORHAT, Feb 19:** The Asam Sahitya Sabha has adopted a policy of 'One Person, One Post' and 33 per cent reservation for women in its new executive committee for the 2025-27 term.

Addressing newsmen at the Danbir Radha Kanta Handique Bhawan within the premises of the Sabha's central office here on Tuesday, newly elected Sabha president Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami stated that, as part of a series of reforms initiated by the premier literary organisation of the state, a policy of 'One Person, One Post' has been implemented for the 2025-27 executive committee.

He explained that the new policy aims to bring more transparency and inclusivity to the activities of the literary body. Elaborating on the decision, Dr. Goswami stated that under this policy, no individual would be allotted more than one post within the Sabha, and members of the same family would not be able to hold multiple posts.

Further, the Sabha president highlighted an-



other significant reform: the reservation of 33 per cent of seats for women in the new executive committee. He noted that these initiatives stem from resolutions adopted on February 5 during

the five-day 77th biennial conference of the Sabha held at Pathsala in Bajali district. He expressed confidence that the reservation policy would strengthen gender inclusivity and promote a more balanced and diverse representation.

"The 33 per cent reservation for women is expected to provide them with a stronger voice in the Sabha's decision-making process," observed Goswami, a well-known linguist and former general secretary of the Sabha.

He also informed that Sabha members who previously held executive committee posts but failed to submit accounts for functions within 25 days of their conclusion have not been appointed to any position in the new executive committee.

Additionally, members of earlier executive committees who were found to be underperforming or inactive have not been included in the new committee. Goswami added that individuals facing allegations of financial irregularities or other charges under investigation have also been excluded from the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## You will be accountable for poll results: Kharge to top office-bearers



**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** Days after a major organisational rejig in the party, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday did some plain-speaking with top office-bearers, stressing that they will be held accountable for future election results in states under their charge and asking them to be wary of ideologi-

cally weak turncoats.

Addressing general secretaries and in-charges, including those appointed last week, at a meeting held at the party's headquarters at Indira Bhawan here, Kharge emphasised the importance of promoting those people who are committed to the ideology of the Congress and stand with us like a rock even in adverse circumstances.

Kharge also hinted at some more changes in the organisation, saying some changes have already taken place and some more are in the offing. "I want to talk to you about the most important thing of accountability. You all will be held accountable for revamping the organisations in states and for all future election results," he told the office-bearers.

The party recently brought in new office bearers in the revamped organisation. Among those who attended the meeting were former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, senior leaders (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## Sensex, Nifty end marginally lower amid volatile trade

**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower in a volatile trade on Wednesday dragged by blue-chip IT stocks.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dipped 28.21 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 75,939.18. Intra-day, it hit a high of 76,338.58 and a low of 75,581.38, gyrating 757.2 points.

The NSE Nifty skidded 12.40 points or 0.05 per cent to 22,932.90.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Consultancy Services and Infosys fell over 2 per cent each. Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra, and Tech Mahindra were also among the laggards.

Among the gainers, Zomato jumped nearly 5 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank were also among the gainers. Among BSE sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT dropped 1.33 per cent, teck (1.31 per cent) and IT (1.21 per cent).

BSE Industrials jumped 2.59 per cent, capital goods (2.19 per cent), metal (1.41 per cent), services



(1.41 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.05 per cent), and commodities (0.95 per cent).

"The national benchmarks exhibited a range-bound performance with a slight downward bias, though selective buying in the broader market was evident, driven by bargain hunting in beaten-down stocks.

"A reversal in FII flows also influenced market dynamics; however, the durability of this trend remains uncertain. Despite concerns over potential US tariff impositions and delays in anticipated

interest rate cuts, market sentiment remains optimistic about a rebound in India's Q3 GDP growth," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

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

US markets ended in positive territory on Tuesday.

"While markets ended flat with a slightly negative bias due to selling in IT stocks, broader markets witnessed a lot of optimism as mid

and smallcap stocks rallied after the recent sell-off.

"Despite the uncertainty over rising FII selling, falling rupee, and the ongoing tariff war, the recently beaten sectoral stocks from banking, automobile, telecom, metals attracted significant buying interest," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Tuesday after unabated selling. They bought equities worth ₹ 4,786.56 crore, according to exchange data.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 2.41 per cent and midcap index climbed 1.30 per cent.

"Markets remained volatile and ended nearly unchanged, extending the prevailing consolidation phase. The ongoing indecisiveness in the index is keeping participants on edge," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.65 per cent to USD 76.33 a barrel. After a day's breather, the Sensex ended 29.47 points or 0.04 per cent lower at 75,967.39 on Tuesday. The Nifty dipped 14.20 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 22,945.30. (PTI)

## Coal ministry plans to offer additional incentives in underground mine auctions

**KOLKATA, Feb 19:** The Coal Ministry is planning additional incentives to boost underground (UG) commercial coal block auctions in India, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

The push for UG mining aligns with India's drive for sustainable coal production.

The proposed incentives are in an advanced stage of discussions and are expected to be announced soon, Coal Secretary Vikram Dev Dutt said at a roadshow for commercial coal mine auctions in the city.

Additional Secretary and nominated authority Rupinder Brar clarified that any new incentives and policy relaxations are expected to be applicable prospectively.

The coal ministry's policy evolution has involved multiple stakeholders, including industry players. "We have consistently refined the auction framework based on industry feedback, ensuring an investor-friendly environment," Dutt said. The ministry was discussing demands for reclassification, as underground mining faces inherent challenges.

Of the 113 commercial mines successfully auctioned, 37 are underground, officials said.

The ministry is also working to secure environmental concessions with the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

The ministry believes the next 2-3 years are crucial for commercial mines to rapidly begin production.

Currently, production from auctioned commercial mines is 20 million tonnes, but combined with captive production, it totals 157 million tonnes and is expected to reach 170 million tonnes by the end of the fiscal year, an official said. In 2025-26, this production is projected to rise to 210 million tonnes.

Currently, 14 mines are operational and more will join soon.

The ministry plans to auction a similar number of blocks in the 12th tranche as it did in the 11th round, Dutt said. In the 11th round, 27 mines were under the hammer and received 72 bids for 17 mines. The technical evaluations are on and allotment is expected in a month. (PTI)

## US reciprocal tariffs on India to have limited impact as economy domestically-driven: S&P

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** India will be less impacted by the proposed US reciprocal tariff as the country's economy is mainly driven by domestic demand, and has substantial services exports, which is not going to be targeted by the Trump Administration, S&P Global Ratings said on Wednesday.

US President Donald Trump has announced he will impose reciprocal tariffs on its trading partners, including India.

S&P Global Ratings, Economist Asia-Pacific, Vishrut Rana said the reciprocal tariff will hurt countries like Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan more as they have high trade surplus with the US.

The Indian economy has two mitigating factors -- greater reliance on domestic economy and larger services trade with the US, which is not likely to be tariffed. In Japan also, there are similar mitigating factors -- greater reliance on services trade, and domestically-driven economy.

"... which means (US) trade measures might be less impactful there (India and Japan)," Rana said at the S&P Asia-Pacific Credit Focus webinar.

He also said that reciprocal tariffs may fuel inflationary expectations, thus leading to higher interest rates globally.

S&P Global Ratings, Director, Sovereigns (Asia-Pacific) YeeFam Phua also said India's economy is largely still domestic-oriented and the nature of the exports to the US is more on the services side, which is less prone to tariffs.

"India's dependence on exports for growth is not that great. So, therefore, I think the impact (of US tariffs) will be more or less limited," he said, adding on the goods side the sectors which could be exposed to higher tariffs are jewellery, pharmaceutical, textiles and chemicals.

Phua said the US may not impose higher tariffs on pharmaceuticals, which are basically generic drugs, from India as it would drive up healthcare costs in its own country.

However, textiles and to some extent chemicals are most at risk of higher tariffs. "If we were to reimagine that scenario for the first Trump administration to unfold again, I think overall, the impact on India should be quite minimal," Phua added.

Earlier in 2018 under the Presidency of Donald

Trump, Washington had imposed an additional 25 per cent import duty on steel products and 10 per cent on certain aluminium products. In retaliation, India in June 2019, imposed additional customs duties on 28 American products.

More than five years after the initial tariffs were imposed, on July 3, 2023, the US removed tariffs on steel and aluminium imports from India.

With regard to economic growth in India, Phua said India will clock a 6.7-6.8 per cent GDP growth over the next two years. These growth rates, even though slower than before, continue to place India above sovereign peers at similar income levels, and "we do believe that this will continue to support fiscal revenue growth despite the income tax cuts."

He said fiscal 2025-26 budget will boost growth for the next few years, largely by domestic demand through tax cuts for households and GDP growth is now normalising to a more "sustainable level".

"The government remains very much focused on investment-led growth and also on agriculture sector reforms. However, we do think that economic expansion in India is starting to normalise towards a more sustainable level after real growth had averaged 8.3 per cent over the last three years post-pandemic," Phua said.

As per official projections, the Indian economy will grow at 6.4 per cent in the current fiscal (2024-25), lower than 8.2 per cent in 2023-24.

S&P Global Ratings has a 'BBB-' rating on India, which is the lowest investment grade. The outlook on the rating was positive, from stable, in May 2024.

He further said India's fiscal metrics continue to be quite positive and the tax revenue to GDP has grown over the last few years to around 12 per cent currently.

The central government deficit has been lower since the pandemic years.

S&P believes that the government will meet its fiscal deficit target of 4.8 per cent and 4.4 per cent for the current and the next fiscal, respectively.

"These targets actually are quite consistent with our projections... We do believe that the government will meet the deficit targets, largely because there are continued large dividends coming from the central bank, as well as potential capex under-spending on the expenditure side," Phua said. (PTI)

## realme unveils realme P3 Pro 5G and realme P3x 5G

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** realme introduced the realme P3 Series 5G—designed exclusively for India. Led by the realme P3 Pro 5G and realme P3x 5G, the series embodied the brand's philosophy of delivering cutting-edge innovation tailored for Indian consumers. With a focus on performance,

durability, and style, these smartphones set new benchmarks in the mid-range segment, reinforcing realme's commitment to bringing segment-first innovations to its users.

The realme P3 Pro 5G and realme P3x 5G—not only redefined performance but also introduced groundbreaking design

elements that ensure they stand out in a highly competitive market. Staying true to realme's commitment to leap-forward technology, both devices blend impeccable craftsmanship, cutting-edge features, and unmatched durability to cater to the needs of modern, tech-savvy consumers, a PR stated.

## Google inaugurates new campus in Bengaluru, billed as one of its largest offices globally

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** Tech titan Google on Wednesday inaugurated its new campus in Bengaluru, which is touted to be among its largest offices globally.

India has always played the role of a strategic nerve centre in the tech discourse, the company said, adding that this is "evident in the thriving startup and app ecosystems, the digital public infrastructure that's transforming life for hundreds of millions of Indians, and the depth and diversity of Indian creators."

"Today, we are excited to share another major milestone in our ongoing commitment to India, with the inauguration of Ananta -- one of Google's largest offices globally," Google announced in a blog post.

For two decades, Google said it has played a role in facilitating transformation further -- through AI-powered flood forecasting, specialised AI models to catch tuberculosis early, and helping millions of people join the formal economy



with Google Pay, among others. "Increasingly, we have been building from India, for the world," it said.

The new campus named 'Ananta', meaning 'infinite' or 'limitless' in Sanskrit, signifies the boundless potential the company sees to improve lives through technology.

"Located in Bengaluru, one of the world's fastest-growing tech

hubs, Ananta is one of our most ambitious ground-up developments. A collaboration between Google India and a local development and design team, the Ananta campus embodies Google's latest thinking in workplace design," the company said.

Each working floor in Ananta is organised like a city grid, with a network of streets for easy navigation. Individual "neighbourhoods"

foster collaboration while also giving individuals the freedom to focus within smaller nooks and booths.

The new space is designed to connect people in ways that spark breakthrough ideas and innovation, the company asserted.

"Ananta is part of our ongoing efforts to build with and for India and the world," it added.

Google said India has always represented a very special opportunity, not just to reach millions of users within the country with products and platforms, but also have them shaped by Indian ingenuity, helping them become even more useful for the billions of users the company creates for, globally.

"Ananta will further accelerate this mission, enabling us to deliver world-class products, foster deeper partnership with our customers, and continue to focus on solving the most complex challenges facing users, businesses and startups in India and around the world," it said. (PTI)

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## Media must exercise utmost

shaping their beliefs and judgments. It has the capability to cause severe damage to the reputation of those concerned, with consequences that may be far-reaching and enduring, it added. "This highlights the critical need for accuracy and fairness in media reporting, especially when dealing with matters having the potential to impact the integrity of individuals or institutions. Keeping these aspects in mind, publication of the news articles must be done in public interest and with good faith," said the bench. The top court was hearing an appeal filed by the journalists against a Karnataka High Court order, which dismissed their petition challenging the initiation of the criminal proceedings against them.

The were facing charges of under Sections 499 (defamation) and 500 (punishment for defamation) of the IPC. The complainant (art auction house) alleged that the defamatory news item that was printed, published and circulated by all the accused persons had caused readers to view the complainant with suspicion and also fostered an unjustifiable and unfounded public opinion that its works offered for sale through public auctions could be fake.

The top court however observed procedural irregularities in the magistrate's summoning order and said the complainant failed to produce any witness to prima facie establish the alleged imputations had lowered its reputation. "No material has also been placed before us to suggest that the auction was unsuccessful or that any damage or loss was actually caused, due to the alleged news articles published in the newspapers," it said. The bench added, "Irrespective of the same, at this stage, remanding the matter for fresh examination of witnesses before issuance of summons would serve no useful purpose, given the remote likelihood of securing witnesses. It would only prolong the litigation yielding little to no benefit especially, since the auction has already concluded and more than a decade has passed." (PTI)

## Speaker adjourns session

issue from your seats."

However, nobody accepted his request and continued sloganeering inside the well. The Speaker then adjourned the House for 10 minutes. When the House resumed, the chaos continued and the same situation prevailed.

"We have a discussion on the governor's speech. There is no scope for any other discussion today. It's Zero Hour now, so please allow the House to function," Daimary said. With nobody paying heed to his appeal, the Speaker adjourned the House for the second time for 10 minutes. As soon as the House assembled, the same noisy situation continued with both ruling and the opposition shouting from the well.

The Speaker for the third time adjourned the House for 20 minutes. When the assembly resumed, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the government is ready to discuss all the four issues. "We have no problem in discussing the subjects. This budget session will continue for one month. So, I request the Speaker to give time on any day to discuss these issues," he added. Following this, both sides pacified and normal business started thereafter. (PTI)

## Akhil suspended for

the Marshals to escort the MLA out of the House. Gogoi, however, returned after the completion of his suspension time. (PTI)

## Two more bodies found

a 'logical conclusion' is reached. The chief minister had earlier claimed that the mine was abandoned 12 years ago and was under the Assam Mineral Development Corporation till three years ago. The state government has also announced a judicial enquiry into the incident, with retired high court judge Anima Hazarika heading the one-person committee. (PTI)

## Uddhav wanted to make Shinde

and minister Nitesh Rane claimed it was Raut who harbored the ambition to become chief minister. "Calls were also made to MLAs but only five-six MLAs came out in his support," Rane told reporters. (PTI)

## 1.66 lakh illegal foreigners

March 25, 1971, would be detected and deleted from electoral rolls with steps taken to deport them. The minister also said that the Justice (Retd) Biplab Kumar Sharma Committee report on the Assam Accord has made 67 recommendations, of which 52 fall under the jurisdiction of the state government.

"We have decided to implement the 52 suggestions. We have already initiated steps for execution of these recommendations," he added. Regarding barbed wire fencing along the India-Bangladesh border, Bora in a separate reply said that work in 228.541 km has been completed out of a total of 267.5 km of international border with the neighbouring country. Out of the total border, 171.507 km is on land and the remaining 95.993 km is in water, he added. (PTI)

## India has been victim of terror

for terrorism regardless of its form, type and motive. "No political grievance can justify terrorism perpetrated against innocent civilians. This august body can make no distinction between good and bad terrorists," he said adding that Dar should take note of this and not further waste the time of the Council.

Underlining that Jammu and Kashmir have been, is, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India, Harish said it is Pakistan in fact that is in "illegal occupation of parts of Jammu and Kashmir".

"Pakistan's campaigns of misinformation and disinformation, of lies and falsehoods, do not change facts on the ground," he said. Referring to the assembly elections held in Jammu and Kashmir in September-October last year, Harish said the people of Jammu and Kashmir took part in a successful election and voted in largenumbers to choose their government. "The choice of the people of Jammu & Kashmir was loud and clear. Democracy in Jammu and Kashmir is vibrant and strong, unlike in Pakistan," he said. (PTI)

## Meghalaya govt, USTM refute

Such statements not just defame the university but also question the credibility of the highest statutory and accreditation bodies of the government of India, which has recognised the quality and educational standard of the university over the years," the institute said in a statement.

With NAAC A+ grade, the USTM was also ranked among the top 200 universities of the country last year and was ranked 52 in the Nature Index, an indicator of the quality of research and scientific output, it added.

"We urge the Assam Chief Minister to engage in a fact-based discourse, acknowledging the contributions made by USTM towards higher education. We openly welcome any inquiry or investigation by any authority for cross-verification of facts and figures," it said. Stating that teaching, learning and evaluation are conducted strictly according to the guidelines of UGC, the USTM said, "The PhD programme is conducted with firm adherence to UGC regulations as revised from time to time and follows a rigorous and transparent research process, often exceeding the standards set by premier institutions."

According to the university, external experts from premier institutions like IIT Guwahati, Tezpur University, North-Eastern Hill University, AMU, JNU, Delhi University, Gauhati University and other premier institutions of the country are part of the quality evaluation of degrees. "We categorically reject the unfounded accusations against USTM. Such statements not only tarnish the image of a credible educational institution but also demoralizes thousands of students, faculty members, and researchers striving for excellence," it added. (PTI)

## Asam Sahitya Sabha adopts

new executive committee. Announcing another key decision, Goswami stated that office secretaries have been appointed for all branches across the state, with each branch secretary now being from the district where the branch is located. Furthermore, individuals holding key positions—such as president, vice-president, or secretary—of any community, tribal, or political organisation have not been included in the new executive committee. However, general members of such bodies are not barred from being part of the committee.

Regarding executive meetings for the 2025-27 term, he said they would be conducted in a more streamlined manner, with all future meetings being held for a single day instead of the previous two-day format. He further stated that another reform is the discontinuation of customary gifts such as gamusas or other items for executive members. Instead, books will be presented as tokens of appreciation, reflecting a modern approach to the Sabha's traditions. Goswami also announced the names of secretaries appointed to the Sabha's branch offices across Assam. He further stated that the first executive meeting would be held on March 9 at the Sabha's central office here.

## You will be accountable

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, K C Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh, and all general secretaries and in-charges in various states. At the meeting, Kharge also flagged the issue of alleged "voter list manipulation" and claimed that it is happening on a large scale in elections. He noted that Rahul Gandhi also raised a question about this in the Lok Sabha. "All of you will realise that these days the names of our supporters are deleted from the voters list. Or the name is removed and added to the adjacent booth. New names are added by the BJP just before the election. This rigging has to be stopped at all costs," the Congress chief asserted. Kharge pointed out that earlier the Chief Justice was also included in the selection committee of Chief Election Commission (CEC) by the order of the Supreme Court but the CJI was removed from the panel by the Modi government.

"The government does not even trust the impartiality of the Chief Justice of the country. This matter was to be heard in the Supreme Court, but the government announced the new CEC before that. Rahul Ji also said that what is the use of such a selection committee, where you are using Leader of Opposition only for certification?" he said. Kharge also raised the issues of inflation and unemployment, alleging the Modi government has completely failed on that front. He urged the office-bearers to strengthen the organisation.

"It is your responsibility to strengthen the organisation from state headquarters to booth as soon as possible. You will have to go to the booth yourself for this work, work hard, interact with the workers. Our Frontals - Cells will have to be involved. I especially want to say about the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), that they are an important part of us, involve them too in organisation building," Kharge said.

"If you yourself go to the booth, division, block, district, state level at the grassroots level, then you will be able to add new people there. You will be able to bring trustworthy and ideologically strong people with you. You can bring forward those people who can be very useful for the party but did not get a chance," he said.

Kharge called for promoting those people who are committed to the ideology of the Congress and "stand with us like a rock even in adverse circumstances".

Many times, to strengthen the party, people are inducted in a hurry, he said, adding that they could be weak in ideology and run away in difficult times. Using a Hindi proverb, he advised the office-bearers to be wary of choosing "imitations over original". In his opening remarks at the meeting, Kharge said Delhi voted for change and lauded the efforts of the state leadership in putting up a good fight despite lack of resources.

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

The Congress chief said the party leaders must raise issues of public interest in the next five years and strive to make the organisation emerge as the principal opposition party in Delhi. Hitting out at the government, he said the prime minister failed to stop the insult of Indians deported from the USA.

"Despite Modi ji's visit, America is sending back Indian citizens handcuffed as before. Vegetarians were given non-vegetarian food. Our government also failed to protest this insult properly," Kharge alleged. (PTI)



## Pomp and gaiety captivate spirit and mind

# Ali-Aye-Ligang celebration in state boasts preservation of culture, tradition

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Feb 19:** Ali-Aye-Ligang, the traditional Mising seed & fruit-planting & sowing festival that falls on the first Wednesday of the month of Fagun in Hindu calendar, was celebrated in Mising populated areas across the district on Wednesday with warmth and festivities.

The festival of Ali (seeds), Aye (fruits) and Ligang (sowing) was celebrated by the Mising community in Sivasagar town in Kangkan Nagar and in Taxi Mothadung Mising Community Hall, in Desangmukh Aphala, Majorbari, and in Panidihing Chitalia, Katori and Dolopa Mising goan the festival was inaugurated by elderly people of the villages by performing seed sowing rites in the morning followed by Gumrag dance and festivities.

In Taxi Mothadung, Rajen Mili, teacher and social activist, in his speech greeted all the people on the occasion of the traditional Ali-Aye-Ligang. He urged the government to declare a holiday on Ali-Aye-Ligang festival in all districts and also as restricted holiday in the Central government offices in Assam as the Mising population is spread across the state, not just in 11 districts.

**Our Dibrugarh Correspondent adds:** In Dibrugarh Ali-Aye-Ligang was celebrated with traditional fervor at DHSK College in Dibrugarh on Wednesday. This year, for the first time, the Assam



Government declared a full holiday on February 19, across 11 districts—Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Majuli, Charaideo, and Biswanath—to honor the festival.

The event at DHSK College was organised by Mising students in collaboration with the department of Political Science and the Centre for Tribal Development and Research Centre, DHSK College.

Festivities commenced with a traditional ritual led by principal SK Saikia, symbolising the ceremonial sowing of paddy seeds, marking the onset of the agricultural season. Saikia expressed his gratitude and emphasised the importance of

preserving and promoting traditional cultures, pledging his support for such noble initiatives.

Lmakhol Doungel, head and associate professor of the department of Political Science, served as the resource person and speaker for the event.

In his insightful address, Doungel highlighted the intrinsic link between cultural identity and traditional customs, urging the youth to actively engage in preserving their heritage.

He highlighted the significance of cultural preservation, urging the youth to actively engage in sustaining their traditions. Doungel remarked, "Identity becomes extinct with the death of customs and cul-

tures; we must live our culture and not let our traditional values and wisdom die with us."

He stressed that cultural promotion and the showcasing of traditional attire should not be the sole responsibility of women but a collective effort.

The festival's highlights included traditional singing, dancing, and feasting. The "Gumrag Soman" dance, performed by young members of the community, captivated attendees with its rhythmic movements and vibrant energy.

The event also featured an essay competition on Ali-Aye-Ligang, with prizes awarded by Principal Saikia. The entire programme was coordinated by Nirmali Pegu and Bhaskar Kewed, ensuring a seamless and enriching experience for all participants.

Ali-Aye-Ligang, translating to "sowing of seeds," is a significant festival for the Mising community, marking the beginning of the sowing season.

Celebrated annually on the first Wednesday of the Assamese month of Fagun (February-March), the festival embodies the community's deep-rooted connection to agriculture and nature.

Traditional practices during the festival include the ceremonial sowing of paddy, vibrant dances, and communal feasts featuring delicacies like "Purang Apin" (boiled rice wrapped in special leaves) and

"Porong" (rice beer).

The festival serves as a testament to the Mising people's rich cultural heritage and their commitment to preserving age-old traditions.

**Our Margherita Correspondent adds:** In Margherita, the festival was celebrated on Wednesday with great enthusiasm at Kangkan village lakla jagun.

The Kangkan village lakla is surrounded by Mising community people. They reside in 11 villages with more than 12,000 individuals. The village is 47 kilometres away from Margherita headquarter.

The celebration saw people engaging themselves in traditional dance and song, with young men and women participating in the festival.

Juga Padun organising committee member stated that Ali Aye Ligang has been the largest traditional and agricultural festival of Mising community residing in Assam.

"Every year on the first Wednesday of Phagun of Assamese calendar we celebrate Ali Aye Ligang with great fervour and harmony," Padun stated.

"The festival was celebrated by our forefathers which in Mising language we called it "Abu Tami" and in the coming days we would try to take "Ali Aye Ligang" to world stage. We appeal to all Mising brothers and sisters of Assam to observe it," Padun added.

## AJYCP memo to commissioner in Jagiroad

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, Feb 19:** The Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad (AJYCP) handed over a memorandum signed by its vice-president Jatin Deka and general secretary Dulu Deka to the Jagiroad co district commissioner Biman Das on Wednesday. The memorandum stated that the bridge on the river Kopilee at Jagibhakatgaon on Jagiroad-Morigaon road was inaugurated by the chief minister on February 1 and that the bridge was still not safe to travel.

The memorandum called for signs, large convex mirrors and deployment of traffic control police at designated places to prevent accidents at both ends of the bridge. The memorandum further stated that accidents have already occurred in the area. The AJYCP district advisor Jyotirmoy Goswami along with few members was also present while submitting the memorandum.

## Cachar honours excellence in education at prestigious felicitation ceremony in Silchar



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** The district-level felicitation programme for Best School Management Committee and Mother Group's Award 2024-2025 and the Vidyajalji 2.0 District-Level Award 2024-2025 unfolded in grandeur at the GC College Auditorium, Silchar on Wednesday.

It marked a significant milestone in the district's commitment to education. Organised by Samagra Shiksha, Cachar, the event witnessed the presence of esteemed dignitaries, including Cachar district commissioner Mridul Yadav, additional district commissioner Antara Sen, district mission coordinator & assistant commissioner cum in-charge deputy director of information and public relations Barak Valley Zone, Bonnykha Chetia, and other distinguished guests.

The event was a celebration of the tireless efforts of schools, educators, and community contributors who have played an instrumental role in elevating the educational landscape of Cachar. Addressing the gathering, Yadav emphasised the transformative power of education in driving societal progress. He lauded the relentless dedication of teachers, school management committees, and community members in uplifting educational standards, urging all stakeholders to continue their mission of excellence to ensure quality education and holistic development for every child in the district.

A poignant moment in the ceremony was the speech delivered by Prankishore Deb, a distinguished contributor whose unwavering dedication has revolutionised the infrastructure of 127 government schools in Katigora. With deep emotion, he spoke about his vision and commitment to providing better learning conditions for underprivileged children.

"I firmly believe that the future of our nation lies in the hands of our

children, and it is our collective responsibility to provide them with an environment conducive to learning and growth. Seeing students struggle due to inadequate infrastructure deeply moved me, and I felt the urge to contribute in every possible way. Through the donation of ceiling fans, desks, chairs, and the construction of floors, I wanted to ensure that students could study in comfort, without distractions caused by poor facilities," Deb said.

"Education is not merely about textbooks and exams; it is about shaping young minds to become responsible citizens. If a child sits in a well-equipped classroom, free from discomfort, they can focus on their lessons and dream of a brighter future. My journey of contribution does not end here; I am committed to continuing my support for schools and children in need. I urge all individuals, businesses, and organizations to come forward and play their part in making a difference in the education sector," he added.

His heartfelt words received thunderous applause from the audience, reflecting the deep appreciation for his selfless service to government schools.

Earlier, in his inaugural address the officer in-charge of the programme, Bidyut Deb Choudhury, district programme officer (Community Participation), SSA, Cachar, and regional secretary, Assam State School Education Board, DIV-I, Cachar, highlighted a landmark achievement—the declaration of all schools in Cachar as tobacco-free zones. Stressing the importance of a tobacco-free school environment, he announced a forthcoming signature campaign to gather community pledges for a healthier and more disciplined future for students. He also thanked the community people and contributor who have done selfless service for the education development under Cachar District.

The commitment to education was further reinforced by Ganesh

Harijan, inspector of schools, Cachar, who expressed deep gratitude to retired teachers who, despite concluding their official tenure, continue to serve the noble cause of education. Their selfless dedication has been pivotal in shaping young minds and strengthening the district's academic foundation.

Emphasising the role of collective efforts, Bibhas Deb, principal of GC College, reminded the audience that educational institutions were not merely built by infrastructure but by the dedication of teachers, the enthusiasm of students, and the commitment of school management committees. He urged all stakeholders to continue working together to create a progressive and inclusive education system in Cachar.

The event concluded on a high note, with the district commissioner Yadav presented awards and felicitations to outstanding school management committees and mother groups who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to educational welfare. The initiative not only honored excellence but also served as an inspiration for others to contribute toward enhancing the education system in Cachar.

It is to be mentioned here that Cachar honored 227 School Management Committees (SMCs) and Mother Groups for their outstanding contributions to school development. Representing each educational cluster in the district, these groups have played a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of education at the grassroots level. Their dedication and commitment were recognized in a special ceremony that underscored the significance of collective efforts in shaping a brighter future for students.

As part of the Vidyajalji 2.0 initiative—a government-driven programme that encouraged voluntary contributions to schools—the district also acknowledged the most significant contributors registered on the Vidyajalji portal. The Top Three Asset Contributors who were felicitated for their remarkable support to schools are minister of food, public distribution & consumer affairs, mines and minerals, Barak Valley Development Kaushik Rai, MLA Udharbond, Mihir Kanti Shome, and Pran Kishore Deb. Their generosity has made a tangible impact on the development of educational institutions, ensuring better resources and facilities for students.

## Journalists receive CM's gift

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAOON/KOKRAJHAR, Feb 19:** The journalists who were recognised by Directorate of information & public relation (DIPRO), have been officially presented the chief minister's gift packages by district commissioner Debashis Sarma at his conference hall on Wednesday.

The meeting was chaired by district commissioner Debashis Sarma, IAS. The meeting discussed about the responsibility of journalists towards the society, their roles as the forth pillar of democracy and the importance of sending true information to the people. He requested them to cooperate in government programmes. Several senior journalists of the district expressed their views on various issues of journalism, especially the relevance and impact of digital journalism. After the function, the district commis-

sioner distributed gift packages to the officially recognised journalists of various media houses in the district. The meeting was attended by Dipali Tamuli, Bhaskar Jyoti Bora and other employees of the district information and public relations office.

A total of 26 government-recognized journalists from Kokrajhar district were honored with a Gift of Goodwill sent by Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

In a ceremonial event held at the district commissioner's conference hall on Wednesday, Kokrajhar district commissioner Masanda Magdalin Pertin presented the goodwill gifts on behalf of the chief minister amongst the journalists.

The initiative was initiated by the information & public relations department, aimed to acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of journalists in the district.

## 500 BPF workers Join UPPL

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 19:** Altogether 500 BPF party workers joined UPPL in a joining ceremony organised by the Bhergaon Block UPPL on Wednesday.

The event, held in the 32 No Bhergaon constituency saw the presence of former Assam Cabinet minister Chandan Brahma.

New members include Tulosa Devi, vice president of the Central Women Cell. Speaking at the event, Daobaisa Boro, EM, expressed confidence that the UPPL would return to power in BTR in 2025. He credited Pramod Boro, UPPL president and BTR CEM, for restoring peace and driving development in the region.

Boro further stated that many leaders from BPF, other political parties, and non-political organisations are joining UPPL, strengthening the party's position ahead of the upcoming elections.

## Assam movement martyr remembered

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Feb 19:** The 43rd Swahid Divas of Sardar Chandan Singh who made the supreme sacrifice of his life for the mother land in the police firing during the Assam movement in the year 1983 was observed at Hatipara of Nagaon district on Friday last here.

The people of Hatipara and its neighbouring areas wholeheartedly attended the event. He was the 1st martyr of Borkola area among 3 martyrs including Sardar Karam Singh and Baliram Mazumdar.

## Physical and assessment camp for differently abled

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Feb 19:** Gram Vikas Parishad, Rangulu, a pioneer NGO of the district, is going to organise a physical as well as assessment camp for the differently abled persons to provide fittings, aids and appliances on February 25 next.

The camp scheduled to be held under financial assistance of AL-IMCO, Guwahati at the office premises of Gram Vikas Parishad, Rangulu.

In a press note, the NGO urged the intended participants to bring required documents like UDID card, Ration card and Aadhar card along with them to the camp.

## NABARD launches solar based DRE project in Nagaon district

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Feb 19:** NABARD Assam RO has successfully launched a pilot FSPF project on 'Effectiveness of solar based Decentralised Renewable Energy (DRE) technologies in strengthening the Fishery Value Chain (FVC) in Nagaon on Wednesday.

As a part of Natural Resources Management, NABARD has been supporting the implementation of various projects like Integrated Watershed Development with Climate Proofing Interventions (IWDCPIs), Integrated Tribal Development Programmes (ITDPs), UPNRM & Climate Change Projects, etc. across India.

The project would be implemented under convergence mode along with GiZ-India & Selco Foundation with Kalong Kapili as the implementing agency.

The project was ceremonially launched and inaugurated at Kaliabor on Tuesday last, jointly by CGM-NABARD, Loken Das and the Kaliabor co-district commissioner, Liza Talukdar, in presence of DGM-NABARD, Sankar Das, GIZ representatives Nilanjana Ghose and Anuj Xess, programme manager of Selco Foundation Prashanth Bharadwaj, DDM-NABARD, Rajendar Perma, DFDO, Himangshu Talukdar, Kalong Kapili Director Jyotish Talukdar.

Speaking on the occasion, the CGM-NABARD, Loken Das suggested that under the project, the identified 10 Model Fish Farms (MFFs) would be provided with DRE equipments viz Solar pump & solar

erator (for production enhancement) and Solar Dryer & Solar Freezer (for processing activities). Each of these 10 MFFs would cater to nearby fish farmers for the purpose of demonstration of the DRE technology, training and capacity building. Accordingly, over 210 beneficiaries would be supported under the project.

DGM-NABARD Sankar Das also suggested that the pilot has been devised with various objectives like dissemination of effectiveness of DRE technologies in enhancing the stocking density and reducing the mass mortality during the culture period, reducing the over-dependence on fossil fuels, mitigating the damage to environment and enhancing the income levels of fish farmers etc.

Besides, DM-NABARD Rajendar Perna informed the participants that the project has been formulated for implementation in Nagaon as there are more than 70,000 fish farmers in the district and the district tops the production of fish and fish seeds in the state. The replacement of fossils with renewables would also support in enhancing the income levels of fish farmers, in addition to mitigating the climate impact.

During the event, the participants were also guided by the DFDO, GIZ-India and Selco Foundation representatives.

During the closing session, the DRE equipments were ceremonially distributed to each of the identified Model Fish Farmers.

## Cheque of ₹ 1 lakh to the wife of deceased

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, Feb 19:** The Morigaon district commissioner Devashis Sarma on Wednesday handed over a cheque of ₹ 1 lakh to the bereaved family member of Ajay Das, a private driver from Shuklad Sarubarri village in Morigaon. He passed away on February 11 after prolonged illness. His wife, 10-year-old and 6-year-old daughters and mother were left helpless after his death. The family members of the deceased met the chief minister during the Cabinet meeting held in the district on February 16 and requested for financial assistance. The chief minister assured the family of assistance and accordingly, Morigaon district commissioner Devashis Sharma handed over a cheque of ₹ 1 lakh to the wife of the deceased Maina Das on Wednesday.

## Thieves go berserk in West KA, steal valuables, peace

**HT Correspondent**

**DONGKAMUKAM, Feb 19:** Rising theft in certain rural areas of West Karbi Anglong has raised grave concern among conscious citizens of the district. In certain areas people are spending sleepless night looking after their belongings. When people do vigil in particular village in night then it seems they select the other village for their activities. Villagers suspected that there might be some villagers are acting as informers in the group. When enquired by this reporter about information given to the Police so far they refused to reveal.

## Season adds vibrancy to 51st Karbi Youth Festival

# Phoenix TD wins Karbi Rap Star Season 6

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Feb 19:** Phoenix TD has won the Karbi Rap Star Season 6, the grand finale which was held on the evening of February 17, here at Ru Semson Sing Ingti Stage, KPH Taralango.

Adding vibrant colours to the 51st Karbi Youth Festival from February 15 to 19, organised by Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), the Karbi Rap Society (KRS) in collaboration with Karbi Cultural Society and ArniKeme Production and media partnered with The Hills Times, English daily newspaper organised the Karbi Rap Star Season 6.

The grand finale featured five contestants. They are Phoenix TD, Stan Gun, M.S. Killer, X-Carbee Boy, and Lyndokpo 7.t.7. Among them, Phoenix TD emerged as the winner, with MS Killer as the 1st runner-up and Lyndokpo 7.t.7 as the 2nd runner-up. The competition was judged by a renowned

panel consisting of Inglong Aso, Kiri Hanjang Dili, and Bonghom Rapper.

The semi-final and grand finale were inaugurated by Executive Member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Madhuram Lekhe. Distinguished guests, including Mohon Tisso, agriculture board chairman; Bidasing Teron, political secretary to the CEM, KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang and P Ratane, Khasi Student leader have attended the opening ceremony. Sarklim Terang, president of Karbi Youth Organisation (KYO) distributed the prizes, trophies and certificates to the winners.

General secretary, KRS, Christin Teron (Diphu City Rap) stated that the Karbi Rap Star Season 6 was a resounding success with many contestants in the competition. He hoped the event to be a bigger one in the days to come and thanked the sponsors and the media partners for their support.





## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Do exactly what you would do if you felt most secure — Meister Eckhart*

## Deciding fate of Ukraine

Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has already achieved a very big objective of his diplomacy — isolating Europe from the United States. Now with the US President's latest statement from his clubhouse, Donald Trump seems to have dumped the traditional diplomatic tie up between Western Europe and America. India must take lesson — don't trust your allies. For fighting your war and for your existence, pursue relentlessly national military capabilities. Today, America might be paying India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi compliments - tomorrow they might just as well supply the most lethal weapons to Pakistan to teach a lesson. The world is now a sort of place, very much like a state of nature of Rousseau. In pursuit of its avowed aim of bringing the Ukraine war to an immediate end, America is going alone to the negotiating table with Russia, without taking the Europeans. This has given the Europeans the jolt they badly needed. After all, they had outsourced their defence to the Americans and now the chickens are coming home to roost. Donald Trump has now accused Ukraine of having started the war, and said that after three years it is still fighting the war instead of reaching some 'deal' with the Russian president Putin. The American position must be under close examination of the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, and he must be feeling happy that he might also reach a deal with Trump isolating Taiwan.

If the war comes to end on the basis of present negotiating stance of the principal interlocutors (Russia and America), this will usher in a completely new world order. This will establish might is right rather than the former global regime which was based on rule of law and respect for sovereignty of nation states, whatever might be its limitations. While the fate of Ukraine is being decided at the negotiations hosted by Saudi Arabia, the country itself is absent and far away from any of the talks. Russia is seeking to bamboozle its viewpoint in the negotiations, if only for the vanity of the new US president. Donald Trump had promised to end the Ukraine war immediately on resuming office. The high representatives of the United States and Russia met in the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh on Monday and set up committees for follow up negotiations. However, Russian ambassador to the UN, Vasili Nebenzha, has laid out conditions which are blatantly unacceptable to Ukraine.

His first condition is that the European Union and United Kingdom should have nothing to do with the talks for ending war in Ukraine. The Russian envoy has stated that the EU and UK have an attitude of 'primitive Russophobia' and therefore could not be part of any talks. Russia is inviting that Ukraine should be 'demilitarised' and should not be part of NATO alliance. This was not acceptable to Ukraine or the European Union. But Trump has already said that Ukraine President should forget about his NATO membership. Any agreement accepting Russian conditions would not be acceptable to Ukraine or its present-day allies, namely, EU and UK. America has gone out of the way to force an agreement to end the war principally on its own calculations and diplomatic targets.

## British Prime Minister is staking lives at risk by committing troops to Ukraine

By: Ben Chacko

The geopolitics of Europe are moving. The least we should demand of our elected representatives in Parliament is a frank discussion of that.

We have been denied one. When Russia launched its illegal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Labour MPs who signed a Stop the War Coalition statement condemning that invasion, but pointing to the role NATO expansion to Russia's borders had played in provoking it, were ordered to remove their names or lose the Labour whip.

Keir Starmer is the most intolerant Labour leader in the party's history: authoritarian crack-downs on any member or MP who dares to differ with him are no novelty. But given the incalculable stakes when it comes to brinkmanship with nuclear-armed states, we should see refusal to countenance discussion on war and peace as especially dangerous.

In contrast to controversies of the past — from Suez to Iraq — there has been almost no debate in Parliament or Establishment media about the Ukraine war or the wisdom or otherwise of our government's approach to it.

Not only did Starmer silence by dictat, immediately, those MPs who pointed out (alongside die-hard US imperialists like Henry Kissinger) that NATO policy over the past decade had been widely predicted to provoke a violent Russian reaction.

The ruling-class consensus suffocated the media: in the first week of the war, BBC Question Time presenter Fiona Bruce shut down an audience member who asked the panel whether NATO expansion might have provoked the invasion, and panel members were not permitted to answer. It should be possible to disagree on the causes of the Ukraine war without endorsing such censorship.

By making disagreement treasonous, governments have been given carte blanche to escalate the war without having to persuade the public of their cause.

When — because the Joe

Biden administration gave permission, since the White House always held a veto over our foreign policy that is denied to British opinion — the Labour government gave the green light to Ukraine firing missiles at targets inside Russian territory, it was not even announced in Parliament, nor raised until independent MP Jeremy Corbyn did so. Yet the risks of retaliation are obvious. Parliament failed to hold government to account by making ministers explain themselves.

This silence on alternative foreign policy has never applied in the United States. Its ruling class don't hesitate to assess and reassess their strategic approach. Washington never cared about Ukraine, as Britain's peace movement warned from the start.

The war lobby have not only prolonged the agony. Those who cried treachery at calls for dialogue should face the reality: if Boris Johnson had not scuppered the April 2022 peace deal on offer in Istanbul, Ukraine would be far better off now.

Hundreds of thousands of dead people would still be alive. And Russia had not at that stage made expansionist territorial claims on the scale it has done since, claims the US is now happy to accept as part of a great power carve-up.

Europe is left high and dry. Starmer's response is to see how far we can pursue US policy without the US: hence the proposal to deploy British troops to Ukraine, though the huge military build-up by Western powers on Russia's borders was a cause of the war, not a deterrent.

Even Starmer states openly that no such plan will work without backing from the United States, which has said it will not offer support to a European deployment in Ukraine nor come to its aid if it is attacked.

Starmer is putting Britain at risk of conflict with a nuclear power, and true to form, made his offer to foreign governments without the courtesy of a nod to Parliament. Lives should not be risked so carelessly, and British belligerence has done nothing but harm to date. (IPA Service)

## Reactions to influencer Ranveer Allahabadi's programme are bizarre

SOCIAL media influencer Ranveer Allahabadi's question to a contestant on the online show 'India's Got Latent' has attracted not only public outrage, but systematic response from various State authorities. By mid-February, the Maharashtra Cyber Department had filed a First Information Report ('FIR') against Allahabadi, comedian Samay Raina, and other artists from the show for allegedly creating obscene content. Soon after, sitting chief ministers and a debate in a parliamentary standing committee pushed for constitutional restrictions on free speech, keeping in mind the malicious effects of such expression on Indian society.

A closer reading of the political reaction and the state machinery's behaviour towards Allahabadi's case reveals certain peculiar tendencies of societies where majoritarian forces are potent. Society's popular impulses creep into the institutions of the State and come to be presented as legal truth. This form of proscription of free speech generally arises when the social majority is incapable of accepting certain forms of practice that have historically haunted the institution of the State. The state and its institutions have, from time to time, criminalised certain acts that do not conform to a majoritarian logic. However, within the same realm of law, the State has failed to criminalise other acts of violence which bear significance in preserving majoritarian institutions.

In India, several laws govern obscenity when it appears on electronic or digital platforms. Section 294 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita criminalises the sale, display, or transmission of obscene material, including in electronic form, and Section 67 of the Information Technology Act mirrors the BNS's definition of obscenity, while prescribing a harsher punishment.

Obscenity jurisprudence has undergone a transition over the years - from the infamous five-judge bench decision of the Supreme Court in Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra (1964), where it used the 'Hicklin test' to uphold a ban on D.H. Lawrence's novel 'Lady Chatterley's Lover', to its more recent verdict in Aavek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal (2014), where it adopted the 'community standards' test. Contrasted to the more conservative position in Udeshi, the Court ruled in Aavek Sarkar that works should not be judged in isolation but rather as a whole in order to prevent arbitrary conclusions. The crucial outcome of this was that not all potentially offensive material is obscene.

India's jurisprudential history on free speech is marked by two distinct streams. One stream conveys the impression that citizens are prone to violence and cannot be trusted with a great measure of freedom. Thus, for their own good, the State should protect citizens from the malignant influences of speech. Another stream acknowledges citizens as conscientious beings capable of living principled lives, such that rights reinforce the conditions to realise their full potential. Hence, it is not for the State to impose its visions of ideal citizens by curb-



ing what they can see, speak, or hear. In these matters, the Court has, over time, insisted upon a close degree of proximity between speech and disorder.

The Supreme Court is set to hear Allahabadi's plea to quash the multiple pending FIRs against him on Thursday, February 21, 2025. It is to be seen whether it will be able to stand by its own concretely established principles in Aavek Sarkar.

Lost amidst the noise around Allahabadi was a report published by India Hate Lab, a Washington-based organisation, which found a 74% increase in anti-minority hate speech in India in 2024. The report recorded 1000 incidents of hate speech, a third of which were recorded in the run up to India's general elections. Compared to this, 668 hate speech incidents had been recorded in 2023.

The report underlined that 80% of the hate speech occurred in states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign speech in Rajasthan's Banswara on April 21, 2024, marking an inflection point. Notably, the report also highlighted the ongoing demolition drive conducted by state machinery, particularly targeting Muslims and the row on the Hijab ban in educational institutions in Karnataka when the BJP was in power. While Allahabadi's unpleasant humour continues to foreshadow the country's television screens and public forums, a striking record of hate speech in a democratic country failed to solicit critical political engagement.

The Allahabadi incident underscores a perceived intent to suppress expressions that do not necessarily align with the majoritarian construction of an ideal society. On February 14, 2025, the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, a far-right Hindu majoritarian group proposed a form of parallel policing 'such elements' by essentially using a reciprocal threat of mutilating Allahabadi. All this signifies that legitimacy accorded through majoritarian endorsement is being institutionalised due to its performative nature and its steady integration into the insti-

tutions of the State.

The question that arises is this: how does one bridge the gap between acts of violence that enjoy legal immunity through public authorisation and individual claims that do not necessarily adhere to majoritarian principles?

Unsuspectingly, the recent judgement by the Chhattisgarh High Court which refused to convict a person accused of marital rape provides certain answers.

On February 13, 2025, the Court noted that Section 377 of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code ('IPC'), which provides punishment for 'unnatural offences', was repugnant to Exception 2 of Section 375 of the IPC, also termed the 'marital rape exception'. The exception permits non-consensual sexual intercourse or acts by a man with his wife, the wife not being under eighteen years of age. In December 2017, the victim provided a

declaration stating that forceful intercourse by the husband had led to her illness, shortly before succumbing to her injury.

In 2022, the Delhi High Court had delivered a split verdict on the constitutionality of the Exception. Justice Rajiv Shukhder found the law unconstitutional, stating that the right to withdraw consent forms the core of women's right to life and liberty. However, Justice Hari Shankar relegated the issue to the legislature noting that "requires consideration of various aspects including social, cultural and legal." Justice Shankar's argument echoed the State's firm position on the Exception, which views it closely tied to sanctity of the institution of marriage. In the Delhi High Court, the government argued that law, if decriminalised, would be used by "unhappy wives" to harass husbands.

The State's position, which is also the position of certain judges, underscores a regressive and patriarchal conception of agency within marriage. Equating 'consent for marriage' with 'consent for sexual intercourse' automatically undermines bodily autonomy, freedom, and the fundamental right to privacy. If courts continue to permit the revoking of bodily autonomy as a means to

preserve the sanctity of marriage, it would be a step towards constitutional chaos.

Similar to Allahabadi's case, the marital rape exception captures profoundly the contestation between agency and the caprice of collective will, with the Court as a final arbiter. The State's logic, which is backed by a majoritarian and populist value system that pushes to preserve marriage, due to its central position in Indian society, provokes fundamental concerns about the 'quality' of the society that these institutions reinforce and their adherence to the Constitution's transformative vision of a democratic polity.

The Constitution offers a site for self-determination, enabling individuals to realise their potential as free members of the polity. It recognises group rights and individual freedom, balancing their coexistence. While one set of rights seeks to uphold the socio-cultural practices of a community, the other insists on individual autonomy and freedom of choice. The fundamental guiding principle is marked by equality among all individuals and liberty from all structures of domination and discrimination. Therefore, amidst the clash between individual autonomy and collective will, where the constitutional commitment to dismantle discriminatory practices endorsed by social institutions gets disrupted, the agency of the citizens should prevail.

Allahabadi's remarks, expressed in a corner of the internet, trembled both the virtual and physical world equally on issues ranging from morality to free speech and censorship. But the Chhattisgarh High Court's verdict could not solicit a single prime-time discussion or parliamentary debate on marital rape.

In 1984, Latvian political theorist Judith Shklar argued that the only defensible meaning of liberalism was a system that could secure the political condition necessary for every adult to exercise the freedom to make as many effective decisions about any aspect of their life without fear or favour as possible. Liberalism's significance is also grounded on the continuous presence of 'fear' that takes the shape of cruelty in our societies. Shklar presents cruelty as society's primary flaw. The hubris of this trait is carried by the social actors to the institutions of the State as well. The outcome is a system where the cruelty of the punishment that is inflicted on an individual or a group does not necessarily match the cruelty of the act concerned.

This is the problem of justice that societies run by majoritarian forces encounter. Both Allahabadi's case and the Chhattisgarh High Court's decision on marital rape exception show that the State and its institutions have actively endorsed a colonial attitude that assumes Indians are unable to respond to speech in a reasoned and rational manner. At the same time, when social institutions empowered by majoritarian lobbies and impulses perpetuate violence, the State revokes its protectionist stance. The State and its institutions essentially reinforce the appropriation of hierarchies as legal truths. (IPA Service)

## Trump's 'America First' doctrine: A catalyst for global turmoil

By: Dipak Kurmi

From the moment Donald Trump took office in 2017, his foreign and domestic policies have been marked by bold, sometimes controversial moves, but it is his stance on climate change and international relations that has shaped some of his most defining decisions. His first executive order, signaling the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, encapsulated his administration's disregard for global environmental commitments. This decision came despite mounting evidence of climate disruptions in the U.S. since his campaign, with disastrous consequences unfolding across the country in the years that followed.

The year 2024 was marked as the deadliest hurricane season in the continental U.S. since 2005, with Hurricanes Beryl and Milton accounting for at least 335 human deaths. The destruction caused by these storms left thousands without homes and power, compounding the dire consequences of the Trump administration's climate policies. Just as the nation faced the aftermath of these hurricanes, a new set of natural disasters threatened the country in 2025. Unprecedented snowfall in the central and eastern U.S. forced the relocation of Trump's second term inauguration indoors, while catastrophic wildfires ravaged Los Angeles. The combination of the Santa Ana winds and extreme dryness in California created the perfect conditions for a devastating fire that lasted for ten days, killing at least 25 people, destroying more than 15,000 structures, and displacing tens of thousands of residents, including Hollywood celebrities.

The fire, exacerbated by climate change-induced conditions, symbolized the broader struggles the U.S. was facing under a political system that appeared to be unwilling to confront the undeniable reality of a warming planet. Climate experts pointed to the interaction between La Nina and El Nino, contributing to the dramatic weather patterns that would make the southern part of the country drier than ever before. With winds reaching speeds of up to 120 kilometers per hour, efforts to control

the fires proved nearly impossible, further highlighting the devastating consequences of the administration's environmental stance.

Trump's pursuit of an "America First" agenda extended beyond climate policy and into global trade. He has imposed tariffs on goods from countries like Canada, Mexico, China, and Brazil, challenging global trade dynamics and potentially triggering a global trade war. This protectionist approach has sparked tension with other nations, particularly developing countries, who are now forced to reckon with shifting trade policies that could hamper their economic growth.

At home, Trump has launched efforts to shrink the federal workforce, offering two million federal workers the option to resign with pay through September 2025. This move is in line with his goal of cutting the size of government, although it also serves to further politicize the federal apparatus by pushing out those who do not align with his political ideology. Such actions signal a president testing the boundaries of executive power, seeking to exert unprecedented control over the functioning of the government.

Meanwhile, Trump's rhetoric on immigration has become increasingly aggressive. The deportation of illegal immigrants has accelerated under his administration, with even religious places, such as Sikh Gurudwaras in New York and New Jersey, being searched in an attempt to root out undocumented immigrants. The administration has also made plans to house some of these immigrants in Guantanamo Bay, effectively sidelining their access to legal rights and social services. These actions raise troubling questions about the erosion of civil liberties and the targeting of vulnerable populations based on political ideology.

In terms of geopolitics, Trump has proposed highly controversial measures aimed at bolstering U.S. dominance over strategic global resources. His desire to bring Canada into the U.S. fold as the 51st state is rooted in his belief that the U.S. would be more secure with a stronger foothold on its northern border. Additionally, Trump has set his sights on the Panama Canal and Greenland, hoping to secure these strategic



territories to counter China's growing influence in Latin America and the Arctic. The Panama Canal, a crucial international trade route, has become a point of contention in this global chess game, especially as China continues to make inroads in securing trade relationships with Latin American nations.

Equally concerning is Trump's interest in Greenland, a territory that holds immense strategic and economic value. The U.S. has a long history with Greenland, stretching back to the Cold War when the U.S. military attempted to establish nuclear missile bases there. While these plans never fully materialized, the U.S. left behind nuclear waste and diesel fuel in Greenland's ice, and climate change is now bringing those contaminants to the surface. The Trump administration sees Greenland's rare earth and critical mineral deposits as key to countering China's dominance in the global minerals market. Additionally, the southern mountains of Greenland are rich in gold, further fueling Trump's interest in acquiring the territory. However, this move, if realized, could have devastating environmental consequences for both Greenland's fragile ecosystem and the broader global climate.

Equally concerning is the ongoing degradation of the Panama Canal, a vital global trade artery. Climate change, coupled with widespread deforestation in the Amazon, has significantly depleted the water levels in the Gatun Lake, which is responsible for raising ships to the necessary height to pass through the canal. As a result, the Panama Canal's efficiency has been drastically reduced, and fewer ships are able to navigate the route. Despite this, Trump's focus remains on controlling the canal, which could exacerbate the environmental issues surrounding it.

On the domestic front, the Trump administration's environmental policies have taken an increasingly regressive turn. The president has withdrawn from the Paris Climate Agreement for the second time, opting instead to pursue energy self-sufficiency through domestic drilling and oil exploration. The National Energy Emergency declared by Trump has allowed the suspension of environmental regulations, with plans to expand mining projects and lift restrictions on drilling in sensitive areas, including the Polar Bear Wildlife Sanctuary in Alaska. These decisions have sparked widespread concern about their po-

tential to accelerate climate change, particularly through the disruption of wildlife habitats and the rapid melting of the Arctic ice.

The consequences of Trump's climate policies are not confined to the U.S. alone. The world is already witnessing the devastating effects of climate change, with the World Meteorological Organization reporting a 1.55-degree Celsius rise in global temperatures over the preindustrial period. Celeste Saulo, the WMO Secretary-General, has called for urgent action to curb climate change, emphasizing the need for a rapid transition to renewable energy. Yet, under Trump's leadership, the U.S. continues to prioritize fossil fuel interests over climate action, making it increasingly difficult for the country to meet its international commitments to combat global warming.

Trump's agenda to bring manufacturing back to the U.S. faces significant challenges, particularly in the face of growing trade tensions, environmental degradation, and a shrinking labor force. His policies, which have sought to reshape the global trade order and curtail immigration, may prove unsustainable in the long run. As the world grapples with unprecedented climate disruptions, Trump's actions increasingly appear to be at odds with the urgent need for global cooperation on climate change and sustainable development.

The Trump administration's approach to climate change, global strategy, and trade is not just reshaping the U.S. but is also sending shockwaves across the globe. While his policies continue to alienate allies and provoke conflict, the full impact of his decisions will only become clear in the years to come. As the world faces the mounting consequences of climate change, the United States' retreat from global leadership and environmental responsibility may leave a lasting and dangerous legacy. Whether these actions will prove successful in the long term, or whether they will accelerate the decline of America's global standing, remains uncertain. One thing is clear: the stakes for the future of the planet are higher than ever. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@ipatd.com)



# The threat of mega dams on Assam's ecology

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The northeastern state of Assam, located in the biodiversity-rich Eastern Himalayas, is an ecologically fragile region that has been facing severe environmental challenges. One of the most significant threats to its ecology today is the construction of mega dams. While dams are often promoted as engines of development, providing hydroelectric power, irrigation, and flood control, the reality is more complex. In Assam, the environmental, social, and economic consequences of building large dams have sparked intense debate, with growing concern over the irreversible damage they may cause to the state's ecosystems and communities.

Assam's geographic position makes it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of mega dams. The Brahmaputra River, one of the world's largest and most dynamic river systems, flows through the state, supporting a rich diversity of life and providing livelihoods for millions of people. This river, along with its tributaries, forms the lifeblood of Assam's agricultural economy and natural ecosystems. However, the river is also notorious for its annual flooding, which can be both destructive and beneficial. The delicate balance of this natural system is threatened by the construction of large dams, which alter water flow, sediment transport, and the overall hydrology of the region.

The primary argument in favor of constructing mega dams in Assam and its neighboring states is their potential to generate vast amounts of hydroelectric power. With India's growing energy demands, the government has prioritized hydroelectric projects as part of its strategy for meeting the country's renewable energy goals. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries offer significant hydroelectric potential due to their fast-flowing nature, steep gradients, and consistent water supply from the Himalayan snowmelt and monsoons. Proponents of dams argue that they can provide a clean and renewable energy source, reducing India's dependence on fossil fuels and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

However, the ecological costs of these dams are immense. The construction of large dams requires the submergence of vast areas of land, leading to the destruction of forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats. The Brahmaputra River basin, where many of these dams are proposed, is home to a variety of endemic and endangered species, including the Indian rhinoceros, Bengal tiger, Gangetic dolphin, and various migratory bird species. The loss of habitat due to dam construction threatens the survival of these species, many of which are already under pressure from habitat fragmentation, poaching, and other human activities. Wetlands, which act as critical biodiversity hotspots and natural buffers

against floods, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of dams. When wetlands are submerged or their water supply is altered, the delicate ecosystems they support can collapse, leading to the loss of plant and animal species.

The effects of mega dams on aquatic ecosystems are perhaps the most concerning. Dams disrupt the natural flow of rivers, which has far-reaching consequences for the species that depend on free-flowing water. Fish, in particular, are severely affected by the presence of dams, which block their migratory routes and alter the timing and quantity of water flow. The Brahmaputra River is home to a variety of fish species, many of which undertake long-distance migrations to spawn. These migrations are essential for maintaining healthy fish populations and sustaining the livelihoods of communities that rely on fishing. The construction of dams can prevent fish from reaching their spawning grounds, leading to a decline in fish populations and, ultimately, the collapse of fisheries. This has significant implications not only for biodiversity but also for the food security and economic well-being of local communities.

In addition to disrupting fish migration, dams can also alter the physical characteristics of rivers, such as water temperature, oxygen levels, and sediment transport. The Brahmaputra River carries a large amount of sediment from the Himalayas, which is essential for maintaining the fertility of the floodplains and deltas in Assam. This sediment is deposited during the monsoon season, enriching the soil and supporting agriculture. Dams trap sediment behind their walls, preventing it from reaching downstream areas. Over time, this can lead to a reduction in soil fertility, affecting agricultural productivity and leading to the degradation of ecosystems that depend on nutrient-rich sediments. The reduction in sediment transport also has geomorphological consequences, as the river's ability to shape the landscape is diminished. This can result in increased riverbank erosion downstream, altering the natural flow patterns of the river and causing the displacement of communities living along its banks.

The potential for increased flooding is another significant concern associated with mega dams in Assam. While dams are often touted as a solution to flooding, their actual effectiveness in this regard is debated. Large reservoirs behind dams can store water during periods of heavy rainfall, theoretically reducing the risk of downstream flooding. However, the unpredictability of the monsoon season, combined with the siltation of reservoirs, can limit the effectiveness of dams in controlling floods. In some cases, dam releases during extreme rainfall events can exacerbate flooding downstream, as the sudden release of water adds to already swollen



rivers. This has been a concern for many communities living in flood-prone areas of Assam, who fear that the construction of dams will make flooding more unpredictable and severe.

The social impacts of mega dams in Assam are as significant as the ecological ones. The construction of large dams often involves the displacement of thousands of people, many of whom belong to indigenous and marginalized communities. These communities have a deep connection to their land, which is not only a source of livelihood but also of cultural and spiritual significance. When dams are built, vast areas of land are submerged, forcing people to relocate. The process of displacement is often fraught with difficulties, as resettlement programs are rarely able to provide adequate compensation or alternative livelihoods. Displaced communities face the loss of their homes, agricultural land, and access to natural resources, leading to social and economic marginalization. Moreover, the disruption of traditional ways of life can have profound cultural impacts, as displaced communities are often unable to maintain their cultural practices and social structures in new environments.

The construction of dams also raises concerns about the violation of indigenous rights. Many of the areas targeted for dam construction are inhabited by indigenous communities who have lived in these regions for centuries. These communities have developed sustainable ways of managing natural resources, and their knowledge of the local environment is invaluable for biodiversity conservation.

However, the voices of these communities are often marginalized in the decision-making process surrounding dam construction. The lack of meaningful consultation and participation in these processes has led to widespread protests and resistance from indigenous groups, who see the construction of dams as a violation of their rights to land, resources, and self-determination.

The economic benefits of mega dams are also called into question when considering the long-term costs of environmental degradation and social disruption. While hydroelectric power can provide a source of revenue and electricity, the economic costs of environmental damage, displacement, and the loss of biodiversity are often overlooked. For example, the decline in fisheries due to dams can have significant economic repercussions for communities that rely on fishing for their livelihoods. Similarly, the loss of agricultural productivity due to reduced sediment transport and altered water flow can affect food security and rural economies. The costs of managing increased riverbank erosion, flooding, and other environmental impacts can also place a burden on local governments and communities. In many cases, the economic benefits of dams are concentrated among a small group of stakeholders, while the environmental and social costs are borne by the most vulnerable communities.

In recent years, the construction of mega dams in Assam has sparked widespread protests and opposition from civil society groups, environmentalists, and indigenous communities. One of the most controversial

projects is the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project, which has been the subject of protests for over a decade. The dam, located on the Subansiri River, a major tributary of the Brahmaputra, has faced opposition due to concerns about its environmental and social impacts. Environmentalists have raised alarm over the potential for the dam to disrupt the river's ecology, affect fish migration, and increase the risk of downstream flooding. Indigenous groups, meanwhile, have protested against the lack of consultation and the potential displacement of communities.

The resistance to mega dams in Assam has also been fueled by concerns about the region's seismic vulnerability. The Eastern Himalayas, where many of these dams are being constructed, is a seismically active region, prone to earthquakes. The construction of large dams in this area increases the risk of dam failures in the event of an earthquake. A dam failure could have catastrophic consequences for communities living downstream, leading to loss of life, property, and environmental damage. The seismic risks associated with dam construction have been a key argument for those opposing these projects, as the potential for disaster outweighs the perceived benefits of hydroelectric power.

In light of these concerns, there is growing recognition that alternative approaches to water and energy management are needed in Assam. Rather than relying on large-scale infrastructure projects like mega dams, there is increasing interest in exploring decentralized and community-based solutions. Small-scale, run-of-the-river hydroelectric projects, for example, have been proposed as a more sustainable alternative to mega dams. These projects generate electricity without requiring large reservoirs or significant alterations to river flow, minimizing the environmental and social impacts. Community-managed water systems, which prioritize local knowledge and participation, have also been successful in managing water resources sustainably and equitably.

In essence, the construction of mega dams in Assam poses a significant threat to the state's ecology, biodiversity, and communities. While hydroelectric power offers the promise of renewable energy, the environmental and social costs of these projects are immense. Dams disrupt natural ecosystems, displace vulnerable communities, and increase the risk of environmental disasters. In a region as ecologically and culturally rich as Assam, the consequences of these projects could be devastating. As the debate over mega dams continues, it is essential to prioritize sustainable, community-based solutions that protect both the environment and the people who depend on it. *(The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAM-PROTIK who can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

## The Amazon: A forest shaped by human hands

By: Satyabrata Borah

For centuries, the Amazon rainforest has been regarded as a vast, untouched wilderness, a pristine ecosystem shaped primarily by natural forces. However, recent research has begun to challenge this perception, revealing that ancient human activities played a significant role in shaping the forest's composition and biodiversity. Archaeological evidence suggests that indigenous peoples have been managing and cultivating the Amazon for at least 4,500 years, transforming it into a vast, edible forest. This historical perspective sheds light on how early inhabitants practiced sophisticated forms of agriculture, developing sustainable land management techniques that continue to influence the rainforest today.

The indigenous peoples of the Amazon were not merely passive inhabitants of the forest but active stewards of the land. They practiced various forms of agriculture, including horticulture and permaculture, which allowed them to cultivate a wide range of edible plants. These early farmers selectively planted and nurtured fruit-bearing trees, root crops, and other useful plant species, effectively engineering the landscape to support human communities. Over generations, their practices contributed to the remarkable biodiversity of the Amazon, shaping its ecology in ways that scientists are only now beginning to fully understand.

One of the most striking pieces of evidence for ancient human influence on the Amazon is the presence of Amazonian Dark Earths, or terra preta. These artificially enriched soils, which are found throughout the region, were created by indigenous populations through the deliberate addition of organic matter, charcoal, bone, and other materials. Unlike the naturally poor and acidic soils of the rainforest, terra preta is highly fertile and capable of sustaining agriculture over long periods. This suggests that early inhabitants of the Amazon developed innovative soil management techniques that allowed them to cultivate crops more effectively than previously thought.

The creation of terra preta was not merely a byproduct of human settlement but a deliberate strategy to enhance agricultural productivity. These nutrient-rich soils

remain fertile for centuries, providing a lasting testament to the ingenuity of ancient Amazonian societies. The presence of these soils indicates that the region was home to large, organized communities capable of supporting intensive agriculture. This challenges the long-standing belief that the Amazon's nutrient-poor soils made it unsuitable for large-scale human habitation and complex societies.

The legacy of indigenous land management is still visible in the modern Amazon, where many of the dominant tree species are those that were cultivated by ancient peoples. Studies have shown that fruit-bearing trees, such as Brazil nuts, cacao, and peach palms, are far more common in areas where human activity was historically concentrated. This suggests that the composition of the forest has been influenced by centuries of human selection and cultivation. Rather than being an untouched wilderness, much of the Amazon can be seen as a cultural landscape, shaped by millennia of human interaction.

The traditional view of the Amazon as a pristine ecosystem has long influenced conservation policies and scientific research. However, recognizing the historical role of indigenous peoples in shaping the forest challenges this perspective. It highlights the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge into modern conservation efforts. Many of the sustainable practices developed by ancient Amazonian societies, such as agroforestry and soil enrichment, offer valuable lessons for contemporary land management and climate change mitigation.

The discovery of extensive earthworks, such as geoglyphs and raised fields, further supports the idea that pre-Columbian societies in the Amazon were more complex than previously assumed. These large-scale modifications to the landscape suggest that ancient peoples had sophisticated engineering skills and a deep understanding of their environment. The existence of such structures implies that the Amazon was home to a network of interconnected communities that engaged in coordinated land management practices.

Indigenous knowledge of the Amazon extends beyond agriculture to include a profound understanding of medicinal plants, ecological relationships, and sus-

tainable resource management. Many of the principles used by ancient Amazonian societies align with modern ecological theories, emphasizing biodiversity, resilience, and sustainability. By studying these traditional practices, scientists and conservationists can gain insights into how to maintain the health of the Amazon in the face of deforestation and climate change.

The recognition of the Amazon as a managed landscape also has implications for indigenous land rights. Indigenous communities have long been the stewards of the rainforest, and their traditional practices have played a crucial role in maintaining its biodiversity. Acknowledging their historical contributions reinforces the need to protect their territories and support their continued role in conservation. As deforestation and industrial development threaten the Amazon, empowering indigenous peoples and incorporating their knowledge into environmental policies could be key to preserving the rainforest for future generations.

In addition to its ecological significance, the Amazon's history as a cultivated landscape challenges broader assumptions about human-environment interactions. It demonstrates that humans are not always agents of destruction but can also be creators of sustainable ecosystems. The ability of ancient Amazonian societies to enhance biodiversity rather than diminish it provides an alternative model for how humans can live in harmony with nature.

The implications of this research extend beyond the Amazon itself. It raises important questions about how other so-called "wild" landscapes may have been shaped by human activity in the past. Similar evidence of ancient land management has been found in regions such as the African savannas, North American forests, and Southeast Asian jungles. These findings challenge the notion of untouched wilderness and highlight the deep interconnections between human societies and the natural world.

As scientific understanding of the Amazon's history continues to evolve, it is becoming clear that the region's biodiversity is, in part, a product of human cultivation. This perspective does not diminish the importance of conservation but rather strengthens the case for an approach that recognizes the role of indigenous

peoples as key partners in preserving the rainforest. By valuing traditional ecological knowledge and incorporating it into contemporary conservation strategies, we can build a more sustainable future for the Amazon.

The Amazon rainforest has long been seen as a fragile, untouched ecosystem, vulnerable to human exploitation. However, the growing body of evidence showing the deep historical influence of indigenous peoples suggests that the forest's resilience is partly due to the practices of its ancient inhabitants. Rather than viewing human presence as inherently damaging, this research highlights the potential for sustainable coexistence between people and nature.

The idea that the Amazon was shaped by ancient human activity is not only a scientific revelation but also a call to rethink conservation and land management strategies. Recognizing the legacy of indigenous stewardship offers new ways to address current environmental challenges. By learning from the past, we can develop innovative approaches to protecting the Amazon that work with, rather than against, the traditional knowledge and practices of its indigenous inhabitants.

As the world grapples with the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, the lessons from the Amazon's history are more relevant than ever. The ability of ancient societies to manage the rainforest sustainably for thousands of years suggests that solutions to today's environmental challenges may lie in reviving and adapting traditional land management techniques. Understanding the Amazon as an edible forest, shaped by generations of human care, opens new possibilities for conservation, agriculture, and ecological restoration.

The Amazon rainforest is not merely a relic of nature untouched by human hands but a living testament to the ingenuity and resilience of its indigenous peoples. Their knowledge and practices have left an enduring mark on the landscape, one that continues to support biodiversity and sustain life in one of the most important ecosystems on Earth. As we move forward, embracing this historical perspective can help guide efforts to preserve the Amazon and ensure that its legacy of sustainable management endures for generations to come.

## Is the spring season dying in India?

By: Akshat Sangomla

The daytime and nighttime temperatures are ranging much higher-than-normal in many regions across India, making it feel like a vanishing spring season, an early onset of the summer season and even heat waves are on the offing.

The higher-than-normal temperature rise is happening despite an ongoing La Nina phenomenon in the equatorial Pacific Ocean which generally causes colder winter and spring seasons in India as it does across many other regions.

The phenomenon is also occurring on the heels of the warmest January month on record in 2025 across the world with a temperature anomaly of 1.75°C above the pre industrial (1850-1900) average for the month.

Between February 9 and February 10 there was a sudden rise in day time temperatures by 2°C in northwest and central India, according to a press release by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Current day time temperatures are above normal by 3-4°C in many parts of northwest and central India and by 2°C in the northern parts of peninsular and eastern India, according to IMD. Maximum temperatures over southern India are already in the range of 30-35°C, with the highest of 36.6°C recorded in Kalaburagi in north interior Karnataka.

Additionally, night time temperatures in the same period increased by 2-4°C over most regions of Maharashtra and some regions of Gujarat, west Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, southwest Madhya Pradesh, west Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Yanam.

This heralds a sudden shift to spring time climate over these regions of the country. The immediate reason for this rise in day time and night time temperatures is a warm air mass sitting over Eurasia and China, according to Raghu Murtugudde, professor of climate studies at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay and emeritus professor at the University of Maryland.

"The air mass is partially blowing in but the disorganised and weak winds in general are not able to provide any relief," Murtugudde told Down To Earth (DTE). The day time, night time and mean temperatures have been higher-than-normal all through the winter month of January as well.

"The average maximum (day time), average minimum (night time) and mean temperature for the country as a whole during January 2025 were 25.53°C, 12.51°C and 19.02°C respectively, against the normal of 24.61°C, 11.46°C and 18.04°C based on data of 1991-2020," as per IMD.

"Thus, the average maximum, average minimum and mean temperature were above normal with departure from normal of 0.92°C, 1.04°C and 0.98°C respectively for the country as a whole," IMD added.

The mean temperature anomaly over India for January was the second highest since 1901 after 1921 and the average min-

imum temperature was fifth highest since 1901, according to the monthly climate summary for January by IMD. Specifically, over east and north east India the average minimum temperature was second highest since 1901.

The monthly anomalies for minimum and mean temperatures in January 2024 were 0.97°C and 0.51°C, respectively, while the anomaly for maximum temperature was near normal, according to data from the IMD.

During January 2024, an El Nino phenomenon was present in the equatorial Pacific Ocean when generally warmer-than-normal temperatures are observed over India. In January 2025 the spike in temperatures has been observed while a La Nina phenomenon is underway when generally cooler-than-normal temperatures prevail over India.

This shows that the impact of global warming from the emissions of the greenhouse gases, mainly from the burning of fossil fuels, has overshadowed the influence of natural cycles of temperature variations such as the two phases (El Nino and La Nina) of the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomenon.

The trend of higher-than-average monthly and daily minimum temperatures has been around for the past year or so. In 2024, 11 of the 12 months witnessed higher than normal night time temperatures.

Until around June 2024, the El Nino phenomenon was prevalent and the La Nina started off only in December, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the United States.

The average minimum and mean temperature anomalies in March 2024 were not as high as in January and February 2024, showing decreasing gap between the average temperatures in these months.

According to a research paper published in October 2023 in the journal npj Climate and Atmospheric Science, there was a positive trend of increasing temperatures by 0.1°C-0.3°C per decade in north west, north east and north central India for the period of March to May from 1980-2020.

From January 2024 to January 2025, the difference in temperature anomaly for minimum temperature was 0.07°C while the difference in temperature anomaly for mean temperature for the month was a staggering 0.47°C.

Some experts say that the current rising temperature trend doesn't have anything to do with the La Nina and that it may not even be prudent to call the ongoing phenomenon in the equatorial Pacific Ocean a La Nina, when cooler-than-normal temperatures prevail all over the region.

"We are a bit careless in calling the pattern a La Nina especially since it's warm in parts of the eastern equatorial Pacific. The Arabian Sea is cool in the west and warm in the east but the Bay of Bengal is very warm all over. So, this has nothing to do with La Nina," Murtugudde told DTE. *(Courtesy: Down To Earth)*



## Trump's Labour Department pick has union support

**NEW YORK, Feb 19:** Union leaders have described President Donald Trump's nominee to lead the Department of Labour as a friend of organised labour. But as her confirmation hearing begins Wednesday, advocates for workers' rights question whether Lori Chavez-DeRemer will be able to uphold that reputation in an administration that has fired thousands of federal employees.

Chavez-DeRemer, a former Republican member of Congress from Oregon and former mayor of a small city on the edge of liberal-leaning Portland, is scheduled to appear before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions, the first stop in her confirmation process.

During her one term as a congresswoman, Chavez-DeRemer's voting record earned her strong union support. Some political observers surmised that Trump picked her as his labour secretary as a way to appeal to voters who are members of or affiliated with labour organizations. She is the daughter of a Teamster member.

Before she lost her House reelection bid in November, Chavez-DeRemer backed the PRO Act, legislation that would allow more workers to conduct union organizing campaigns and penalize companies that violate workers' rights. The bill, one of former President Joe Biden's priorities, passed the House in 2021 but didn't gain traction in the Senate.

If confirmed as secretary, Chavez-DeRemer would be in charge of the Department of Labour's nearly 16,000 full-time employees and a proposed budget of \$13.9 billion in fiscal year 2025. She would set priorities that impact workers' wages, ability to unionize, and health and safety, as well as employers' rights to fire employees.

But it's unclear how much power Chavez-DeRemer will be able to wield as Trump's Cabinet moves to



slash US government spending and the size of the federal workforce. During his first month in office, the president froze trillions of dollars in federal funding and offered buyouts to most federal workers.

His administration last week started laying off nearly all probationary employees who had not yet gained civil service protection. Billionaire Elon Musk, who leads Trump's Department of Government Efficiency, has called for getting rid of entire agencies.

"The Department of Labour is the agency where people in building are supposed to wake up every day thinking about how they can improve the lives of working people," said Adam Shah, director of national policy at Jobs with Justice, a nonprofit organization that promotes workers' rights. "It's quite possible that no matter what the secretary of labour stands for, the billionaire embedded in the Trump administration, who is so keen on destroying the institutions, will be interested in gutting the Department of Labour."

In January, Trump fired two of three Democratic commissioners serving on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a federal agency that enforces civil rights in the workplace. He also fired the acting chair of the National Labour Relations Board, Gwynne Wilcox, the first Black woman to serve as an NLRB member, as well as General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo. Wilcox sued the Trump administration, arguing that federal law protects her from being arbitrarily dismissed. (AP)

pean supporters.

Trump's comments are likely to vex Ukrainian officials, who have urged the world to help them fight Russia's full-scale invasion that began February 24, 2022.

The battlefield has also brought grim news for Ukraine in recent months. A relentless onslaught in eastern areas by Russia's bigger army is grinding down Ukrainian forces, which are slowly but steadily being pushed backward at some points on the 1,000-kilometre front line.

Trump told reporters at his Florida residence Tuesday that Ukraine "should have never started" the war and "could have made a deal" to prevent it.

Kellogg said his visit was "a chance to have some good, substantial talks." Zelenskyy cancelled his planned Wednesday trip to Saudi Arabia in what some analysts saw as an attempt to deny legitimacy to the US-Russia talks about the future of his country.

American officials have signaled that Ukraine's hopes of joining NATO in order to ward off Russian aggression after reaching a possible peace agreement won't happen. Zelenskyy says any settlement will require US security commitments to keep Russia at bay.

"We understand the need for security guarantees," Kellogg said in comments carried by Ukrainian public broadcaster Suspilne Novyny on his arrival at Kyiv train station. (AP)

## Russia, US agree to work toward ending Ukraine war in remarkable diplomatic shift

**RIYADH, Feb 19:** Russia and the US agreed on Tuesday to start working toward ending the war in Ukraine and improving their diplomatic and economic ties, the two countries' top diplomats said after talks that reflected an extraordinary about-face in US foreign policy under President Donald Trump.

In an interview with AP after the meeting, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the two sides agreed broadly to pursue three goals -- restore staffing at their respective embassies in Washington and Moscow, create a high-level team to support Ukraine peace talks and explore closer relations and economic cooperation.

He stressed, however, that the talks -- attended by his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov and other senior Russian and US officials -- marked the beginning of a conversation, and more work needs to be done. Lavrov echoed Rubio's remarks and told reporters that "the conversation was very useful."

Trump's national security advisor Michael Waltz and special Mideast envoy Steven Witkoff joined Rubio at the table, along with Lavrov and Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs advisor Yuri Ushakov.

No Ukrainian officials were present at the meeting, which came as the beleaguered country is slowly



but steadily losing ground against more numerous Russian troops in a grinding war that began nearly three years ago.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country would not accept any outcome from the talks since Kyiv didn't take part, and postponed his own trip to the kingdom scheduled for Wednesday.

European allies have also expressed concerns that they are being sidelined.

Trump showed little patience for Ukraine's objections to being excluded from the talks.

"Today I heard, 'Oh, well, we weren't invited.' Well, you been there for three years. You should have ended it three years ago," Trump said during a news conference at his Florida residence. "You

should have never started it. You could have made a deal."

Ties between Russia and the US have fallen to their lowest level in decades in recent years -- a rift that has been widening ever since Russia illegally annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and only worsened after Moscow's full-scale invasion.

The US, along with European nations, imposed a raft of sanctions on Russia in an effort to damage its economy. And embassies in Washington and Moscow have been hit hard by expulsions of large numbers of diplomats, as well as other restrictions.

Rubio said on Tuesday that ending the war in Ukraine could "unlock the door" for "incredible opportunities" to partner with the Russians on issues of common in-

terest "that hopefully will be good for the world and also improve our relations in the long term".

His comments were further evidence of the remarkable US reversal on Russia after years in which Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, led international efforts to isolate Moscow.

Tuesday's meeting was meant to pave the way for a summit between Trump and Putin. After the talks, Ushakov and Waltz said no date has been set yet for that summit.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Lavrov mentioned the same three goals as Rubio and said that Washington and Moscow agreed to appoint representatives to carry out "regular consultations" on Ukraine. The meeting marked the most extensive contact between the two countries since Moscow's February 24, 2022, invasion.

The recent US diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Ukraine and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favourable to them.

Kyiv's absence at Tuesday's talks rankled many Ukrainians, and France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the UK on Monday to discuss the war. Kyiv's participation in such talks was a bedrock of US policy

under Biden.

US State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said the talks were aimed at determining how serious the Russians are about achieving peace and whether detailed negotiations can start.

Rubio said Tuesday that there would be "engagement and consultation with Ukraine, with our partners in Europe and others. But ultimately, the Russian side will be indispensable to this effort".

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said last week that NATO membership for Ukraine was unrealistic and suggested Kyiv should abandon hopes of winning all its territory back from Russia -- two key items on Putin's wish list.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday said he spoke by phone to Trump and Zelenskyy following Monday's European meeting. The meeting at the Diriyah Palace in the Saudi capital of Riyadh also highlighted de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to be a major diplomatic player.

Saudi state media described the talks as happening at the prince's direction. Like the neighbouring UAE, the prince has maintained close relations to Russia throughout its war on Ukraine, both through the OPEC+ oil cartel and diplomatically as well. (AP)

## Migrant groups say racist attacks increase in German city after deadly Christmas market violence

**MAGDEBURG (GERMANY), Feb 19:** When Haben Gebregers first immigrated to the German city of Magdeburg seven years ago, the Eritrean immigrant was walking to the supermarket with her child when an intoxicated woman approached her on the street.

At the time, Gebregers did not speak German well enough to comprehend what the woman was saying. But Gebregers says that when the woman threw a beer bottle at her head, she immediately understood.

It was one of her first encounters with racism, but certainly not the last. In the aftermath of a deadly attack at a Christmas market in Magdeburg late last year, Gebregers and other migrants who have settled in the city say they have experienced a sharp increase in racism and anti-immigration sentiments.

"We are the same as you," Gebregers said earlier this month. "We are not different. Just like you, we have feelings. Sometimes we are sad, sometimes we are happy, just like everyone else."

The Christmas market violence

was one of five high-profile attacks committed by immigrants in the past nine months that have made migration a key issue as the country heads toward an early election on Sunday. The suspect, a Saudi doctor, drove into the holiday market teeming with shoppers and left five women and a 9-year-old boy dead and 200 people injured.

The suspect arrived in Germany in 2006 and had received permanent residency, and authorities say the suspect does not fit the usual profile of perpetrators of extremist attacks. He is being held in custody as authorities investigate him.

Just one day after December 20 violence, there was a large right-wing demonstration in Magdeburg, and verbal and physical attacks on people with a migrant background have increased significantly in the city since then, according to the German-Syrian Cultural Association in Magdeburg.

"The migrant community and the advice centers report that attacks have increased by more than 70 per cent here in the city," said Saeed Saeed, who came to Germany from Syria seven years ago and is a member of the association.

"Racism already exists here and everywhere. But it has increased enormously since the attack."

Ketevan Asatiani-Hermann, newly elected chair of the board for the Advisory Council for Integration and Migration in Magdeburg, said victims of racist attacks in the city often do not feel support from politicians or police.

"The hatred has always been there, people just didn't dare to say it so clearly before," said Asatiani-Hermann, who came to Magdeburg in 2011 from Georgia.

Officers sometimes target or search the victims first before the perpetrator, she alleged, and they also worry reporting an attack could have a negative impact on their residence status.

The Magdeburg Police Department did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Mayor Simone Borris, in a statement, said: "Cohesion and community are fundamental values of a city that are inviolable." The mayor also referred media to online services for migrants, and said the city's Cooperation with the Advisory Council for Integration and Migration will be expanded. (AP)

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

**ABU DHABI, Feb 19:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Wednesday met with the leader of the United Arab Emirates, wrapping up an overseas trip that saw the highest-level outreach between the United States and Russia since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

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

The UAE, which diplomatically recognised Israel in 2020 during President Donald Trump's first term, also has been key in mediating prisoner swaps between Russia and Ukraine.

There was no immediate readout on what Rubio, Sheikh Mohammed and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's foreign minis-

ter, discussed in their roughly 30-minute meeting. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with Sheikh Mohammed on Monday.

Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have been discussed as possible sites for peace talks to end the war in Ukraine, which marks its third anniversary on Monday. Saudi Arabia also has been mentioned as the possible venue for a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, providing a potential diplomatic boon to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler.

The leaders met Rubio at an Abu Dhabi convention center that's hosting the biennial International Defense Exhibition and Conference this week, where both Ukraine and Russia have displayed weapons -- even as Moscow faces Western sanctions over the war. (AP)

## EU envoys approve more sanctions against Russia to mark third anniversary of its war on Ukraine

**BRUSSELS, Feb 19:** European Union envoys have approved a new raft of sanctions against Russia, with the measures set to enter into force next week on the third anniversary of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a top EU official and diplomats confirmed on Wednesday.

The move comes with the Europeans sidelined from US-led talks to end the war.

The EU has slapped several rounds of sanctions on Russia since President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops into Ukraine in February 24, 2022. More than 2,300 officials and entities -- usually government agencies, banks and organizations -- have been hit.

The diplomats confirmed approval of the sanctions -- the 16th package of measures

including travel bans, asset freezes and trade restrictions -- on condition that they not be named. The measures are still not entirely finalised until EU foreign ministers endorse them on Monday, allowing them to enter force.

Among the latest sanctions are measures targeting Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" of ships that it exploits to skirt restrictions on transporting oil and gas, or to carry stolen Ukrainian grain. Some 70 vessels believed to be part of the shadow fleet will be added to more than 50 already listed.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, whose services drafted some of the measures for consideration, welcomed their prospective adoption by the 27-nation bloc's ambassadors. (AP)

## White House says Elon Musk not in charge at DOGE but advising president

**WASHINGTON, Feb 19:** The White House says billionaire Elon Musk is not technically part of the Department of Government Efficiency team that is sweeping through federal agencies but is rather a senior advisor to President Donald Trump.

Musk's exact role could be key in the legal fight over DOGE's access to government data as the Trump administration moves to lay off thousands of federal workers. Defining him as an advisor rather than the administrator in charge of day-to-day operations at DOGE could help the administration as it pushes back against a lawsuit arguing Musk has too much power for someone who isn't elected or Senate-confirmed.

The declaration was filed on Monday as the Trump administration fends off the lawsuit from several Democratic states that want to block Musk and the DOGE team from accessing government systems. The litigants say Musk is wielding "virtually unchecked power" in vio-



lation of the Constitution.

The Trump administration, on the other hand, says Musk is not a DOGE employee and has "no actual authority to make government decisions himself". Joshua Fisher, director of the White House Office of Administration, said in court papers. The documents do not name the administrator of DOGE, whose work Musk has championed in posts on

his social-media platform X and in a public appearance at the White House.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt declined on Tuesday to tell reporters at the White House who the DOGE administrator is, though minutes before she said in an interview with Fox News Channel that Musk has been tasked with overseeing the effort on behalf of the

president.

Layoffs, she told reporters, are up to individual agency heads. "Elon Musk, just like everybody else across the federal government, works at the direction of President Trump," Leavitt said.

The DOGE team has roamed from agency to agency, tapping into computer systems, digging into budgets and searching for waste, fraud and abuse, while lawsuits pile up claiming Trump and DOGE are violating the law. At least two are targeting Musk himself.

Last week, Musk called for the US to "delete entire agencies" from the federal government as part of the push to radically cut spending and restructure its priorities.

US District Judge Tanya Chutkan seemed sceptical in a hearing on Monday when Justice Department lawyers asserted that Musk has no formal authority.

"I think you stretch too far. I disagree with you there," Chutkan said. (AP)

## 'Nobody can argue with me': Trump on reciprocal tariff

**WASHINGTON, Feb 19:** US President Donald Trump has said that he made it clear to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India will not be spared from Washington's reciprocal tariffs, emphasising that "nobody can argue with me" on tariff structure.

Trump made these remarks during an interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity recently. Fox News aired a joint television interview with President Trump and billionaire Elon Musk on Tuesday night.

On February 13, hours before Prime Minister Modi's bilateral meeting with Trump in the White House, the US President announced reciprocal tariffs.

Under the plan, the Trump administration "will work strenuously to counter non-reciprocal trading arrangements with trading partners by determining the equivalent of a reciprocal tariff with respect to each foreign trading partner."

During the interview with Hannity, Trump reiterated his stance on existing tariff structures between the US and its partners, including India. "I told Prime Minister Modi

yesterday - he was here - I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging.'" President Trump said.

"He (Modi) goes, 'No, no, I don't like that.' 'No, no, whatever you charge, I'm going to charge.' 'I'm doing that with every country.'"

India has very strong tariffs on certain imports from the US. Like in the automobile sector, India charges 100 per cent.

Musk said, "It's 100 per cent - auto imports are 100 per cent."

"Yeah, that's peanuts. So, much higher. And -- and others too. I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging.'" Trump said.

Under the reciprocal tariff system, the US would impose the same level of tariffs on Indian imports as India does on American goods.

"Nobody can argue with me," President Trump insisted. "If I said 25 per cent, they'd say, 'Oh, that's terrible.' I don't say that anymore... because I say, 'Whatever you charge, we'll charge.' And you know what? They stop." (PTI)

## Gunmen kill seven passengers of bus in Pakistan's Balochistan

**ISLAMABAD, Feb 19:** Unidentified gunmen killed at least seven passengers of a bus on Wednesday in Pakistan's volatile Balochistan province, officials said.

The gunmen targeted the passenger bus in the Barkhan area of the province when it was moving from the provincial capital, Quetta, to Punjab province.

Police said that the assailants stopped the bus on a national highway by setting up a blockade. The attackers boarded the bus, checked the passengers' identity cards, and forcibly took seven individuals to a nearby mountain. Shortly after, gunshots were heard.

Barkhan Deputy Commissioner Waqar Khurshid Alam confirmed the incident and the death toll. "All seven who were travelling in the coach belonged to Punjab, and were on their way to Lahore," he said.

Security forces rushed to the area and launched a manhunt to arrest the killers. No group claimed responsibility for the attack but ethnic Baloch terrorist groups regularly attack the people from neighbouring Punjab. (PTI)



## Mizoram gov expresses grave concern over drug menace in Mizoram



**AIZAWL, Feb 19:** Mizoram Governor General Vijay Kumar Singh (Retd) on Wednesday said drug menace in the state has assumed alarming proportions and has become a major cause of concern to the government.

Addressing the inaugural sitting of the budget session of the state assembly, Singh said the state's excise and narcotics department, along with other law enforcement agencies, have been making all-out efforts to curb the menace.

He emphasised the need for more vigilance to check the problem. "The menace of drug trafficking and abuse has assumed alarming proportions today and is of much concern to my government," Singh said.

Singh said the overall the state remained peaceful and "no major law and order problem occurred last year due to the pro-active role and constant monitoring by the state police."

"Mizoram Police has been performing arduous duties for preventing disturbances along the inter-state boundaries. In order to

ensure that international border areas are secured from anti-national elements, the state police, in collaboration with border guarding forces such as Assam Rifles and Border Security Force (BSF), is also conducting patrolling in these areas," he added.

Mizoram shares 325-km long inter-state boundaries with Assam, Tripura and Manipur, and 510-km long international border with Myanmar in the east and 318-km with Bangladesh in the west.

Singh said 600 drug traffickers were arrested and prosecuted with 441 drug-related cases registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985 in the current financial year.

"A total of 429 kg of various kinds of drugs have been seized, and 37 foreigners were arrested in narcotic cases during this fiscal," he added.

Additionally, he pointed out that "4,364 people were arrested for violations of the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Act, 2019, with 4,862 cases registered under the liquor law, which prohibits sale, manufacture, and consumption of liquor."

The 30-day budget session began on Wednesday and will conclude on March 20.

Chief minister Lalduhoma, who also holds the finance portfolio, will present the budget on March 4. (PTI)

## Mizoram proposes to host international half marathon in Aizawl for first time

**AIZAWL, Feb 19:** The Mizoram government has proposed to host an international half marathon event in Aizawl for the first time, Sports minister Lalnginglova Hmar said.

The event, the schedule of which will be announced after approval from the Athletic Federation of India (AFI), is expected to see the participation of about 2,000 runners from across the country and abroad, he said.

For the successful organisation of the proposed international event, the state Sports and Youth Service Department has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Innovations India in the presence of Hmar.

Hmar on Tuesday said that apart from promoting health, fitness and tourism, the event will also be used as an anti-drug campaign among

the youth, he said.

He said that the government has approached the AFI for recognition and schedule of the event and is awaiting a response from it.

"In case the AFI can't include us in its calendar and fix the date, we are planning to organise the event in April as we are optimistic for approval at least," he said.

He said that registration for the proposed event will be conducted online except for students, who will be approached in their schools for offline registration.

Innovations India chief executive officer (CEO) Rahul Bali, who is also the curator of the proposed Aizawl International Half Marathon, said there will be three categories -- 21.1 km marathon, 10 km for women and 5 km for children and the elderly. (PTI)

## Appeal to take part in Arunachal statehood Day



**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Feb 19:** The Itanagar capital complex (ICC) deputy commissioner Talo Potom on Tuesday has appealed the denizens of capital complex to take part in statehood day celebration at IG Park as all the preparation have been nearing completion and finishing touch were being given by all the line department.

Speaking to media at IG Park parade ground, the Capital complex deputy commissioner Talo Potom said, "People of state and even otherwise celebrate our statehood with lots of programme and the main celebration is being held at IG Park. Several prominent dignitaries which include Governor will be chief guest and host of dignitaries include Union minister of parliamentary Affairs and Arunachal West MP Kiren Rijiju, Chief Minister Pema Khandu, Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mien among others."

## Naga tribes urge Naga groups to unite to preserve spirit of oneness

**DIMAPUR, Feb 19:** Expressing concern over growing factionalism among Naga groups, tribal organisations from Nagaland and Manipur representing the community have called for an urgent need for all Naga political groups to unite and cooperate with one another to preserve the spirit of oneness.

The appeal was made during a meeting between Naga tribal organisations and Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) on Tuesday. It was attended by representa-

tives of 13 Naga tribes from Nagaland and Manipur, as well as leaders of FNR.

"Representatives of various Naga tribes gathered in solidarity to express, in one voice, the urgent necessity for all Naga political groups to come together in unity and cooperation," a release issued by FNR said.

During the meeting, it was resolved that Naga political groups must listen to the voice of the people, and that all efforts, without exception, must be made to ensure Naga unity in the spirit of

oneness. On January 14, the Naga groups had agreed to implement the Council of Naga Cooperation and Relationship, a working mechanism, to advance unity.

The Naga tribal organisations also urged all Naga political groups and the Naga people to participate in the Council of Naga Cooperation and Relationship.

Furthermore, the meeting resolved to consciously promote and consolidate Naga solidarity by fostering a spirit of kinship without borders. (PTI)

## Pawan Hans team in Kohima

**KOHIMA, Feb 19:** A team from Pawan Hans arrived in Kohima recently to conduct inspections under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) UDAN. The assessment focuses on infrastructure and feasibility in five districts—Tuensang, Mokokchung, Zunheboto, Kohima, and Phek—selected under the first phase of the scheme. The initiative aims to enhance regional air connectivity, improving accessibility and economic opportunities for residents in Nagaland's remote areas.

In a meeting with the inspection team and transport officials, Transport Secretary

Robert Longchari highlighted key developments and challenges. While infrastructure is largely in place, some financial approvals and minor modifications, such as fencing and helipad upgrades, remain. The government must also address legal and land acquisition hurdles before operations begin.

He emphasized that the helicopter service will significantly benefit not just district headquarters but also subdivisions, particularly in medical emergencies and subsidized transport. Given Nagaland's challenging road infrastructure, air connectivity is expected to provide a crucial alternative. (NNN)

## Centre approves ₹ 288.93 crore for flood relief measures in Tripura

Additional central assistance will be a boon to the disaster-affected people in the state

**AGARTALA, Feb 19:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday said that the Centre has approved an additional assistance of ₹ 288.93 crore for flood relief measures in Tripura under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).

Earlier, the central government had provided ₹ 62 crore in two phases to the state for the same purpose.

The approval came in response to the floods that hit the northeastern state in August last year.



At least 18 people died in the deluge, while it caused damage to property valued at ₹ 15,000 crore. "The additional central assistance will be a boon to the disaster-af-

ected people in the state. The ₹ 288.93 crore allocated to Tripura will undoubtedly help the state to achieve the developmental goals left out due to the Tripura floods in

2024," the chief minister said in a post on Facebook.

The approval came after the chief minister met with Union home minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on February 15 to discuss the extent of the damages caused by the floods and the necessary relief measures required for the affected people.

"I wholeheartedly thank PM Narendra Modi ji and Hon'ble HM Amit Shah ji for always being with Tripura," the chief minister added. (PTI)

## Headmistress, teachers in charge among 20 show caused for 'negligence' in duty

**AGARTALA, Feb 19:** At least 20 school teachers, including one headmistress and four teachers in charge, were show caused for their alleged negligence in duty in Tripura's Khowai and West Tripura districts, official sources said on Wednesday.

Separate notices were issued to all the teachers on Monday.

In the show cause notices issued by the director of the elementary education department, N C Sarma, it is said that during a surprise visit by the inspection team on February 12, it was found that the teachers in charge of Moharbari Senior Basic School in Teliamura subdivision and three other teachers were "resting" in the staff room, while the students were found in the playground during school hours.

"You are asked to explain why this kind of negligence was found during school hours and why appropriate action shall not be taken against you," the Director mentioned in the separate show cause notices. Copies of some such notices are available with PTI. In some schools in the Khowai district, sixteen more teachers were absent without official permission. A few teachers manipulated the students' attendance to match the mid-day meal statements, the sources said.

At the Teliamura HS School, the inspection team had received complaints from the students that most of the time, classes were not conducted properly, and the teachers mainly assigned homework to the students to study at home.

## New DIG seeks public co-operation in Itanagar

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Feb 19:** "Gunda gardi nahi chelega capital complex me," said newly appointed DIG Tumme Amo who joined as DIG Itanagar Capital complex on Monday morning.

Amo while addressing the officers and official of various police stations of the capital complex and adjoining areas here in DIG office campus said that if any police personnel were found involved in any alleged activities of corruption, taking bribe for charge sheet, failure of filing charge sheet, non registration of FIR, arrest and no arrest,

taking less fine instead of heavy penalty, would not be tolerated anymore.

"Always maintain the dignity of the uniform and I want that no man in uniform is involved in indiscipline activities," Amo added.

Everyone in capital complex has responsibility to shoulder being a civilized citizen and everyone are responsible for wellbeing of each and every citizen in state capital and capital complex belongs to all so it's a humble request to each and every citizen to maintain discipline, maintain peace and tranquility, he said.

## 129 KHADC, 95 JHADC polling stations marked vulnerable

**SHILLONG, Feb 19:** A total of 129 polling stations have been identified as vulnerable and critical in areas under the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) and 95 in the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) even as Commissioner & Secretary in-charge District Council Affairs (DCA) Cyril Diengdoh has assured adequate deployment of security forces is in place to ensure a free, fair and smooth ADC elections to be held on February 21.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Diengdoh said, "All arrangements are in place. We have had multiple review meetings with the deputy commissioners, who are responsible to conduct the elections. The security plans are in place. The deputy commissioners have identified the vulnerable and sensitive polling stations for which additional security forces are being deployed in consultation with the SPs."

He informed that 129 of 1669 polling stations in the KHADC are identified vulnerable or critical while 95 of 477 polling stations in JHADC.

"The police are confident as they have requisitioned enough security police personnel including home guards so there is no report of shortage. They have made an assessment of vulnerable and critical polling stations and there they will deployed more manpower," he said while adding "Security forces have been requisitioned from various parts of the state and since the polls are happening in the Eastern Range so quite a few security forces have also been taken from the Garo Hills region, which is the western range of the state. So that arrangement has been made." (NNN)

## Nagaland govt puts on hold transfer, posting of 1,650 school teachers

**KOHIMA, Feb 19:** The Nagaland government has put on hold the process of transfer and posting of 1,650 government school teachers across the state.

Principal director of school education, Thavaseelan K, in a notification issued on Monday, said, "In the interest of public service, the orders dated February 6 and February 10 are hereby kept on hold till further orders pending review."

Earlier this month, Nagaland's Department of School Education had issued the transfer and posting of the teachers.

On February 6, the department issued a notification regarding the re-deployment of 278 mathematics and science graduate teachers while on February 10 it notified the transfer and posting of 840 primary teachers, 341 graduate teachers and 191 graduate Hindi teachers as part of the rationalisation of teachers in government schools across the state.

All these teachers were asked to join their new place of posting within seven days from the date of the announcement.

The department had asserted that no requests for retention or reconsideration of postings will

be entertained under any circumstance while failure to comply with the new posting will result in withholding of their salaries.

Following the rationalisation notification, various student bodies expressed serious concern and opposed the process saying it is irrational and unjustified while it would have far-reaching implications for the entire state.

The student bodies, while asserting that they support teachers' rationalisation policy, alleged that, however, this time, the process had been done randomly without any groundwork, statistical reports and without consulting the district authorities.

They remarked that the hasty and arbitrary transfer of teachers has created uncertainty and chaos among students, parents and the teaching community, affecting not only the academic environment but also the future of students.

Advisor to school education and SCERT, Kekhriehoulie Yhome, while speaking to PTI on Saturday, had said that despite the difficulties and opposition, the rationalisation process would continue as planned, with the department revisiting cases where specific concerns or exceptional issues arise. (PTI)

## Five militants, one sympathiser arrested in Manipur

**IMPHAL, Feb 19:** Five militants belonging to three banned outfits have been arrested in Manipur in the last two days, police said on Wednesday.

One sympathiser of a proscribed organisation has also been nabbed.

The arrests have been made in Imphal East and West, Bishnupur and Kakching districts, a police officer said. An active member of banned outfit People's Liberation Army (PLA), identified as Waikhom Ibungo Meitei (26), was arrested from Hatta Golapati area in Imphal East on Tuesday.

"He was allegedly involved in extorting the public, government officials and educational institutions," the officer said.

Security forces also arrested another cadre of PLA, identified as Thokchom Ajit Singh (40), from Leimaram Canal area in Bishnupur district on Monday.

A militant belonging to PREPAK (PRO) outfit, identified as Salam Sitoljit Singh (36), was

nabbed from Uripok Khumanthem Leikai in Imphal West district on Tuesday, the police officer said, adding he was allegedly involved in extortion.

Security forces arrested another active cadre of PREPAK (PRO), identified as Thokchom Sanathoi Singh (24), from Okshongbung area in Bishnupur district the same day.

Police arrested a militant belonging to the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) outfit, identified as Naorem Premkanta Singh (43), from Irum Mapal area in Kakching district on Tuesday, he said, adding the insurgent was also involved in extortion.

Meanwhile, a sympathiser of KCP (PWG), identified as Romeo Laishram (50), was arrested from his residence at Yurembam in Imphal West district and a pistol with magazine and cartridges were seized from his possession on Tuesday, he added. (PTI)

### NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Mohammed Salman Ahmed to Salman Ahmed swearing a notarial affidavit at Sankardevnagar Hojai(Assam)

### NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Abdul Khaliq to Abdul Khaliq swearing a notarial affidavit at Sankardevnagar Hojai(Assam)

### AFFIDAVIT

I, MAMIZUL HOQUE, S/O, Late Ajuddin, R/O Vill-Mowamari P.O + P.S - Kharupetia, Dist: Darrang (Assam) do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of the above mentioned address and citizen of India by birth. That my actual and correct name is MAMIZUL HOQUE. That my name has been wrongly recorded in my passport vide no - H9145149 dtd 22/03/2011 as Mohammed Mamijal hoque in place of MAMIZUL HOQUE. That Mohammed Mamijal hoque and MAMIZUL HOQUE are the same and one person. Sd/- MAMIZUL HOQUE

## Snowfall makes Nathu La pass, New Baba Mandir out of bounds for tourists

Located at an elevation of 12,313 ft, Tsomgo Lake, also known as Changu Lake

**GANGTOK, Feb 19:** Heavy snowfall in the high altitude of Sikkim blocked a key road that takes tourists to popular destinations Nathu La pass which lies on the China border, and New Baba Mandir, the memorial of a soldier, an official said on Wednesday.

The snowfall began late Tuesday night and intensified in the morning of Wednesday, making road travel hazardous, in the northeastern state.

"The authorities are closely monitoring the situation and working to clear the blocked routes," the official said.

Tourists, after visiting Tsomgo Lake, generally con-



tinue their journey towards Nathu La pass and New Baba Mandir, the official said.

The accumulated snow on Jawaharal Nehru Road has made Nathula Pass and New

Baba Mandir out of bounds for travellers and tourists.

However, people can travel up to Tsomgo Lake, the official said.

Located at an elevation of

12,313 ft, Tsomgo Lake, also known as Changu Lake, is a glacial lake in East Sikkim district, some 40 kilometres from the state capital Gangtok.

Nathu La, one of the highest motorable roads in the world, joins Sikkim and China at 14,450 ft above sea level.

The New Baba Mandir was built in memory of Sepoy Harbhajan Singh who died in 1968 while on border patrol duty.

The IMD has also predicted thunderstorms with gusty winds in various parts of the Northeastern region. (PTI)

No.GDB/15-FC/206/2022-23/812

### TENDER NO.15 OF 2024-25 INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

Dated:- 10/02/2025

Selected tenders affixing Non-refundable court fee stamp of RS.8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty Five Paise) only with at validity period of 180 (One Hundred Eighty) days which will subsequently to be covered and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the intending Registered Contractors of all categories of the Assam PWD (Bldg. & Roads) for submitting tender for the work below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2:30 PM 10-02-2025 to 02-03-2025 and will be opened on the date 02-03-2024 at 2:30 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Appox Estimated value of work	Tender Value	Earnest money 2% for GNL & 1% for ST/SC/OBC/MOBC	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
1	Const. of Community toilet at Podumoni Namghar (Ramcha), under (Tied Grant) 15th-FC fund for the 2023-24 during 2024-25.	11,00,000.00	10,47,960.00	Rs. 21,000/- & Rs. 10500/-	Rs.300/-	3 (Three month)

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the Office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up to 11:30 AM in all working days from 10-02-2025 to 02-03-2025 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker Cheque/Bank Draft/ Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the BDO, Goreswar Development Block.

Sd/-

Block Development Officer  
Goreswar Development Block

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1511



# Modi has already declared Adani issue personal matter, will he oblige US SEC: Cong

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The Congress on Wednesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already declared the Adani issue to be a personal matter and asked whether he would oblige the US Securities and Exchanges Commission's (SEC) request in the ongoing probe against the business group.

The opposition party's assertion came after the SEC told a federal judge in New York that its efforts to serve its complaint on Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani in the alleged bribery scheme are "ongoing". This included a request for assistance to the Indian authorities.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the SEC has just informed a New York district court that it has sought the assistance of the Modi government to serve complaints on the violations of US laws by Gautam Adani and some of his colleagues.

"The PM has already declared the Modani issue to be a personal matter. Will he oblige the SEC?" Ramesh said on X.



To a question on whether the issue relating to Adani figured in the talks, Modi said at a joint media briefing with Donald Trump in Washington last week: "India is a democracy and our culture is 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. We consider the whole world as one family. I believe every Indian is mine."

"Two prominent leaders of two countries never discuss such individual issues," he said.

The SEC submitted a status update Tuesday to Judge Nicholas Ga-

raufis at the United States District Court, Eastern District of New York, regarding its efforts to serve its complaint on Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani.

It said both "are located in India, and the SEC's efforts to serve them there are ongoing, including through a request for assistance to the Indian authorities to effect service under the Hague Service Convention for Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Mat-

ters."

The SEC said its complaint dated November 20 last year alleges that Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani violated the anti-fraud provisions of the federal securities laws by "knowingly or recklessly making false and misleading representations concerning Adani Green Energy Ltd in connection with a September 2021 debt offering by Adani Green".

In a parallel action, the US Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York unsealed criminal charges against Gautam and Sagar Adani, among other individuals connected to Adani Green and Azure Power.

Adani is being indicted by the US Department of Justice for his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 250 million bribes to Indian officials in exchange for favourable solar power contracts.

The Adani group has denied the allegations by the Department of Justice and the SEC and said they are "baseless". (PTI)

## No illegalities in land purchased about 40 years ago: Union Minister Kumaraswamy

**BENGALURU, Feb 19:** With revenue department officials conducting a survey of land belonging to him in Ramanagara district, Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Wednesday asserted that there are no illegalities in the land he purchased about forty years ago.

The JD(S) leader, claiming that he was being targeted, also hit out at the ruling Congress government in the state and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

"I purchased the land 40 years ago. For forty years, surveys and investigations have been done a number of times. I have been open to it...there were no complainants for forty years. How have they emerged all of a sudden now?" Kumaraswamy asked.

Speaking to reporters here, he pointed out that in 1986-87 itself, Congress leader C M Lingappa and Ramachandra, a zilla panchayat member, had submitted a petition to the then Chief Minister, Prime Minister and Home Minister and others, alleging that the land was purchased illegally.

"I have all the documents. This government and those claiming to protect the state resources (activists)

have gone against me. So far I have not got any notice from the High Court. On getting to know that officials were coming for a survey of the land owned by me without even serving a notice, I questioned the Principal Secretary and Deputy Commissioner, then they subsequently served notice. I allowed the survey. I even told them they can get the survey by any international agency," he said.

Asserting that there were no illegalities in the land he had purchased, the union minister, attacking the Congress, said he has documentary evidence about who has indulged in what kind of illegalities, and how the government lands have been illegally acquired by others. "But in today's system, the logical end cannot be reached," he added.

Revenue department officials on Monday conducted a survey of Kumaraswamy's farm land at Kethaganahalli in Bidadi hobli of Ramanagara district.

Social activists had alleged that 14 acres of government land had been encroached by Kumaraswamy. The High Court had directed the revenue department to submit a report. (PTI)

## Fadnavis hails Shivaji Maharaj as management guru, says state won't forgive those who insult him

**PUNE, Feb 19:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis paid tribute to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on his birth anniversary on Wednesday, hailing him as a management guru and an able administrator who set an example of running a welfare state.

Those who try to insult Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj will be shown their "real place" and the state will not forgive them, Fadnavis told reporters after paying homage to the Maratha king at Shivneri Fort in Pune district. Shivaji Maharaj not only established 'Swarajya', but also ignited a sense of national pride, he said.

The legendary warrior king was born on February 19, 1630 in Shivneri in the district's Junnar tehsil.

Fadnavis and Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar attended various programmes to mark Shivaji Maharaj's birth anniversary, including the 'cradle ceremony' at the Shivneri Fort.

A large number of followers of the Maratha king also gathered at the fort to take part in his 395th birth anniversary event. Addressing the gathering at the fort, Fadnavis said Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was not just a warrior, but also an able administrator who set an example of running a welfare state.

"He was a management guru in the truest sense," the chief minister added.

Fadnavis said that setting foot on the land of Shivneri evokes the inspiration of

"Swarajya", and it is this very spirit that draws people to this place time and again.

"When many kings and kingdoms accepted Mughal rule, Mata Jijau envisioned Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as the leader who would end the exploitation and tyranny, guiding the people towards Swarajya," he said.

"With the determination and values instilled by his mother, Shivaji Maharaj united people from all communities, wielded his sword, and built an army of Mavalas. He not only established 'Swarajya', but also ignited a sense of national pride," the CM said.

Fadnavis stressed the importance of preserving Shivaji Maharaj's forts, saying they hold a greater significance than temples.

"We are working tirelessly to ensure the conservation of these forts by removing barriers. A task force has been created to clear encroachments from all these sites. Come what may, these encroachments will be removed," he asserted.

The CM also announced that 12 forts from Maharashtra have been nominated for the UNESCO's World Heritage Site status under an initiative taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"In the coming days, a team of the Maharashtra government, led by minister Ashish Shelar, will make a presentation highlighting these forts as exemplary architectural marvels at the UNESCO event in Paris," he said. (PTI)

## J-K emerging out of 'evil eye' shadow to become prominent tourism destination: Omar

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** Jammu and Kashmir is emerging out of the shadow of "evil eye" and is on verge of reclaiming its status as one of India's leading tourism destinations, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on Wednesday.

He also invited people from across the globe to explore the picturesque region popularly known as "paradise on earth".

Speaking at the inauguration of the SATTE exhibition at Yashobhumi here, Abdullah highlighted J&K's rich and diverse offerings beyond its famous tourist spots like Gulmarg and Pahalgam or religious pilgrimage to Mata Vaishno Devi and Amarnath shrines.

Jammu and Kashmir offers a lot more to satisfy anyone from holiday makers to adventure sports lovers and influencers to social media enthusiasts, he said at the South Asia's Travel and Tourism Exchange (SATTE).

The chief minister talked about improved connectivity between Kashmir and the rest of the country, including the direct rail link which is likely to start anytime soon.

"The shadow of evil eye resulted in a difficult time for J&K over the past 30 to 35 years but the region is now emerging out of it and is once again one of India's prominent destinations for domestic tourism."

"International tourism is also picking up in spite of the difficulties that we have with travel advisories issued by various embassies and consulates," Abdullah said, referring to the eruption of terrorism in early 1990.

Quoting famous Persian poet Amir Khusrau who once said "Gar firdaus, bar ruhe zamin ast, hamin asto, hamin asto, hamin asto (If there is paradise on this earth, it is here, it is here, it is here), Abdullah explained the cultural concept of "nazar" (evil eye), suggesting that the region's beauty has often been overshadowed by challenges.

He reminisced about the significance of J&K in Indian culture, mentioning that no honeymoon was complete without a stay on the



houseboats of Dal Lake, and that Bollywood films often featured the region's picturesque landscapes including mustard fields or from the snow-capped mountains of Kashmir.

However, the chief minister said that "Jammu and Kashmir is not resting on its laurels or trying to sell you a sob story...Jammu and Kashmir has something for everyone...Jammu and Kashmir is the right place now for any investment in the tourism industry".

Abdullah asserted that J&K is a year-round destination, suitable for pilgrims, wedding celebrations, adventure seekers, and those looking to unwind in a scenic environment.

"Jammu is known as the city of temples, and there is significant potential for heritage and border tourism. Places like Gurez, once relatively unknown, are now among the fastest-growing tourist areas," he said.

"...Kashmir border tourism on the Line of Control with Pakistan, whether we talk about Tangdhar, Machil, Karnah or Keran, these areas are seeing increasing numbers of visitors. J-K is about new meadows like Bangus and Doodhpathri," he said.

The chief minister also referred to the potential of adventure tourism and said rafting in rivers, skiing in mountains, water skiing in Dal lake and Mansbal lake are yet to be fully explored.

"I have often said J-K is heaven on earth long before Kerala became the God's own country.

Please look at J-K as a destination for your next holiday, for your next visit, or for holding your conference or seminar," he said.

Abdullah pointed out the region's increasing focus on wellness and sports tourism, referencing upcoming marathons planned for the area.

"We had the Kashmir marathon and full marathon last year, and this year we intend to start the Jammu half marathon and Jammu ultra marathon while continuing with the Kashmir marathon," he said.

Highlighting improvements in connectivity, Abdullah noted that direct rail links between Kashmir and the rest of the country are expected to be operational soon.

"Travelling to Kashmir has become significantly easier than in the past when there were only a few flights connecting Delhi and Srinagar. Today, there are direct flights from various cities, and soon, rail connectivity will further enhance accessibility," he added.

Concluding his speech, he extended an open invitation to the audience, saying, "Please give us a chance to host you. We will ensure you leave with unforgettable memories and experiences."

Taking to X after the event, the chief minister wrote, "Today I took the @OfficialDMRC AirPort Express to get to Yashobhumi for the SATTE 2025 Tourism promotion event. 25 minutes in the train beats 1.5 hours in the car hands down & saves fuel & emissions. I'm not driving to Yashobhumi again." (PTI)

## Sangam water fit for 'snan' and 'aachman: Adityanath in Assembly

**LUCKNOW, Feb 19:** The water at the Sangam is fit for both bathing and ritual drinking (aachman) as confirmed by some recent reports, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said Wednesday, amid claims it may contain high levels of faecal bacteria.

He told the state assembly that the Uttar Pradesh Control Board and the Central Pollution Control Board are continuously monitoring the water quality at the Sangam.

He also trained his guns at Opposition Samajwadi Party, saying the condition of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers was so poor while it was in power that the Prime Minister of Mauritius refused to take a dip during the 2013 Kumbh.

"This time, 81 drains have been tapped, treating 261 MLD (million liters per day) of sewage. In January and February, fecal coliform levels at the Sangam nose were found to be within the acceptable range, below 2,500 MPN per 100 ml, according to the UP Pollution (Control) Board," he said, according to an official statement.

"The Central Pollution (Control) Board has also confirmed this in its report. The UP and Central Pollution Control Boards are continuously monitoring water quality, and recent reports confirm that the

water at the Sangam is now fit for both bathing and ritual use," Adityanath told the state Assembly.

He said the Maha Kumbh 2025 is being organised in a "grand" manner, while the 2013 edition suffered due to the "corruption, mismanagement", administrative negligence and chaos of the SP rule.

There are better facilities and well-planned arrangements this year, but those responsible for the 2013 "mismanagement" are now criticising the 2025 Maha Kumbh, he said.

The CM also pointed out that after the stampede at the Prayagraj (then Allahabad) Station in 2013, the head of the state government was attacking the Centre, then led by the Congress.

The Uttar Pradesh government was not receiving funds from the Centre then, and there was "corruption" in whatever money was spent as mentioned in the 2014 CAG report, he said.

Adityanath compared the 2013 and 2025 events, and said the duration of the Kumbh is determined by religious calculations.

He said the 2025 event will last 45 days, whereas it spanned 55 days in 2013. (PTI)

# Rajasthan Budget focuses on jobs, water supply

Commits to make state USD 350-bn economy by 2030

**JAIPUR, Feb 19:** Recruitment for up to 2.75 lakh positions in the government and private sector, water supply projects, and the construction of nine greenfield expressways were the highlights of the Rajasthan Budget 2025-26 presented by state Finance Minister Diya Kumari in the assembly on Wednesday.

While presenting the ₹ 5.37-lakh crore Budget, Kumari, who is also the Deputy Chief Minister of the state, announced that 20 lakh new houses will be provided with drinking water connections and ₹ 400 crore will be spent for this purpose.

"We are committed to creating a USD 350 billion economy by 2030... We have increased capital expenditure by more than 40 per cent in a short period and have constructed more than 9,600 km of new roads and upgraded more than 13,000 km of roads," Kumari said.

Calling this the state's first "green Budget", Kumari said special focus will be given on climate change adoption, forest and environment, sustainable agriculture, water harvesting, recycling and

waste disposal, circular economy, and capacity building.

"Under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, the GDP, indicating the development of the state, is estimated to increase to more than ₹ 19,89,000 crore in 2025-26," she said.

Kumari announced recruitment for 1.25 lakh posts in government departments and state undertakings and 1.50 lakh private sector jobs in the coming year.

In the speech, the finance minister said under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the state government has proved the trust expressed by the public was right by setting new records of development in the state in the first year of its tenure itself.

She said the state government will construct nine greenfield expressways at a cost of ₹ 60,000 crore.

For the energy sector, she announced 50,000 new agriculture connections and 5 lakh domestic connections, abolition of banking with other states at high rates, solar plants, and 150 units of free elec-



tricity per month to beneficiaries under the CM Free electricity scheme.

An allocation of ₹ 10 crore was made for work of non-patchable roads in each assembly constituencies and ₹ 15 crore in constituencies under desert region, ₹ 50 crore for detailed project report of ring roads in 15 cities, ₹ 250 crore for traffic improvement work in Jaipur, Jaipur metro work from Sitapura industrial area to Ambabari and Vidhyadhar Nagar, DPR for Jaipur metro extension to Jagatpura and

Vaishali Nagar. A fund of ₹ 150 crore was announced under the CM Thar region development programme, installation of 50,000 street lights in all cities of the state.

She announced global capacity centre policy for investment in the service sector, Rajasthan trade promotion policy for trading sector, development of 10 sites as iconic tourist destinations.

Kumari said ₹ 100 crore will be spent to promote night tourism, ₹ 100 crore for Tribal Tourist Circuit

covering Tripura Sundari temple, Mangarhi Dham, Beneshwar Dham and other temples, and Govind Devji Kala Mahotsav to mark 300 years of foundation of Jaipur.

She said "Vaidik Gurukul" and "Vaidik Tourism Centres" will be established in Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Udaipur, and "Yuva Sathi Kendra" in Kota, Jodhpur, Jaipur and Sikar to address the issues of suicides and stress among students.

"MAA" fund of ₹ 3,500 crore was announced for free diagnosis and medicines to people, establishment of ultra-advanced burns care units at divisional headquarters, "zero accident zones" on Delhi-Jaipur, Jaipur-Agra, and Jaipur-Kota highways.

She said the monthly social security pension for the elderly, widow/single woman, differently abled people, and small and marginal farmers will be increased to ₹ 1,250 from ₹ 1,200.

Other Budget announcements included the establishment of a Centre for Cyber Control and war room at ₹ 350 crore, and a hike in PM Kisan Samman Nidhi as well as the

bonus per quintal on MSP of wheat.

The finance minister said the state government has delivered 58 per cent of its promises made in the election manifesto and has fulfilled 73 per cent of the previous Budget announcements.

In the Budget 2025-26, estimated revenue receipts were pegged at ₹ 2.94 lakh crore, estimated revenue expenditure ₹ 3.25 lakh crore and estimated revenue deficit ₹ 31,009 crore. The estimated fiscal deficit was ₹ 84,643 crore, or 4.25 per cent of the gross state domestic product (GSDP).

Addressing a post-Budget press conference, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma said the Budget will ensure development of the state.

"We have taken a step forward toward making Rajasthan a developed state by 2047 by focusing on green growth," the CM said.

The leader of opposition, Tikaram Jolly, however, said the Budget was "only going to put the burden of debt on the people of Rajasthan".

He said the financial manage-

ment of the state government has completely failed.

"In the last Budget, it was estimated that there would be revenue receipts of about ₹ 2.65 lakh crore, but this target could not be met and only ₹ 2.62 lakh crore have been made," he told reporters after the Budget presentation.

"The biggest challenge facing the common man today is inflation. We expected some announcement to reduce inflation but nothing happened," he said.

"Our (former Congress) government had given an inflation relief package of ₹ 19,000 crore in the Budget 2023-24, but today the world inflation did not come in the entire speech."

Before the beginning of the Budget speech, Rajasthan Speaker Vasudev Devnani said the government will respond to issues raised by the Opposition after the Zero Hour on February 20.

Opposition Congress is demanding the government's response to the allegations of phone-tapping levelled by Cabinet Minister Kirodi Lal Meena. (PTI)



# SC defers hearing on pleas against CEC, ECs appointments

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The Supreme Court on Wednesday adjourned the pleas against the appointments of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (EC) under the 2023 law.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh indicated that the matter would be listed after the Holi festival break due to paucity of time. However, no date was fixed for hearing the matter.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner NGO Association for Democratic Reforms, said it was an important issue which required an urgent consideration.

He said the matter involved a short legal question -- whether the 2023 Constitution bench verdict should be followed for the appointment of the CEC and ECs through a panel involving the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India or the 2023 law, which excludes the CJJ from the panel.

At around 3 pm, Justice Surya Kant told Bhushan that he would be sitting in a special bench and the court had numerous matters listed before the Holi break.

Bhushan requested the matter to



be listed on any day in the coming week and assured the petitioners would not take more than an hour to advance submissions.

Advocate Varun Thakur, appearing for petitioner Jaya Thakur, also mentioned the matter for an urgent hearing saying it was "very important for the survival of democracy".

Justice Surya Kant said, for the court, all matters were equally important and no single matter was superior to others.

Earlier, solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, expressed his inability to address the court on the issue saying he was appearing before the Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice San-

jayv Khanna on the issue of arbitration. On February 18, the top court said it would take up on "priority basis" the pleas against the appointments of the CEC and ECs under the 2023 law.

Bhushan said the government by appointing the new CEC and EC under the 2023 law was making a "mockery of democracy".

On February 17, the government appointed EC Gyanesh Kumar as the next CEC. Kumar is the first CEC to be appointed under the new law and his term would run till January 26, 2029, days before the EC is expected to announce the schedule of

the next Lok Sabha election. Vivek Joshi, a 1989-batch Haryana-cadre IAS officer, was appointed as an election commissioner. Born on May 21, 1966, Joshi (58) would serve in the poll panel till 2031.

According to the law, a CEC or an EC retires at 65 or could have a tenure in the poll panel for six years.

On February 12, the top court fixed February 19 to hear pleas against the appointment of the CEC and EC under the 2023 law saying if anything happened in the interregnum, the consequences were bound to follow.

It said the issue would be decided on merit and finally. Bhushan referred to the 2023 verdict, saying it held that the election commissioners had to be selected for appointment by an independent panel comprising the prime minister, Leader of Opposition and Chief Justice of India.

On March 15, 2024, the top court refused to stay the appointments of the new ECs under the 2023 law which excluded the CJJ from the selection panel and deferred the hearing on a batch of pleas against the appointments. The apex court told

# India, Malaysia agree to form joint focus group to address non-traditional maritime security threats



**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** India and Malaysia on Wednesday identified ways to deepen existing defence collaborations between the two nations, particularly in the fields of maritime security, multilateral engagements and defence industry, as they agreed to form a "joint focus group" to address non-traditional maritime security threats.

Both sides also identified steps to further enhance cooperation in emerging areas such as cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Indian defence ministry said.

The 13th Malaysia-India Defence Cooperation Committee (MIDCOM) meeting took place in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday.

The meeting was co-chaired by Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Lokman Hakim Bin Ali, Secretary General, Ministry of Defence, Malaysia.

"Both sides expressed happiness at the growing bilateral defence cooperation with regular engagements between the two armed forces in recent years," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The two sides held wide-ranging discussions on effective and practical initiatives to further expand bilateral defence engagements, and on regional and global issues.

"Both chairs identified steps to further enhance cooperation in emerging areas such as cybersecurity and AI. They identified ways to deepen the existing collaborations, particularly in defence industry, maritime security, and multilateral engagements," the statement said. They also agreed to form a "joint focus group to address non-traditional maritime security threats", it said.

"Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the new initiatives under the defence pillar of the comprehensive strategic partnership, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Malaysian counterpart

Anwar Ibrahim during the latter's visit to India in August 2024," the statement said.

India and Malaysia also exchanged the finalised terms of reference (ToR) on the establishment of a strategic affairs working group, the defence ministry said.

"This forum will act as a consultative mechanism intermediate between the MIDCOM (Malaysia-India Defence Cooperation Committee) and the two sub-committees to progress all aspects of bilateral defence cooperation," the statement said.

The two sides also exchanged the finalised ToR on the establishment of an Su-30 forum as an outcome of the MIDCOM.

The Su-30 forum will "enable closer cooperation between the two air forces in exchanging expertise and best practices in Su-30 maintenance", the statement said.

Rajesh Kumar Singh highlighted the capability of the Indian defence industry, particularly its potential to collaborate with the Malaysian companies and the armed forces in their capability enhancement and modernisation efforts.

He also congratulated Malaysia on assuming the chairmanship of ASEAN and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus, and wished its defence ministry the best for conducting the ADMM Plus and ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' meetings this year, the statement said.

"India supports ASEAN centrality and unity, which is a crucial element of India's Indo-Pacific vision. The defence secretary reiterated India's support to Malaysia's endeavours as the ASEAN chair in promoting a stronger, unified, and prosperous ASEAN that plays a central role in shaping the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region," it said. (PTI)

# Safeguarding privacy as a human right in digital world is necessary: NHRC chief

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** NHRC chairperson Justice (ret'd) V Ramasubramanian emphasised that safeguarding "privacy as a human right" in the digital world is necessary, even as he pointed out that there is a "significant decline" in value systems and one must bear its consequences.

The National Human Rights Commission chief's remarks came during an open house discussion on 'Ensuring privacy and human rights in the digital era: A focus on corporate digital responsibility' held at its premises, with some participants joining virtually, according to an NHRC statement on Wednesday.

Some of the important suggestions that emanated from the discussion include simplifying user agreements and policy frameworks to enhance consumer understanding and control over personal data; establishing "clear accountability" structures for data breaches, especially for research institutions and third-party data processors; and strengthening user consent frameworks for greater transparency and informed decision-making.

Having "explicit penal provisions for non-compliance"; need for bilateral agreements to address cross-border security and data-sharing concerns; addressing the challenges arising from strict data localisation mandates; and having clear guidelines for obtaining verifiable parental consent for minors, were also suggested.

Addressing the participants, the NHRC chairperson "emphasised that safeguarding privacy as a human right in the digital world is necessary", the statement said.

The technological advancements should "align with fundamental human rights and privacy protection". The responsibility must begin with the individual user, it said.

Justice Ramasubramanian highlighted that "maintaining digital hygiene is crucial". He also pointed out the "significant decline in value systems, cautioning that



one must bear the consequences of this shift", it said.

The NHRC chairperson reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to fostering inclusive discussions on digital rights and corporate accountability for developing a robust regulatory framework that balances innovation, security, and individual privacy.

The intensity of the problem that arises due to misuse of data and data breaches were extensively discussed during the meeting. Further, several key provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 were also discussed, it said.

Many participants raised concerns over the "extensive control exerted by global technology companies on user data, which complicates regulatory enforcement". Law enforcement agencies often face challenges in accessing critical data due to data storage in off-shore centres, the statement said.

Additionally, the increasing reliance on digital platforms makes maintaining individual privacy more challenging, it said. The participants noted that consumers have limited choices in consenting to data collection, as many business models mandate data sharing. The existing Do-Not-Disturb (DND) mechanism by TRAI was deemed ineffective, the NHRC said.

The participants included Shailendra Trivedi, Chief General Manager-in-Charge, Department of Information Technology, Reserve Bank of India; Deepak Goel, Group Coordinator (Cyber Law), Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology; Ankur Rastogi, Principal Project Engineering, EGSTM, Centre For Railway Information Systems, among others. (PTI)

# Mullaperiyar Dam row: SC asks supervisory panel to resolve issues raised by TN

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the newly-constituted panel overseeing the safety of Mullaperiyar Dam to examine the issues of repair and maintenance raised by the Tamil Nadu government and file a report.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh said the chairman of the committee, reconstituted on January 3 by the Centre, would convene a meeting of officials from the warring states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in a week and try to settle the issues raised by Tamil Nadu amicably.

The bench said if the issues, including the clearance for felling trees, repair of the dam, construction of approach road, etc., were not settled amicably, the Supreme Court would adjudicate it.

"It seems to us that a new supervisory committee along with its chairman has been appointed on January 3, 2025. It must look into the prayers made by Tamil Nadu and find out the solutions preferably to be accepted by

both sides. However, in the event of any dispute regarding any of the disputes the committee is directed to submit a report in this court to adjudicate the left out issues," the bench said.

The top court, which asked for the report to be filed within four weeks, said some of the issues were "very childish" and could be resolved amicably between the two states.

A "certain hype" was created about Kerala's devastation if anything happened to the dam, the court added.

The bench said there were multiple cases pending before the top court seeking overlapping reliefs for or against either of the states, and one of the benches listed an issue before a three-judge bench.

In the interest of justice, said the court, it would be prudent that all the petitions on Mullaperiyar Dam were clubbed and heard by a three-judge bench.

The bench, therefore, directed for clubbing all the pending matters and placing it before the Chief Justice for

the matters to be listed before an appropriate bench.

The top court was hearing an original suit filed by Tamil Nadu seeking enforcement of directions passed by the top court on the rights over the dam.

On January 8, the top court expressed shock and said despite the Dam Safety Act by Parliament, the executive was yet to "rise from its slumber".

It made the remarks after the Kerala government said the Centre enacted the Dam Safety Act in 2021 to stonewall proceedings, which were going on in court for the safety of the 130-year-old dam and since then nothing was done.

The court had noted Tamil Nadu government's submission on the Centre creating a new supervisory committee led by the chairperson of the national dam safety authority by an office memorandum of November 21, 2024, in supersession of the supervisory committee constituted by the top court in 2014. (PTI)

# Odisha CM urges Nepalese students to return to KIIT, assures them of justice

**BHUBANESWAR, Feb 19:** Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday urged Nepalese students of Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) to return to the campus here and resume studies, assuring them that peace and normalcy will be restored soon.

Around 1,000 Nepalese students of KIIT were issued suspension notices and asked to leave the campus immediately by the institute's authorities on Monday following protests after the body of a student hailing from the neighbouring country, Prakriti Lamsal, was found hanging from the ceiling of her hostel room on Sunday.

However, following the intervention of the Centre and the state government, the KIIT authorities tendered an apology and requested the Nepalese students to return to the campus.

Majhi, who is currently in Rajasthan, spoke over the phone with officials from Nepal, Sanjeeb Das Sharma and Navin Raj Adhikari, who held a meeting with Odisha Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Mahaling and Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj, along with Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja at the State Guest House here during the day on the evolving situation.

"The chief minister also assured them that justice will be served in the case of the deceased KIIT student, Prakriti Lamsal," a CMO statement said.

Besides, Nepal's Foreign Minister Dr Arzu Rana Deuba also spoke with Odisha Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj over the phone on the issue. (PTI)

# UP woman kills husband with lover's help, cops say tension over rape case had a role in murder

**MAINPURI (UP), Feb 19:** A woman and her lover were arrested for allegedly killing her husband here in Uttar Pradesh's Mainpuri. Apart from the affair, their motive is also believed to be the husband's reluctance to pursue a case of the woman's alleged gang rape, police said on Wednesday.

Amna allegedly added sleeping pills to her husband Mohammed Sajid's food on Sunday, making him unconscious, while 25-year-old Sumit allegedly struck him with an iron wrench. The duo then took the husband's body to a field and set it on fire to destroy any evidence, they said.

Police, however, found a partially burnt body and began an investigation based on a complaint by the victim's father, Aashiq Ali. Superintendent of Police (SP) Ganesh Prasad Saha confirmed the arrests and said the incident came to light on Monday when

Aashiq Ali filed a complaint at Bichwan police station.

The complainant alleged that his son, Mohammed Sajid had been murdered by Baisthwa Bhola Yadav and his son -- both residents of Partapur, Bhogaon. The complaint further claimed that Sajid's body was set on fire after his death. In 2022, Amna had accused Yadav and his sons of gang rape and filed an FIR against them. However, the police filed a final report in court in December 2022, deeming the allegations false.

Amna, dissatisfied with the outcome, filed a protest petition in the court through her husband later that month. The matter was still sub-judice, with the next hearing scheduled for February 20, 2025.

The SP added, "Amna was unhappy with her husband as she believed he was reluctant to pursue the

protest petition in court." The tension surrounding this issue is believed to have played a role in Sajid's killing, he said.

Following Sajid's death, police lodged an FIR and launched a probe. Analysis of call data of Sajid and Amna led police to arrest Sumit.

Further investigation revealed that Sumit, a resident of Bichwan, had been involved in a relationship with Amna. Police claimed Sumit confessed that he and Amna planned Sajid's murder together.

On the night of February 16, Amna allegedly laced her husband's food and tea with sleeping pills, rendering him unconscious. Once Sajid was incapacitated, Sumit struck him on the head with an iron wrench. The pair then transported the body to a nearby field and set it on fire to destroy any evidence, Sumit told police. (PTI)

# 2 women, 1 girl of same family found dead in house in Kolkata, 3 others injured in car accident

**KOLKATA, Feb 19:** Two women and a teenage girl of the same family were found dead inside their house, while three other members were injured as their car rammed into a metro pillar in Kolkata on Wednesday, police said.

The three bodies were found in separate rooms on the third floor of the four-storey house in Tangra area, with the bodies of the two women bearing wrist injuries, a senior police officer said.

Police discovered the bodies after coming to know about the deaths from the husband of one of the deceased. He was among the three injured in the car accident, Joint Commissioner of Kolkata Police, Rupesh Kumar, told reporters after visiting the house.

The accident took place when the car collided with a metro pillar near Abhishekta crossing on EM Bypass, Kumar said.

Police were speaking to eyewitnesses to ascertain how the accident took place and were scanning CCTV footage. The eyewitnesses claimed that the car did not collide with any other vehicle and directly rammed into the pillar, Kumar said. Commissioner of Kolkata Police Manoj Verma also visited the

house. He said a teenage girl aged around 14-15 years was among the deceased.

"We have got certain clues. It is premature to conclusively say whether it was a case of murder or suicide. The body of the teenage girl did not have any major injury marks. The exact reason behind her death and the other two deaths can be ascertained only after we receive the post-mortem examination report," the CP said.

Police were investigating a claim by one of the three seriously injured in the car accident that the entire family planned to die by suicide together.

A probe was also underway into claims by neighbours that around 10 people had visited the residence of the family twice on Tuesday and whether the deaths are linked with these developments.

"During preliminary investigation, we have come to know that the family was having some financial problem. We are trying to ascertain whether today's developments are linked to it," Verma said. The Deys were involved in tannery business and lived in the locality for decades, the local KMC councillor said. (PTI)

# Court rejects discharge plea of Dawood gang member in terror funding case

**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** A court here has refused to discharge a member of the Dawood Ibrahim gang in an alleged terror funding case, holding that there was enough evidence to show his apparent involvement in the crime.

The Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) arrested Parvez Vaid in August 2022, acting on information that fugitive gangsters Dawood Ibrahim and his brother Anees were sending money acquired out of "proceeds of crime" to India for terrorist activities through their associates in the country.

Vaid was booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for allegedly being members of a terrorist organization, as well as under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

The Bombay High Court granted him bail last year, following which he filed a discharge application before the special court for UAPA cases.

Judge B D Shelke, in the order passed on Tuesday, held that from the statements of witnesses and documents "it can be safely gathered that there are sufficient grounds for proceeding against the accused". (PTI)

# Ensure child care, feeding rooms in public buildings: SC to states

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The Supreme Court on Wednesday outlined the importance of separate spaces for child care and feeding of infants in public buildings and asked states to ensure such facilities were provided.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Prasanna B Varale said setting up such facilities would ensure privacy of mothers and prove beneficial for infants.

In existing public spaces, as far as practicable, the state governments may ensure such facilities were provided, added the court.

"In so far as public buildings which are at the stage of planning and construction at public places, the state governments may ensure that sufficient space is reserved for the purposes referred to above," said the bench.

The top court was hearing a plea seeking directions to construct feeding rooms, child care rooms or any other facilities for infants and mothers in public spaces.

The Centre's counsel said the secretary of the Ministry of



Women and Child Development on February 27, 2024, issued a communication on the issue to chief secretaries and administrators of all states and union territories (UT).

Saying it was conscious that it issued no notice to states and UTs, the bench expressed satisfaction over the secretary's communication incorporating the prayers mentioned in the plea.

"On a perusal of the same, we find that the advice for setting up

of the aforesaid facilities at public places is for the purpose of ensuring privacy and ease of discharging duties of mothers who have young children and for the benefit of the infants," it added.

The bench said if the advice was acted upon by the states, it would go a long way in facilitating privacy to young mothers and infants at the time of feeding.

"We find that the said advice which has been issued by the central government is in accordance



**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** Actor Bhumi Pednekar, who is completing a decade in the industry this year, says she is happy that she has built her career on playing women with agency, right from her debut with 2015's "Dum Laga Ke Haisha".

Bhumi, known for films such as "Toilet: Ek Prem Katha", "Bala", "Bheed", and "Bhakhak", said it is a surreal feeling that she gets to live her dream of being an actor everyday through movies.

"I realised I wanted to be an actor when I was 12 so I am grateful that even after 10 years I am doing what I love so deeply. I constantly seek agency in my characters."

"If they don't have agency, I wouldn't do them because I just wouldn't enjoy being a part of that process. I am lucky that I had the opportunity to play such diverse women," the actor told PTI in an interview.

Bhumi will next be seen in "Mere Husband Ki Biwi", which also features Rakul Preet Singh and Arjun Kapoor.

The 35-year-old actor said "Mere Husband Ki Biwi" is a fitting role to conclude her

first decade in the industry.

"Mere Husband Ki Biwi" has a very special place in my life because when I read the script, I felt, I have never played such a character of Preetleen, she is a little off in a nice way... There is so much comedy in her unpredictability, and I have never played such a character before. I've played this part with a lot of dedication, so, it's a very special film for me," she said.

The comedy film celebrates the quirks and complexities of romantic relationships. It is directed by Mudassar Aziz of "Khel Khel Mein" fame.

The actor said co-star Kapoor's humor and friendship helped create a comfortable atmosphere on set while Singh was just like a sister.

"Arjun has a gift for comedy; he can do it well because he thinks like that. Rakul is a sister to me.

When you are doing comedy, you need to be in a secure space... Until there is fun, trust and friendship, especially among the actors of a comedy film, you won't be able to make the audience laugh," she said.

## NEED MY CHARACTERS TO HAVE AGENCY: BHUMI PEDNEKAR



The actor credited Aziz for steering her toward the world of comedy once again after working with him on the 2019 rom-com "Pati Patni Aur Woh".

"The backbone of it is the writing. The biggest thing I learnt from Mudassar sir in this film is that comedy is of different styles. Like, the dialogues are written in a specific metre, and as an actor, you need to deliver in that metre, or else the punch won't land," she said.

Underscoring his love for films that evoke laughter, Aziz – who has helmed movies such as "Happy Bhag Jayegi", and "Pati Patni Aur Woh", said within the comedy genre he will continue to innovate and explore the complexities of relationships.

"I've always liked this kind of cinema, I've laughed a lot, enjoyed watching it a lot with friends or family. So, my mind automatically goes towards those kinds of movies while writing. I've stayed within a genre, and turned the stories in the right direction, or you can discover the newness or discover the newness of that relationship," he said.

"This is the only relationship in the world, which seems to be on a contract and demands more investment in terms of time and hardwork, you cannot take this for granted. So, there will never be a shortage of problems while exploring this relationship onscreen. It is a breeding ground for a lot of comedy ideas," the director, who admires filmmakers like Hrishikesh Mukherjee, David Dhawan and Raj Kanwar, said.

"Mere Husband Ki Biwi", produced by Vasu Bhagnani, Jacky Bhagnani, and Deepshikha Deshmukh through the banner Pooja Entertainment, will be released in theatres on February 21. (PTI)

*Shweta Tripathi to turn producer, says she's inspired to tell her own stories*

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** "Mirzapur" star Shweta Tripathi has announced her foray into production, saying she is now inspired to tell her own stories.

Tripathi broke out with her role of Shaalu Gupta in Neeraj Ghaywan's 2015 film "Masaaan" and went on to feature in critically-acclaimed movies such as "Haraamkhor", "Gone Kesh" and "Cargo".

She became a household name courtesy her performance as Gajgami Gupta aka Golu in crime thriller show "Mirzapur". She has also starred in shows like "Made in Heaven", "Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein" and "Kaalkoot".

"As an actor, I've been fortunate to receive immense love, support, and respect from the industry, critics, and audiences. I've always been drawn to stories that challenge conventions and offer fresh perspectives.

"Over the years, I've worked on projects that resonate deeply and break stereotypes, and now, with all the support I've received, I feel inspired to tell my own stories," Tripathi said in a statement.

She said she is excited about starting a new chapter in her professional journey and looks forward to collaborating with talented storytellers to bring impactful narratives to life.

"I want to create a space for stories that spark meaningful conversations, challenge norms, and inspire change. While acting will always be my passion, producing offers me the chance to contribute to the industry in a new and fulfilling way. I'm currently working on my first project, and I look forward to sharing more details very soon," Tripathi added.

The actor was most recently seen in the second season of her Netflix series "Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein". (PTI)

## Didn't feel any air of stardom around him: Regena Cassandra on 'Vidamuyarchi' co-star Ajith

**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** Ajith is a relaxed human being who wears his stardom lightly, says actor Regena Cassandra, who has worked with the Tamil superstar in the recently released action thriller "Vidamuyarchi".

The Tamil film is written and directed by Magizh Thirumeni. Inspired by the 1997 American film "Breakdown", the film set in Azerbaijan follows a man on a mission to rescue his wife after she is captured by a mysterious group.

"He is one of the superstars about whom you don't feel this air of super stardom around. He is pretty good at being a relaxed and chilled human being. I'm sure there's a lot of work that goes behind it. I've heard people say things like, 'He does it for the reality or he does it for a certain reason'.

"But if someone has been so consistent with the way they are, like this man comes on to set and makes sure no one knows whether he's having a good or

bad day. I admire that quality because if you are doing something, for whatever reason at the end of the day your intentions will come out," Cassandra told PTI in an interview.

Working with Ajith turned out to be a blessing for the actor, known for films such as "Siva Manasulo Sruthi", "Mughizh", and "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" and web series "Rocket Boys" and "Farzi", as she got the opportunity to closely observe how a superstar gracefully navigates the challenges on a movie set.

"To see this man manoeuvre through everything and this film had its fair share of hurdles as well and

to see how a superstar handles these things and how things happen, that was such a nice experience for me. And as an actor, it's learning," she added.

Cassandra also recalled how Ajith made her feel comfortable during the filming of a scene on the movie set when she needed to place her hand on his shoulder.

"When I was doing the scene, I told him, 'I'm going to put my hand like this'. He said, 'Just do your thing, don't worry'.

That one indication itself was enough for me."

"Vidamuyarchi", which was released in theatres on February 6,

opened to mixed reviews. Also starring Arjun Sarja, Arav and Ramya Subramanian, "Vidamuyarchi" is

produced by Subaskaran Alirajah under Lyca Productions. (PTI)



## Divine feeling, says actor Vicky Kaushal after visiting Raigad fort on Shiv Jayanti

**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** Actor Vicky Kaushal on Wednesday described his maiden visit to Raigad fort on the occasion of Chhatrapati Shivaji's birth anniversary as a "divine feeling".

Maharashtra Women and Child Development Minister Aditi Tatkare accompanied Kaushal to the fort, which served as the capital of the Maratha empire, in Raigad district.

Kaushal is currently in the spotlight for portraying Chhatrapati Shivaji's son Sambhaji Maharaj in the Hindi movie "Chhaava".

"I came here (Raigad fort) for the first time. It was an honour for me to play Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj's role in the movie. I have a divine feeling after visiting the fort," the actor told reporters.

Kaushal said Chhatrapati Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha empire, was the first king who cared mostly for people.

"What we call a 'government by the people, for the people'... it all started with Shivaji Maharaj," he added.

Kaushal had previously announced his plans to visit Raigad Fort on the occasion of Shiv Jayanti. In a video message shared on social media, he conveyed his intention to pay respects to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at the capital of the Maratha kingdom. (PTI)



## Chris Pine to topline crime thriller 'Nowhere Fast'



**LOS ANGELES, Feb 19:** Hollywood star Chris Pine is set to headline "Nowhere Fast", an upcoming crime thriller from filmmaker Noah Hawley.

Also produced by Hawley through his banner "26 Keys Productions", the Texas-set crime thriller follows a small-town criminal who inadvertently kills the nephew of his boss, reported entertainment news outlet "Variety".

The project is the second directorial project for Hawley, known for shows "Fargo" and "Legion" as well as the upcoming series "Alien: Earth". He is currently working on the script of the movie.

He made his directing debut with "Lucy In The Sky", the 2019 movie starring Natalie Portman and Jon Hamm.

Pine's most recent project was 'Disney' movie "Wish", in which he voiced starred alongside Ariana DeBose. He also starred in "Poolman", which marked his directorial debut. (PTI)



# JAMSHEDPUR LOOK TO CUT DOWN GAP AT 2ND SPOT IN MATCH AGAINST MOHAMMEDAN



**KOLKATA, Feb 19:** Jamshedpur FC will get a chance to cut down the gap with FC Goa for the second spot if they beat bottom-placed Mohammedan Sporting in their Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Thursday.

Jamshedpur are third in the table with 34 points from 20 matches. However, they have ended up losing thrice in their previous five encounters.

Their away form has been concerning, having faced six defeats on the road, but Mo-

hammedan Sporting have not really optimised their home advantage either.

The Kolkata-based side is presently on a four-game-long losing streak and has garnered just 11 points from their 20 games until now, with both of

their wins coming away from home.

In the reverse fixture, the Khalid Jamil-coached Red Miners had clinched a convincing 3-1 win, and they will have to iron out their offensive concerns, having gone score-

less in their previous two outings, to repeat that feat.

Mohammedan, on the other hand, will eye their first win in 11 attempts at home — having drawn thrice and lost seven times in their backyard this season.

Jamshedpur is realistically chasing a second-placed finish, but they trail FC Goa (39) by five points.

Ending up in the second spot will see them qualify directly for the semifinals and not participate in the one-legged knockout, but they cannot afford to drop any more points hereon for that.

Jamshedpur FC have won the only game played between these two teams this season.

Jamshedpur head coach Khalid Jamil assured that his team is committed to registering a win from this away game.

"It's an away game. We need to get a positive result. Everyone is working hard and the team needs to continue doing that moving forward," he said.

Mohammedan SC's Indian assistant coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo praised Jamshedpur FC and the season they had had so far.

"We know Jamshedpur FC have performed well this season. It's not going to be an easy game for us, but we are going to try our best to put our best foot forward," he said. (PTI)

## Feyenoord knocks AC Milan out of Champions League and Bayern advances on late Davies goal



**MILAN, Feb 19:** Seldom has a player's sending off had such an influence on a game.

AC Milan was to left rue Theo Hernandez's second yellow card — for diving — as Feyenoord advanced to the Champions League last 16 at the former European champion's expense with a 1-1 draw in the second leg of their playoff on Tuesday, giving the Dutch team a 2-1 win on aggregate.

Bayern Munich, Club Brugge and Benfica also won their play-offs, eliminating Celtic, Europa League winner Atalanta, and French team Monaco, respectively. "In soccer everything changes in a second," said Milan forward Santiago Giménez, who scored one of the competition's fastest goals against his former team, Feyenoord, in the first minute.

Hernandez was sent off for a dive in the 51st when Milan was dominating after Giménez's opener had leveled the tie. Feyenoord had won the first leg of the playoff 1-0 last week.

But Milan's defense looked anything but assured after referee Szymon Marciniak showed Hernandez another yellow card for his dive. The France defender had earned his first before the break for lashing out at a Feyenoord player after a foul on teammate João Félix.

Hugo Bueno crossed for Julián Carranza to head Feyenoord level on the night in the 73rd, enough to put the Dutch team into the next phase.

"We're very disappointed. We started well and scored straight away. It seemed like Feyenoord couldn't hurt us," Giménez said of the game's pivotal moment. "Today it happened to Theo but it can happen to anyone, this is soccer. We have the utmost re-

spect for Theo. We will give him all our support."

Feyenoord's Givairo Read was shown a red card following another melee after the final whistle.

Feyenoord will play either Inter Milan or Arsenal in the round of 16.

Alphonso Davies scored in the fourth minute of stoppage time for Bayern to reach the last 16 with a 1-1 draw against Celtic.

Davies, a substitute, bundled the ball over the line after Leon Goretzka's effort was kept out, saving Bayern the ordeal of extra time after German player Nicolas Kühn had scored against his former club to draw Celtic level on aggregate.

Davies' goal gave Bayern a 3-2 win over two legs.

Next for the Bavarian powerhouse is either Bundesliga rival Bayer Leverkusen or Atlético Madrid.

Club Brugge eliminated Atalanta with a 3-1 win in Bergamo for a 5-2 win on aggregate. The 19-year-old forward Chemsidine Talbi scored twice as the visitors gave Gian Piero Gasperini's team a lesson in efficiency.

Atalanta had 29 efforts at goal, compared to seven from the visitors, and tried 89 attacks compared to 16 from Brugge.

Halftime substitute Ademola Lookman scored seconds after the restart to unleash hopes of a miracle — Atalanta just needed three more goals to level the tie — but Simon Mignolet saved Lookman's penalty in the 61st as those hopes gradually faded.

Benfica reached the last 16 with a 3-3 draw against Monaco in Lisbon, giving the Portuguese team a 4-3 win on aggregate.

The last 16 draw takes place on Friday. (AP)

## Former Mumbai captain and selector Milind Rege dies at 76

**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** Former Mumbai captain and selector Milind Rege, a highly respected figure in domestic cricket, died after suffering a heart attack on Wednesday, just days after turning 76. Rege, who turned 76 last Sunday, was admitted in the intensive care unit of the Breach Candy Hospital here and passed away around 6am on Wednesday morning. He is survived by his wife and two sons.

The all-rounder had suffered a heart attack at the age of 26 but returned to the cricket field and even captained Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy. He played 52 First-Class matches between 1966-67 and 1977-78, taking 126 wickets with his right-arm off-break bowling. He also contributed with the bat, scoring 1,532 runs at an average of 23.56.

Legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar recalled Rege's contribu-

tion in the early days of his career.

"Sad to hear about Milind Rege Sir's passing. He was a true Mumbai cricketer with immense contributions to the city's cricket. He and other CCI members saw potential in me and asked me to play for CCI, which, as I look back now, was a landmark moment in my career," Tendulkar wrote on 'X' in a tribute.

"He could pick out a talented

player from a sea of hardworking hopefuls. He had a special sixth sense to pick talent at all levels, but especially at junior levels.

"He leaves behind a void, one that's tough to fill. He may not be around, but his imprint on people's lives will always live on. He made a difference to so many lives and definitely made a difference to mine. Thank you, Sir, for everything. Heartfelt condolences to his friends and family,"

Tendulkar added.

The Indian cricket board also conveyed its condolence message.

"The BCCI mourns the passing of Milind Rege, former Mumbai captain and selector. A pillar of Mumbai cricket, he played a key role in its growth and legacy. His keen eye for talent and contributions as a commentator earned admiration across the cricketing fraternity," it said. (PTI)

## Mercedes rookie Andrea Kimi Antonelli says Lewis Hamilton told him to enjoy himself in F1



**LONDON, Feb 19:** As an 18-year-old rookie taking over Lewis Hamilton's spot at Mercedes, Andrea Kimi Antonelli is having an introduction to Formula 1 unlike any other. Fortunately, he's had some advice from the seven-time champion.

"He said mainly to enjoy (it), not worrying about the external circumstances," Antonelli told reporters Tuesday. "Just working on yourself, enjoy the process, that was the main thing he said." Given Hamilton's legacy at Mercedes, where he won six titles, and his influence on F1, Antonelli prefers to be called "the next Mercedes driver" rather than the replacement for Hamilton, who's now at Ferrari.

Hamilton's own rookie season for McLaren in 2007 — one year after Antonelli was born — went down in F1 history as he won four races and missed out on the title by one point to Kimi Raikkonen.

"Looking back at his 2007 season, which was incredible because he almost won the championship in his rookie year, what was quite impressive was the consistency," Antonelli said. "What (Hamilton) did really well is starting off well and then keep developing without trying to do too much. That's why he did an amazing season and that's what I'm going to try to do."

Long considered one of the most promising talents in junior series, Antonelli raced in Formula 2 last year and got his first taste of F1 with a drive in Friday practice at his home Italian Grand Prix in August. Driving George Russell's car, he had a high-speed crash and apologized to team principal Toto Wolff. Antonelli said Mercedes gave him the support he needed.

"When you have the right people around you, they really help you not to get too bogged down by these things. I think the natural thing for a driver is you go on track and you try to push as hard as you can," he said.

"And the F1 (cars) nowadays are really complicated on this factor because the aerodynamic (effect) is so powerful that the fine line between being on the limit and going over is so little. And as soon as you go 105%, it happens like what happened in Monza."

Antonelli was able to drive an F1 car before he could legally drive on the road and only got his license last month. His examiner turned out to be a fan.

"I was quite nervous, I'm not going to lie, because I didn't want to fail," Antonelli said. "It was nice because after the test, we also had a nice conversation about everything because she's really passionate about the sport." (AP)

## Raducanu loses to Muchova after a spectator is ejected in Dubai

**DUBAI, Feb 19:** Emma Raducanu lost to Karolina Muchova after an emotional first set in which a spectator was ejected at the Dubai Championships.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion appeared to be in tears as she went to the umpire's chair after the second game Tuesday and her second-round match was briefly paused on Court 2.

After speaking to the umpire, who immediately called tournament organizers, Raducanu stood in a small space between the official's chair and courtside screening before Mu-

chova moved over to console her. Raducanu then picked up a towel, wiped her face, nodded and continued the match.

The British player rallied from 4-0 down to force a tiebreaker but eventually lost 7-6 (6), 6-4 to Muchova.

Organizers of the women's tour issued a statement later saying Raducanu was approached in a public space Monday "by a man who exhibited fixated behavior" and "this same individual was identified in the first few rows during Emma's match on Tuesday ... and subsequently ejected."

"He will be banned from all WTA events pending a threat assessment."

The WTA said it was working with Raducanu and her team "to ensure her well-being and provide any necessary support."

A man who stalked Raducanu while she was still a teenager was sentenced to an 18-month community service order and given a five-year restraining order after appearing in a British court in 2022.

Amrit Magar, a former delivery driver from London, went to Raducanu's home on three

separate dates, loitered outside, left unwanted gifts and cards, and stole property.

Raducanu rose to fame in 2021 by winning the U.S. Open as a qualifier, one of the most unlikely achievements in tennis. She hasn't been past the third round at a major since then and has spent long stints recovering from injuries.

The 14th-seeded Muchova advanced to a meeting against No. 53-ranked McCartney Kessler, who upset 2023 U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff 6-4, 7-5.

Third-ranked Gauff hadn't fallen to an opponent ranked outside the top 50 since a loss to Sofia Kenin (128th) at Wimbledon in 2023.

Earlier, second-seeded Iga Swiatek beat Victoria Azarenka 6-0, 6-2 and will next face Dayana Yastremska for a spot in the quarterfinals.

Top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eliminated Veronika Kudermetova 6-3, 6-4, and defending champion Jasmine Paolini defeated Eva Lys 6-2, 7-5.

Elena Rybakina, Jessica Pegula and Paula Badosa also advanced. (AP)

## We believe we can beat any team in this tournament: Shanto

**DUBAI, Feb 19:** Heading into their Champions Trophy opener against formidable neighbours India, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was filled with optimism.

He was particularly emboldened by the rise of pace sensation Nahid Rana, who has added a new dimension to their bowling attack.

The 22-year-old Rana holds the record for the fastest ball (152kph) bowled by a Bangladesh cricketer, his 150kph on occasion, and averages 145kph for most of his spells.

Besides the presence of Rana and experienced pace colleague like Taskin Ahmed, the team also has few useful all-rounders and spinners, and some good batters.

"Obviously, all-rounders always balance the team and we have got some good all-rounders. I hope they will perform tomorrow," Shanto said in the pre-match press conference here on Wednesday.

"If you look in this format, our

team is quite balanced and we believe we can beat any team in this tournament. All teams are capable of winning this trophy but I am someone who is not thinking about the opponents much. If we execute our plan properly we can beat any team in any day," Shanto said.

After years of struggle, Bangladesh are now in a position to boast a good pace-bowling attack, feels Shanto.

"Yes, obviously, I think we always struggle with our seam attack, but last couple of years we have got some quality fast bowlers. Now we have got Nahid Rana, Taskin the way they are bowling. I think it helps a lot.

"As a captain, we love to see them bowling fast. So, I'm really happy that we have got a good fast bowling unit and under lights the ball might swing. So, if they bowl in the good areas, it will help our team."

Rana has done well in his nascent career, having taken 20 wickets in six Tests and four scalps in three ODIs.



Bangladesh are in a group in which the spotlight is on traditional rivals India and Pakistan, and Shanto was asked if this is a favourable position to be in before a big tournament.

"Yeah, obviously, I think if you look at all eight teams - they are quality teams. And against India, Pakistan, New Zealand, we have good memories. We won a couple of matches in recent times." "Last year, when we played India in Bangladesh, we

have some good memories from then. But that is past, I think if we play well tomorrow and execute our plan, we will have a good match tomorrow," he said.

Shanto refused to read much into the absence of India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and Bangladesh's star all-rounder Shakib al Hasan.

The conditions in the UAE are familiar to both the teams but for Bangladesh to have any chance against India, Shanto knows that

they will have to have one of the best days in all departments.

"We have to play well in all departments - batting, bowling, fielding - because I think the way we played the last few years in this format, I think we have a good side and as you mentioned the conditions are quite similar. I'm really confident that we will prepare ourselves well."

When asked about Rana, Shanto said he was looking to leading the pace attack on Thursday and that his emergence has motivated the whole bowling unit.

"I think last few matches he bowled really well and bowled fast. And when we see in the ground bowling like this, it helps our whole bowling unit. And it's motivated us."

"He needs to be fit and he can continue his bowling form. We have got another two-three fast bowlers as well," he said.

After their opener in Dubai, Bangladesh will be playing their last two group games in Pakistan, and the conditions there are going to be different. (PTI)



# India look to rise above selection challenges, past turbulence against Bangladesh in their CT opener

**DUBAI, Feb 19:** A turbulent recent cricketing past has made a resonant effort mandatory for India in the Champions Trophy, and their opening match against a tricky Bangladesh here on Thursday will be the first point in assuaging a set of existential questions surrounding this team.

They are vexing even for a pre-tournament favourite like India. Can this Indian bowling unit tide over the absence of injured pace talisman Jasprit Bumrah? Can Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma summon their glory days back? Can young names like Shubman Gill ace the pressure of a multi-nation competition to deliver consistently?

In that context, the ICC showpiece is a godsend because ODI is the comfort zone of those icons and young tyros in this Indian line-up, and they will be genuinely eyeing a strong outing here.

It's imperative that they do so -- from a team and individual perspective.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Kohli, Rohit and even head coach Gautam Gambhir, although only six months into his tenure, are living on borrowed time because the shockwaves created by the setbacks against New Zealand and Australia have not subsided yet.

Some bright signs are there though. Skipper Rohit made a century a few days back against England and Kohli a fifty, while Gambhir masterminded the dominant 4-1 and 3-0 victories in T20Is and ODIs respectively. Gill was exceptional while emerging as the player of the series, cracking two fifties and a hundred in three ODIs against England.

But the challenge India face in the Champions Trophy is vastly different from a rather cosy home series.

Bangladesh, Pakistan and New Zealand, their opponents in Group A, are far more



motivated than the seemingly disinterested England whom they faced recently, and even one defeat can change the whole league stage equation quite dramatically.

Although India are playing a strong brand of 50-over cricket of late, they have some selection riddles to solve before they face Bangladesh.

It starts with KL Rahul's batting position. Will he bat at No. 5, his most productive slot, or at No. 6 with Axar Patel coming one place above him?

The wicketkeeper batter had batted at No. 6 in the first two matches against England before going back to No. 5 in the final one-

dayer.

In all likelihood, the team management could remain fluid and take a call as per the game situation here.

However, finding the right balance in bowling poses a bigger challenge, partly because of the injury-enforced absence of Bumrah.

It will be a toss up between Arshdeep Singh and Harshit Rana as the new-ball partner of lead pacer Mohammed Shami, who will have to lift his game by a few notches here.

Rana might have been impressive so far in his outings, and he has the ability to hustle

the batters with sheer pace and bounce even on the most docile of pitches.

But, at this moment, Arshdeep is the front-runner to share the newball duties because of the left-arm angle and the variety he possesses in his bowling.

Other than that, India is likely to go with three spinners with Hardik Pandya as the fast bowling all-rounder.

But herein too, India will have to ponder over who is the third spinner behind primary choices Ravindra Jadeja and Axar.

They have a tough selection to make between left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarthy.

If the recent form is the yardstick then 'mystery spinner' Chakravarthy should get the nod, but Kuldeep showed his readiness while outwitting some reputed batters in the nets here on Tuesday.

But India can take consolation from the fact that Bangladesh are going through turmoil of their own, weakened by the absence of stars like Shakib Al Hasan.

However, India will not like to leave anything to chance as Bangladesh has proved to be the proverbial banana peel for them in the past in global events.

Teams (from): India: Rohit Sharma (c), Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Ravindra Jadeja, Varun Chakravarthy.

Bangladesh: Nazmul Hossain Shanto (c), Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan, Tawhid Hridoy, Mushfiqur Rahim, MD Mahmud Ullah, Jaker Ali Anik, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Parvez Hossain Emon, Nasum Ahmed, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Nahid Rana.

Match starts at 2.30 pm IST. (PTI)

## Shubman Gill dethrones Babar Azam to become No 1 batter in ICC ODI rankings

**DUBAI, Feb 19:** India vice-captain Shubman Gill on Wednesday dethroned Babar Azam of Pakistan from the No. 1 spot in the ICC ODI Rankings for batters on the back of his strong show against England in the recent home series. The ICC issued the latest rankings just ahead of the start of the eight-team Champions Trophy in Karachi with the match between Pakistan and New Zealand. "India right-hander Shubman Gill overtakes former Pakistan captain Babar Azam to become the top ranked ODI batter in the world," the ICC said.



Gill, who scored two fifties and a century in the recent three-match ODI series against England at home which India won 3-0, jumped one place to the No. 1 spot. He now has 796 rating points compared to Babar's 773.

India skipper Rohit Sharma is placed at the third spot with 761 points followed by South Africa's Henrich Klaassen and New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell at fourth and fifth respectively. "It's a major shake-up at the top of the rankings just prior to the start of the Champions Trophy and leaves an interesting sub-plot to what will transpire over the coming weeks during the eight-team tournament in Pakistan and Dubai," the ICC said.

"This is the second time Gill has held the No.1 ranking in ODI cricket, with the India batter having also gone past Babar to claim top spot midway through the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in 2023.

"Gill has been in excellent form of late, with his century against England in Ahmedabad during the third ODI of the recently concluded series enough to catapult the 25-year-old to the top of the rankings," the global governing body added. Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana, meanwhile, has taken the first position in the ODI rankings for bowlers as he replaced Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan.

"While Sri Lanka won't be featuring at the Champions Trophy, Theekshana earned the top spot following his exploits against the Aussies that included an excellent four-wicket haul in the opening match of that series in Colombo," the ICC said. Sri Lanka had recently handed a 2-0 whitewash to Australia with Theekshana taking four wickets. The Sri Lankan spinner has 680 rating points, followed by Rashid at second, Namibia's Bernard Scholtz at third, India's Kuldeep Yadav at fourth and Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi at fifth.

"Meanwhile, Afghan spin wizard Rashid drops to second and will be keen to regain the No.1 spot as he trails his Sri Lankan counterpart by just 11 rating points," the ICC said.

"While a trio of spinners in India's squad Kuldeep Yadav (up one place to fourth), South Africa's Keshav Maharaj (re-enters the rankings in sixth) and New Zealand's Mitchell Santner (up four rungs to seventh) are all inside the top 10 after making ground this week."

Afghanistan veteran Mohammad Nabi remains the top ranked all-rounder in ODIs, followed by Sikandar Raza, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Rashid. (PTI)

## 70th Bordoloi Trophy: Tinkusia Barekuri FC enter semis of Sivasagar Cluster

**HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, Feb 19:** In a Sivasagar cluster match of the 70th Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi Football Tournament played in the Peoli Phukan Stadium here on Wednesday, Barekuri FC Tinsukia defeated Riverine Club, Majuli 6-1 to earn a semi-final clash of the 70th Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi Trophy

Football Tournament on Wednesday.

After a goalless first half, Rofick Sharmachi (52 minutes), Dhanyajit Gohain (56 minutes), Mayukh Gogoi (58 & 61 minutes), Porag Moran (82 minutes) and Dipankar Murra (90+3 minutes) scored for the Tinsukia team while Bikudar Pegu reduced the margin by a lone goal on 75th

minute.

Jorhat Victorious FC withdrew from the tournament giving Charaideo Navajyoti Sangha a walkover to enter the semis. Now Sivasagar Rajmai FC will play against Tinsukia Barekuri FC in the first semi-final while 19th APBN Dibrugarh will lock horns with Navajyoti Sangha Charaideo on February 21.



कृषि आक कृषक कल्याण मन्त्रालय  
ভারত চৰকাৰ

“প্রধানমন্ত্রী ফচল বীমা যোজনাই বতৰৰ অনিশ্চয়তাৰ সৈতে জড়িত ক্ষতিৰ শংকা কম কৰি পৰিশ্ৰমী কৃষক ভাই-ভনীৰ আৰ্থিক হিত ৰক্ষা কৰাত একেৰাহে গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা পালন কৰি আহিছে। এই কৃষক হিতৈষী বীমাৰ লাভ কোটি কোটি কৃষকে পাব ধৰিছে।”

- নৰেন্দ্ৰ মোদী, প্রধানমন্ত্রী



## শস্য এতিয়া সুৰক্ষাৰ লগত মোৰ পলিচী মোৰ হাতত

ফচল বীমা কৰাওক, সুৰক্ষা কৰচ পাওক

প্রধানমন্ত্রী ফচল বীমা যোজনাৰ সাফল্যসমূহ

- 21.95 কোটি কৃষক ভাই-ভনীয়ে এতিয়ালৈকে পালে ফচল বীমাৰ লাভ
- ₹ 1.72 লাখ কোটি দাবীৰ ধন কৃষকক পৰিশোধ কৰা হ'ল
- 72.61 কোটিৰো অধিক কৃষক আবেদনপত্ৰ প্ৰাপ্ত কৰা হ'ল



সমগ্ৰ দেশ জোৰা হেল্পলাইন 14447



প্রধানমন্ত্রী ফচল  
বীমা যোজনা

আপোনাৰ গাঁৱত হ'বলগীয়া শিৱিৰত নিয়োক্ত বিষয়সমূহ সহজে তথ্যপাতি প্ৰাপ্ত কৰক :

- বীমা পলিচী, চৰকাৰী নীতি, ভূমি অজিলেখ তথা দাবী আৰু অভিযোগ নিৰাৰণ
- কৃষকক প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়াৰ হেতু ফচল বীমা পাঠশালা

সেৱাৰ্থীক কৰা হৈছে



মহা অভিযান  
15 ফেব্ৰুৱাৰী - 15 মাৰ্চ 2025



যোজনা সম্বন্ধীয় অধিক তথ্যপাতি জনাৰ বাবে যোগাযোগ কৰক

জনসেৱা কেন্দ্ৰ

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