



# ASSAM WELCOMES

PRIME MINISTER

## SHRI NARENDRA MODI

ESTEEMED FOREIGN DELEGATES  
AND GLOBAL INVESTORS

# ADVANTAGE ASSAM 2.0

Investment and Infrastructure Summit

**INAUGURATION**

**24 February 2025 | 1900hrs**

VETERINARY COLLEGE FIELD,  
KHANAPARA, GUWAHATI

### PARTNER COUNTRIES



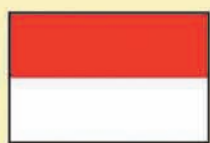
Australia



Bhutan



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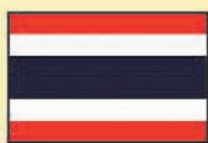
Japan



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### In August Presence of

**Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya**  
Governor, Assam

**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam

**Shri Bimal Borah**  
Minister of Industries, Commerce & Public Enterprises  
and Cultural Affairs Department, Assam

### Programme Highlights

Inauguration | Ministerial Sessions | Thematic Sessions | B2B, B2G meetings | Exhibition | Valedictory Session



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# USAID funded 7 projects in India in FY24 but not related to 'voter turnout': FinMin report

The United States of America's bilateral development assistance to India started in 1951

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Amid a raging political controversy over USAID's alleged role in influencing Indian elections, the latest annual report of the finance ministry has disclosed that the agency funded seven projects worth USD 750 million in 2023-24.

"Currently, seven projects worth a total budget of USD 750 million (approx.) are being implemented by USAID in partnership with Government of India," as per the Finance Ministry annual report for 2023-24.

For the financial year 2023-24, an obligation of a total of USD 97 million (about ₹ 825 crore) has been made by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) under the seven projects, it said.

The Department of Economic Affairs under the Finance Ministry which is the nodal department for bilateral funding arrangements has also shared the details of projects funded in 2023-24 in the report.

During the year, no funding was made for enhancing voter turnout but to projects related to agriculture & food security programme; water, sanitation and hygiene



(WASH); Renewable Energy; disaster management and health.

Besides, it said, funds were committed for Sustainable Forests and Climate Adaptation Program and Energy Efficiency Technology Commercialization and Innovation Project.

The United States of America's bilateral development assistance to India started in 1951 and it is mainly administered through USAID. Since its commencement, USAID has provided economic assistance of over USD 17 billion to

India in various sectors for over 555 projects.

Political controversy erupted in the country earlier this month after the Elon Musk-led DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) claimed that it had cancelled a USD 21 million grant to India to boost "voter turnout".

US President Donald Trump also repeatedly claimed that USAID under the previous administration led by Joe Biden allocated USD 21 million in funding to India for 'voter turnout'.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday said the information put out by the Trump administration is "concerning" and that the government is looking into it. The USAID was allowed in India "in good faith, to do good faith activities", and suggestions are being made out of America that "there are activities which are in bad faith," Jaishankar had said.

On the other hand, the Congress party on Sunday accused the BJP of indulging in "anti-national work" by spreading "fake news from America" and asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer as to why the government is silent when US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk are "insulting" India repeatedly.

Congress general secretary in-charge Jairam Ramesh said, "BJP is a procession of liars and illiterates. The news about USD 21 million, on which the BJP and their bootlickers were jumping on, turned out to be fake. The USD 21 million in 2022 was not for 'voter turnout' in India, but for Bangladesh." (PTI)

## Sebi considers expanding eligibility for qualified institutional buyer

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Markets regulator Sebi is looking to expand the definition of qualified institutional buyers (QIB) and remove the 200-investor cap, allowing angel funds to access a broader pool of accredited investors.

This move will enable more wealthy investors to participate, boosting funding for startups. It ensures that only financially strong investors take on high-risk investments, helping Angel Funds raise more capital and support early-stage companies.

Angel Funds, a type of venture capital fund, mobilize money from investors to support startups.

However, concerns have been raised about inadequate verification of investors' risk appetite, the onboarding of numerous investors without strong financial backing, and potential conflicts with private placement regulations under the Companies Act, 2013. To address these concerns, Sebi previously proposed that only Accredited Investors (AIs) should be allowed to invest in Angel Funds. Now, the regulator is seeking feedback on amending the definition of QIBs to include accredited investors, specifically for offering investment opportunities and allocating investments through angel funds.

Additionally, Sebi has proposed removing the 200-investor cap for Angel Funds. Under the Companies Act, private placements cannot be offered to more than 200 investors unless they are QIBs.

Currently, Angel Funds provide investment opportunities to a large number of investors, even though actual investments per company are limited to 200. The proposal suggested that there should be no cap on total investors in Angel Funds, as all will be accredited. (PTI)

## Installation ceremony of new managing committee of ICAI's Guwahati branch held

**GUWAHATI, Feb 23:** The installation ceremony of the newly elected Managing Committee of Guwahati Branch (EIRC) of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) for the term 2025-29 was recently held at ICAI Bhawan in Guwahati.

As per the official statement, the ceremony was held on Saturday.

CA. Raginee Goyal was unanimously elevated as branch chairperson and CA. Anjani Kumar Mundhra took charge as vice chairperson of the Branch. CA. Jay Prakash Gupta assumed charge of branch secretary and CA. Piyush Birmiwal was unanimously selected as branch treasurer for the year 2025-26.

"CA. Nitika Bagaria was appointed chairperson of the Branch Continuing Professional Education (CPE) Committee and CA. Vikash Kumar Choudhary was appointed as chairman EICASA, i.e. the student body of the Branch. CA. Kumar Victor Saha was appointed as Nominated EICASA member and he was also nominated as editor of Branch E-Newsletter and Non CPE Activity Committee," the official statement added.

It further said that CA. (Dr.) Debashis Mitra, past president ICAI, attended the ceremony as special invitee and was honoured for his excellent service to ICAI during his presidential tenure and historical performance in World Conference of Accountants and his efforts in bringing up the approvals for Centre of Excellence in Uttar Phulung, North Guwahati.

"CA. Ravi Kumar Patwa, central council member of ICAI and past chairman EIRC and Guwahati Branch, extended wishes for a successful term ahead to the newly installed committee team and the incoming chairperson. All the newly elected central council members and regional council members from Eastern India for the term 2025-29 were also invited and felicitated at the event," the statement read further.

As per the statement, CA Saurabh Choudhary, the



outgoing chairman of the branch informed that the Guwahati branch was awarded the best branch of eastern region for its member body as well as best students' body of eastern region in the category of large & medium branches.

On the other hand, CA Goyal in her acceptance speech, put forward her plans and vision for the upcoming year and appealed to the members to participate in learning and fellowship activities of the Branch in large numbers as all programmes of Branch are for updation and professional welfare of the members and students.

She also requested the members to motivate and allow their articulated trainees to attend the workshops and seminars organised for CA students for their all round learning and knowledge improvement with practical training.

"She also requested Chartered Accountants to contribute to the CSR activities of the Branch which are important and desirable for a professional body like the ICAI which is set up under an Act of the Parliament," the statement concluded.

A galaxy of past Chairmen and senior as well as young members of the Branch attended the Ceremony.

## SBI aims to be net-zero by 2055: Chairman C S Setty

**MUMBAI, Feb 23:** State Bank of India Chairman C S Setty on Sunday said the largest Indian lender is targeting to be Net-Zero by 2055. The bank will be celebrating its centenary year of existence then, he said.

Setty made the remarks after

flagging off the "SBI Green Marathon Season 5" event in the financial capital, according to a statement. Over 10,000 runners participated in the 5km, 10km and 21 km categories of the event held here. There will be similar events in Vizag, Lucknow, Chandigarh,

Ahmedabad, Pune, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, and Patna.

Running legends Vinod Kumar Sharma, Barun Kumar, Vishak Krishnaswamy, Ashish Arya, Sarika Jain, Raj Gandhi and Rinkoo Singh were present at event, the statement said. (PTI)

## Handicraft, handloom exports from Kashmir at ₹ 2,567 cr in over last two fiscal years

**SRINAGAR, Feb 23:** Kashmir exported its famed handicraft and handloom products worth ₹ 2,567 crore in over last two fiscal years, officials said on Sunday.

This export figure is expected to touch ₹ 3,000 crore by the end of this fiscal year (March 2025).

"The world-famous handicraft and handloom products worth ₹ 2,567 crore have been exported from Kashmir valley in the last two financial years and the first three quarters of the current fiscal (2024-25)," an official said.

However, the exports in the current financial year have been hit by global conflicts.

As per the figures available with Handicrafts and Handloom Department, Kashmir, while Kani and Sozni shawls exports stood at ₹ 1,105 crore, hand-knotted carpet shipments were worth ₹ 728 crore in the last three years.

The other products exported include crewel, papier mache, chain stitch and wood carving.

The officials said the department would facilitate the export of hand-made Kashmir products for which a subsidy scheme is available, giving an incentive of 10 per cent of the total volume of handloom/handicraft export products to any country with maximum reimburse-



ment up to ₹ 5 crore in favour of the eligible exporters registered with the department.

Highlighting the government's strategy for the welfare of the artisan community in the valley, they said the department has a well-established 'Design Studio' in the Indian Institute of Carpet Technology and unique prototypes conceived by the School of Designs and Craft Development Institute.

"The artisans can access these contemporary designs and packaging models to add value to their products in niche high-end markets," an official said.

For the welfare of the artisans, the department has several flagship

schemes in operation including Credit Card Scheme, Mudra, Financial Assistance Scheme for Cooperatives, Karkhandar Scheme and Education Scholarship for the children of craftsmen.

Under the National Wool Policy, the department has selected 100 weaver beneficiaries for distribution of free modified modern steel carpet looms in Kashmir at a total cost of ₹ 43.70 lakh and the department will pitch for another 250 improved looms for distribution in the next financial year.

Emphasizing the department's focus on testing and QR coding of GI-registered craft products to weed out sale of counterfeit products, the officials said the depart-

ment has augmented manpower and equipment at its premier Pashmina Testing and Quality Certification Centre (PTQCC) and IICT lab for carpets.

"The waitlist of six craft products including Sozni, Kani, Walnut Wood Carving, Khatamband, Papier Mache and Kashmir Pashmina at PTQCC has come down from 1,700 on February 5 to 671 as on February 21, after strengthening of manpower," an official said.

The lab will be further strengthened after more staff undergoes necessary training at the Wool Research Association, Thane.

The officials said the proposal for additional equipment including Scanning Electron Microscope and a Digital Microscope have been submitted in the Union Ministry of Textiles, which shall further enhance the speed of testing and certification in PTQCC.

Laying stress upon the promotion of training of female artisans, the officials said as many as 17,182 women have been trained in various crafts at 432 Elementary and Advanced Training Centres of the department in the last four years. "Stipend to the tune of ₹ 36.27 crore has also been disbursed amongst these trainees," an official said. (PTI)

## FDA issues showcause notice to Aveo for illegal export of opioids

**PALGHAR, Feb 23:** Maharashtra's Food and Drug Administration has issued a show cause notice to a pharmaceutical company here for alleged illegal export of opioids, an official said on Sunday.

Following the Central government's directives on Friday, a joint team of drug inspectors from the Centre and state government raided Aveo Pharmaceuticals, a Palghar-based company allegedly involved in exporting these drugs, the FDA stated in a release.

Aveo Pharmaceuticals, however, has denied the allegations and said it is fully cooperating with the government authorities in the probe.

As per a statement issued by the FDA, the action

was taken after the BBC's investigative report highlighted that Tapentadol and Carisoprodol manufactured in India were illegally exported to African countries, where they are misused for recreational purposes.

Authorities have seized all existing stock in the company, prohibited further production, and initiated stringent legal action against the company in Palghar, the FDA said.

The company has been served a show cause notice under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940, and officials have assured that all necessary legal measures will be taken without any delay, fear, or favour. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

## ₹ 1.22 lakh cr investment proposals

development in tier 2 and 3 cities, and a new flyover on Amolapatty junction on old NH 37 in Dibrugarh city to ease traffic.

The cabinet also approved the introduction of Dynamic Assured Career Progression Scheme 2025 to support doctors serving as faculty members in medical colleges and ensure their growth and retain their services in state's medical colleges.

Sarma said faculty members of medical colleges will also be entitled to various benefits like reimbursement of expenses for attending national and international seminars periodically and other facilities at par with those given to doctors at AIIMS. (PTI)

## PM Modi on two-day

Margherita, Meghalaya chief ministers Conrad Sangma, Tripura chief minister Manik Saha, agriculture minister of Bhutan and top industrialists of the country.

Besides ambassadors of 61 missions, business delegations from Australia, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand, Bhutan and Japan will also be present at the inaugural session, the chief minister said. The prime minister is scheduled to leave from Guwahati after the inaugural session. (PTI)

## Ambassadors of 61 countries

ready for safari inside the park. The sources said the Kaziranga National Park will be closed for regular tourists on Monday, while those with special invites will undertake safaris in the park in the afternoon also. (PTI)

## India to host two-day

take place in New Delhi on February 24 and 25," the MEA said. The United Nations will be represented by Under-Secretary-General, Department of Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix and UN Special Coordinator Christian Saunders.

They will join other stakeholders pertaining to the peacekeeping domain, the MEA said in a statement. (PTI)

## USTM chancellor, 5 teachers

Guwahati, asserting that the water flowing down from the varsity campus, which is located on a hill adjacent to the city, leads to massive flooding. (PTI)

## Build friendship among all

may not be termed as laws from the legal point of view. Bhagwat reached Guwahati on Friday on a six-day tour, during which he is slated to interact with members and deliberate on strengthening the organisation further. The trip is a part of his tour of different regions of the country, coinciding with the centenary year of the organisation. (PTI)

## Cong says PM, EAM must

about two USAID grants on DOGE's list that were given through the Washington-based Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), the Congress leader said.

The CEPPS was supposed to receive a total of USD 486 million from USAID, he said, adding that according to DOGE, the funds included USD 22 million for Moldova and USD 21 million for "voter turnout in India", he said. "The first fund USAID gave to CEPPS for Moldova was in 2016 with the ID AID117LA1600001. But the USAID USD 21 million grant for India marked by DOGE is completely fake. Because it was for Bangladesh, not India," he claimed. And the reality is that of the USD 21 million earmarked for Bangladesh, USD 13.4 million has already been disbursed before the January 2024 elections, Ramesh said.

"Every federal grant specifies the country in which it is to be used. According to US federal spending, there have been no USAID-funded CEPPS projects in India since 2008. The only ongoing USD 21 million USAID grant to CEPPS, ID 72038822LA00001, was approved in July 2022 for Bangladesh's 'Amar Vote Amar' (My Vote Is Mine)," he pointed out.

"In November 2022, the purpose of the grant was changed to 'USAID's Nagorik Programme'. A USAID official in Dhaka also confirmed this on social media during his US visit in December 2024: 'I manage the USD 21 million CEPPS/Nagorik project funded by USAID'," Ramesh said.

"Now the BJP should just answer this: Why did the BJP spread fake news about India's democracy? Why did the BJP do anti-national work by spreading fake news from America? If BJP's accusing India's opposition party over fake news from America is not treason, then what is it?" he said.

Ramesh said "Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer, Donald Trump and Elon Musk are insulting India again and again, and why is our government silent on this?" The Congress leader said "Is it the case that the country's self-respect has been compromised in the process of begging for mercy for Adani?"

Trump for the fourth time in recent days has claimed that the Biden administration allocated USD 21 million funding to India for voter turnout, evoking a sharp response from the Congress which urged Prime Minister Modi to talk to his friend and strongly refute the allegation.

The opposition party has demanded a white paper on the funds received in India from developmental agencies, aid mechanisms and multilateral forums.

It also sought legal action against the RSS-BJP and their ecosystem for making wild allegations against credible civil society members, NGOs and political parties.

In Washington, speaking at a 'Governors Working Session,' Trump had said: Twenty-one million dollars going to my friend Prime Minister Modi in India for voter turnout. We're giving 21 million for voter turnout in India. What about us? I want voter turnout too.

A video clipping from the event was posted on social media by the White House on Friday.

Trump also said that money went to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh to a firm that nobody ever heard of. In New Delhi, reacting to Trump's remarks, the Congress on Saturday demanded a comprehensive white paper on the funds that political parties, individuals, NGOs, organisations received from developmental agencies, aid mechanisms and multilateral forums.

The white paper should not only focus on USAID funding, but all such agencies which fund both governments, individuals and all other entities under Indian law, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khara said on Saturday.

Hitting back at Khara, BJP leader Ajay Alok said the Congress people have probably lost their mind. (PTI)

## Govt reviewing infrastructure

said these centres will have four to six beds and focus on providing chemotherapy services and conducting cancer prevention and awareness programmes.

"We have started conducting a gap analysis and reviewing the infrastructure of all district hospitals for setting up these cancer centres. As part of the exercise, we will also assess the cancer load in these district hospitals," the official added. As part of the government's ongoing efforts for cancer care, over the last few years, more than ₹ 3,000 crore have been approved for the period from 2014-15 to 2025-26 for 19 state cancer institutes (SCIs) and 20 tertiary cancer care centres (TCCCs).

Also, cancer treatment facilities have been approved in all the 22 new All India Institutes of Medical Sciences. Since the inception of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), approximately 68.43 lakh hospital admissions amounting to ₹ 13,160.75 crore have been authorised for cancer-related packages under the scheme, health minister J P Nadda said recently.

At 17 AMRIT pharmacies, 289 oncology drugs are given at a significant discount of up to 50 per cent of market rates. Also, under the Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana, affordable anti-cancer and oncology medicines are given. The government has introduced screening for individuals aged 30 years and above under the National Health Mission (NHM) at ayushman arogya mandirs and more than 26 crore people have been screened for oral cancer, 14 crore for breast cancer and nine crore for cervical cancer at these facilities. The government has also fully exempted 36 lifesaving drugs for treating cancer, rare and chronic diseases from basic customs duty. (PTI)

## CS assures timely delivery

Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. The chief secretary expressed admiration for the courage and resilience of those displaced from their homes in enduring the situation.

Noting that there was a delay in providing funds and assistance in the past, Singh assured "timely delivery henceforth and all-out support from the administration" and wished "a safer, free from fear and self-reliant future for the displaced people".

Imphal East Deputy Commissioner Khumanthem Diana Devi also stated that the district currently hosts 3,500 displaced people across 17 relief camps and 400 units of pre-fabricated houses accommodating 1,394 from 359 families. She mentioned that over 293 families have returned to their villages with the improvement of law and order situation. During the event, a total of 146 looms with accessories, provided by the Weavers Service Centre under the National Handloom Development Programme, were distributed to internally displaced women weavers.

Powergrid Corporation of India Ltd also provided 300 bicycles for displaced students and 150 looms with accessories for such women weavers of the district. (PTI)

**6** WORLD

**8** NATION

- Discontented Germany votes in election with economy, migration in focus
- States threaten fines for local officials who resist immigration crackdown
- Atishi becomes first woman to be LoP in Delhi assembly
- Cong to hold AICC session in Ahmedabad on April 8-9

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2025

THE HILLS TIMES 3

## PM Modi on two-day visit to Assam from today

**GUWAHATI, Feb 23:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive here on a two-day visit to Assam on Monday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

During the visit, the PM will inaugurate the 'Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit' on Tuesday, Sarma said.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Sarma said that the prime minister will attend a mega Jhumur dance performance at Sarusajai stadium on Monday evening.

"The dance performance by artists from our tea gardens will commence at 5.30 pm. The prime minister will greet the artists and spectators. The Jhumur performance will be followed by a laser show on a specific cultural theme of the state," he added.

As many as 61 heads of missions to India, along with other top dig-

nitaries, will also witness the Jhumur performance by over 8,500 artists, in keeping with the completion of 200 years of Assam tea.

The prime minister will inaugurate an exhibition organised along with the Advantage Assam 2.0 Summit later on Monday evening, Sarma said.

"If the prime minister goes during the day, the visit becomes more official and he cannot interact with the people. That is why he will visit the exhibition on February 24 and declare it open. He will spend 30-45 minutes going through the exhibition and meeting the participants," the chief minister said.

Modi will inaugurate the Summit at the plenary session on Tuesday morning, Sarma added.

The plenary session will be attended by Assam Governor, Union ministers S Jaishankar, Sarbananda Sonowal, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Pabitra (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## ₹1.22 lakh cr investment proposals sealed ahead of biz meet

Introduction of Dynamic Assured Career Progression Scheme 2025 to support doctors approved ● Cabinet rejected MoUs worth ₹45,000 cr

**GUWAHATI, Feb 23:** The Assam Cabinet on Sunday approved investment proposals worth ₹1.22 lakh crore ahead of the second edition of the state business summit, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Addressing a press conference after a cabinet meeting, Sarma said that it had been decided that all MoUs, which will be signed during the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit here, will be "properly scrutinised and then approved" by the council of ministers.

The cabinet, in its meeting chaired by the CM, rejected MoUs worth ₹45,000 crore as these were found to be on "flimsy grounds", he said.

"We don't want to create unnecessary euphoria among people, we want to be reasonable and rational," he said on the cabinet that had gone through all proposals before approval.

The two-day business summit will be inaugurated by Prime Min-

ister Narendra Modi on February 25.

Ambassadors from over 60 countries and business delegations from several countries along with top industrialists of India are expected to attend the programme.

"The cabinet cleared MoUs worth ₹1.22 lakh crore today and more details of these will be shared during the summit. We had decided that no MoU will be signed in piggy sector. Other than that, MoUs have been approved in various sectors, ranging from handloom and textile to power to industry to mines and minerals," Sarma said.

Besides the MoUs approved, announcements of investments by some companies are also likely during the summit, he added.

He said the MoUs and investments to be announced through the summit can be broadly categorised into four segments – announcements for investment, announcements for infrastructure, MoU financial and MoU non-financial.

Some of these investment an-



nouncements will be by government sector, some by PSUs and also by private parties, he added.

Along with the investment proposals to be finalised at the summit here, MoUs for investment up to ₹50 crore will be signed at the district commissioners' (DC) offices during the two days of the mega event.

Altogether, 2,590 such MoU

with investment proposals ranging between ₹5 lakh to ₹50 crore have been confirmed to be signed at the districts during the summit, Sarma said.

These MoUs propose a total of ₹15,911 crore of investment, he said.

The chief minister said against each proposal to be signed during the summit, details of investment

and employment to be generated along with other details will be shared.

"In some proposals, the amount of investment could be more compared to jobs created, while in some cases, lesser investment could also lead to more jobs, depending on the sector," he added.

On other decisions in the cabinet, the chief minister said a Textiles and Apparel Policy, Assam, 2025 was approved in the meeting.

"It will help in creating an investor-friendly environment with easy access to raw materials and manpower to support new investments in the textile and apparel sector," he said.

Modification of Biotechnology Policy for the State of Assam (2022-2027) was also approved to create a more conducive environment for biotechnology research, industry and entrepreneurship to align with the BioE3 Policy.

The cabinet also approved ₹55.45 crore to take up urban infrastructure (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### HT BRIEFS

#### Opium seized

**GUWAHATI:** Assam Police on Sunday seized opium weighing more than 18 kg at Karagaon Naka Point under Khatkhati Police Station in Karbi Anglong, said Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The seizure was made during an operation which resulted in seizing 18.108 kg opium from an intercepted vehicle. "In a successful operation at Karagaon Naka Point under Khatkhati Police Station, @assampolice seized 18.108 kg of opium from an intercepted vehicle. One individual has been arrested in connection with the case," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

#### Advantage Assam 2.0

**TEZPUR:** Efforts of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma have now opened the door of investments and possibilities in Assam, Union minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles Pabitra Margherita said in Tezpur on Sunday. The Union minister while speaking on spectacular cultural extravaganza Jhumoir Binandini (Mega Jhumoir) and Advantage Assam 2.0 said that Advantage Assam will draw investors from all around India and the world. Minister Margherita participated in the Prime Minister's MannKiBaat programme from Tezpur and listened to the 19th episode of the programme along with Sonitpur district BJP president Madhusmita Hazarika Deka, president BJP Haleswar Mandal committee Netra Kashyap and several other party office bearers and activists at Booth No 29 under Tezpur LAC. After listening the programme minister Margherita interacted with media and said that whatever PM spoke in the 'MannKiBaat' would inspire the people.

## Ambassadors of 61 countries to visit Assam

**GUWAHATI/ JORHAT, Feb 23:** Over 60 heads of missions of different countries will be on a trip to Assam from Sunday during which they will visit the Kaziranga National Park, witness a mega Jhumur dance performance and attend a business summit in an endeavour by the state government to showcase its potential, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is leading the delegation of ambassadors for the trip during which the focus of the state government will be to highlight the peaceful atmosphere here so that the countries which have negative travel advisory against the state are convinced to withdraw it, Sarma added.

Addressing a press conference at Guwahati, the chief minister said, "External Affairs minister S Jaishankar, along with heads of mis-

sions of 61 countries and families of about 22 of them, will reach Jorhat today. They will spend the night there and visit Kaziranga National Park on Monday morning, undertaking elephant and jeep safaris."

The delegation will then leave for Guwahati to witness a mega Jhumur performance by over 8,500 artists on Monday evening and also participate in the two-day 'Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit' that will get underway at the state's largest city on Tuesday, he said.

"It is not a fun trip, but to show them that peace has returned, tourists both domestic and international are visiting the state. The aim is to get them to withdraw travel advisory against Assam," Sarma said.

He added that Australia has recently withdrawn its advisory against travelling to Assam, except for the districts still under the

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

Sarma expressed gratitude to the Central government for this initiative of bringing the ambassadors to the state.

"This will increase tourist inflow drastically," he added.

The chief minister had earlier said that negative travel advisory by several countries is a major deterrent in attracting investors and tourists, with the state government in talks with Japan and Australia, among others, to get it withdrawn.

Meanwhile, elaborate arrangements have been made in Jorhat, Kaziranga and adjoining areas for the high-level visit, official sources said. Gates of Kohora, Agorotoli, Bagori and Buraphar ranges of Kaziranga National Park, which the foreign delegates will visit, have been decorated, while elephants are being kept (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India to host two-day conference on women peacekeepers

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** India will host a two-day conference beginning Monday on women peacekeepers at UN missions to highlight their contributions.

The conference will bring together women peacekeepers from 35 Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) from the Global South.

External Affairs minister S Jaishankar will deliver the keynote address. The conference is being organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), in collaboration with the defence ministry and the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK). "The first-ever Conference for Women Peacekeepers on the theme 'Women in Peacekeeping: A Global South Perspective' will (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Build friendship among all groups: Bhagwat to RSS volunteers

**GUWAHATI, Feb 23:** Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday appealed to all the volunteers of the organisation to enhance friendship among different groups irrespective of their caste, creed, region and language.

While attending an "intellectual" (boudhik) programme here, Bhagwat pointed out that the 'swayamsevak' work as a catalyst for the welfare of society.

"He urged the Swayamsevaks to enhance the friendship among different sections in the society irrespective of their castes, creeds and regions or languages they possess," RSS said in a statement.

Bhagwat, the Sarsanghchalak (head) of the organisation, also said that all Hindus should share the same temples, crematoriums and water for various uses in spirit through mutual respect and cooper-

ation. He insisted that the sustained communal harmony among various ethnic groups in the society, and goodwill among the relatives and clans will only lead the nation towards the positive direction and outcome.

The statement also said Bhagwat asserted that the society as a whole should take the responsibility to conserve water, plant saplings and avoid plastic utensils to protect the environment.

"Every Indian should pursue food items, housing, travels and even languages matching their self-expression. Everyone should converse in mother tongues instead of using foreign languages in their day-to-day activities," he added.

The RSS chief reiterated that the citizens should follow the traditional social norms even though all such rules (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Cong says PM, EAM must answer why govt silent despite Trump 'insulting' India

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Amid the USAID funding row, the Congress on Sunday accused the BJP of indulging in "anti-national work" by spreading "fake news from America" and asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer as to why the government is silent when US

**USAID FUNDING ROW** President Donald Trump and Elon Musk are "insulting" India repeatedly.

The BJP has rejected all such allegations of the Congress and called Rahul Gandhi a "traitor", accusing him of colluding with foreign forces in his bid to weaken India.

Congress general secretary in-charge Jairam Ramesh said, "BJP is a procession of liars and illiterates. The news about USD 21 million, on which the BJP and their bootlickers were jumping on, turned out to be

fake. The USD 21 million in 2022 was not for 'voter turnout' in India, but for Bangladesh."

"Elon Musk made a fake claim, Trump got confused between Dhaka and Delhi, Amit Malviya spread the lie further, then the rest of BJP's bootlickers seized on it," he charged.

Ever since the Trump administration's DOGE said on February 16 that USAID has cancelled the USD 21 million funding for "voting in India", the BJP has been making fabricated allegations against the Congress, Ramesh said in his post in Hindi on X.

"But now it is coming to light that this entire news is fake. When the money has not even reached India, then what would be the cancellation?" he said. The controversy is actually (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## When will BJP hike tea workers' daily wage: AJP asks PM before his Assam tour

**GUWAHATI, Feb 23:** Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to witness a mega Jhumoir dance recital, the opposition Assam Jatiya Parishad on Sunday posed a set of 17 questions and asked when will BJP fulfil its poll promise to hike minimum wage of tea garden workers in the state.

Modi will arrive in Guwahati on Monday for a two-day tour, during which he will witness the performance of Jhumur, a folk dance form of the tea tribe community, to mark 200 years of the tea industry in Assam.

"What permanent measures will the government take to ensure wage hikes for tea garden workers and prevent livelihood threats caused by the reduction of tea garden areas?" AJP President Lurinjyoti Gogoi and General Secretary Jagadish Bhuyan said in a joint statement.

The statement pointed out that the BJP in its 2016 Vision Document had promised to increase the daily wage of tea workers to ₹351.33.

"However, as of now, tea workers in the Brahmaputra Valley receive only ₹250, while those in the Barak Valley get ₹228. Even the Prime Minister himself acknowledged in his speech that Assam's tea workers receive lower wages," the AJP claimed.

Additionally, the Assam government has enacted a law allowing 10 per cent of tea garden land to be used for non-agricultural purposes, paving the way for hotels, resorts and other commercial establishments, the party said.

"This has raised concerns about

the shrinking of tea garden areas and the resulting job losses for tea workers. These two policies of the BJP government contradict each other. How does the government plan to address this contradiction and ensure both fair wages and job security for tea workers?" the AJP asked.

It also wondered when the six indigenous communities of Assam will be granted the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

"For nearly two decades, the BJP has promised ST status to six communities in Assam but has taken no concrete steps. Why?" the party questioned.

Assam's Moran, Motok, Chutia, Tai-Ahom, Koch-Rajbongshi and Tea-Tribes communities have been demanding ST status for many years, while multiple assurances by many senior BJP leaders and ministers for granting the reservation are being offered regularly.

Modi will also inaugurate the two-day Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit on Tuesday in Guwahati.

"When will the corruption allegations against Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and his associates be investigated? Allegations of land scams and financial irregularities involving the Assam CM's family and associates have surfaced," the AJP claimed.

It also questioned the PM when will the process of identifying and deporting illegal foreigners from Assam be completed as promised before the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. (PTI)

## The estimated expenditure for setting up these centres will be ₹3,200 crore

### Govt reviewing infrastructure of district hospitals for setting up daycare cancer centres

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** The government has started a survey to identify gaps and review the infrastructure in all district hospitals in order to implement the budget announcement of setting up daycare cancer centres in these health facilities over the next three years.

The estimated expenditure for setting up these centres will be ₹3,200 crore, Union health ministry officials have told PTI.

In her budget speech, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government will facilitate setting up daycare cancer centres in all district hospitals over the next three years and 200 of these will be established in 2025-26.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday laid the foundation stone for the Shree Bagheshwar Medical Sciences and Research Institute, which will include a cancer hospital, at Chhatrapur in Madhya Pradesh. After the foundation stone-laying ceremony, Modi said daycare cancer centres will be opened in all districts of the country in the next three years.

He pointed to the budgetary announcements aimed at fighting cancer and the decision to make cancer medicines cheaper.

"This (daycare cancer centres) will lead to an increase in access to quality cancer care for more people, especially in rural areas. Also, this will reduce the burden on the tertiary-care centres, allowing them to focus on more complex cases, by offering such services at the district level," an official said.

The official (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Candy is dandy but liquor is quicker.*  
- Ogden Nash

## Six months of new govt in B'desh

In Bangladesh, more than six months after taking over as Chief Adviser to the interim government, Dr Mohammad Yunus still struggles hard to prove his credentials as an effective leader. Back home from after meeting top US leaders and officials at Dubai, he firmly asserted that the country had entered into a new era of hope, as the first phase of his 'assignment' ended successfully. However, while his earnestness to project bolder, more confident persona of himself at a time of national crisis in Bangladesh was understandable, not even his allies, let alone his many opponents, were apparently impressed with his rhetoric. The country, Yunus, explained, had emerged much stronger, more creative and cohesive than ever before, during the last few months. Bangladeshi boys and girls were the dynamic drivers of the new spirit of change, during the historic days of what had come to be called 'the July revolution'. Today's young generation was keen to engage boldly in the process of change all over the world. They fully understood the urgent need for socio-economic development and in particular, the right of every country to share the world's resources in a fair equitable manner. The world's progress must be inclusive and no one should be deprived or left behind in the just struggle for a better life. The old days of political misrule and corruption-riddled governance were finally over.

To give an example of how influential sections of public opinion makers there reacted to the ongoing series of incidents of violence and related matters, some Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) leaders strongly spoke out on the present situation. This was significant, Jamaatis in general are known to be Islamic fundamentalists, but more importantly, their numerous organisations had firmly supported Dr Yunus. Further, their supporters were allegedly involved in numerous incidents of mass violence that had erupted in many districts of Bangladesh after the August 5 2024 anti Hasina coup, resulting in hundreds of deaths of students, Awami League activists, policemen and Hindus, among others--- not to mention the destruction of official property, and cultural monuments.

At present, let alone the poor and the daily wage earners, even other sections of people were suffering as before, because of the general trends of inflation and lawlessness continuing in Bangladesh. This must end, immediate official steps, he warned the administration, to curb down the activities of armed anti-social gangs were already overdue. The interim rulers, he stressed must not assume that the long suffering people would suffer silently from such criminalisation of society for all times to come. Northeast India-based analysts monitoring Bangladesh events also commented on what they saw an obvious contradiction between Yunus's perceptions and the prevailing situation. One Assam-based paper analysing the so-called 'glorious revolution' as Yunus often describes the August 5 2024 coup and subsequent events, offered a factually different account of what had been happening in Bangladesh during the last few months. Quoting stats compiled by the Unity Council of Christians, Buddhists and Hindus in Bangladesh, the paper reported that during the last few months, at least 32 Hindu had been killed, while 13 women were raped. The number of mob attacks/related incidents was 2010, out of which government took only nominal action in some cases.

## British working class cannot afford militarism, has to work for peace

By: Ben Chacko

Confusion is the order of the day among Europe's core capitalist powers. We should not let it run rampant in the working-class movement. It has been an epoch-shifting fortnight, with the US blindsiding the rest of NATO with an about-turn on Ukraine.

Not only has it started peace talks with Russia. It has humiliated European governments — making clear their views are irrelevant. It has humiliated Ukraine, demanding it hand over half of its resource wealth to Washington and blaming it for the start of the conflict.

Donald Trump is, of course, unfair: to imply Ukraine tricked the United States into this war is to reverse manipulator and manipulated. US and EU policy pushed Ukraine into a position which many US experts, from former CIA director William Burns to former secretary of state Henry Kissinger, had said for decades would lead to war. It did so including through regime change (backing the Maidan uprising in 2014) and derailing peace initiatives like the Minsk agreements.

After Russia invaded, Britain's Boris Johnson was despatched to block a peace deal in April 2022. When Trump says Ukraine could have done a deal earlier, we should remember who stopped it.

That said, peace talks are overdue and welcome. The Ukraine meat-grinder has cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Majority Ukrainian opinion supports talks, and rampant draft evasion shows how little appetite there is for continued war with no plausible endgame. Nobody on the left should seek to prolong the fighting. Nor should a reorientation of US strategy be mistaken for a pro-peace policy. The Trump regime talks openly of ethnic cleansing in Gaza and encourages it in the West Bank, where tens of thousands have been driven from their homes in the last month.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said the US is prioritising threats to its own borders. Washington's new designation of Mexican drug cartels

as "terrorist" organisations has sparked concern in Mexico that this is to provide an excuse for military intervention. Trump refuses to rule out an annexation of Greenland, which risks turning the Arctic into a zone of military rivalry. A seemingly minor update to the State Department website, removing a long-standing statement opposing Taiwanese independence, may point to planned confrontation with Beijing.

Trump makes clear what he wants from Europe if it is to retain its place in the US-led bloc: huge rises in military spending. Ironically, those opposing a Ukraine peace as a way of "standing up to Trump" are promoting exactly that.

The consequences for essential services, development or a green new deal in Britain would be catastrophic. Already government departments are being told to draw up plans for 11 per cent cuts ahead of a spending review in June — when after 14 years of Tory cuts, services from local government to courts and prisons are already in deep crisis.

The working class cannot afford a new age of militarism and unions will not be able to mobilise against these cuts unless we resist projected rises in "defence" spending. If the US wants to retreat from Europe, we should demand more. Tell Trump to pull the nuclear bombers from Lakenheath in Suffolk and kick the US National Security Agency out of Men with Hill in Yorkshire. Withdraw from a NATO alliance that was never defensive and is now humiliating. Press for an independent foreign policy.

Britain, like other spurned European countries, can play its role in building a multipolar world based on peace and respectful relations between states, not war and plunder, working together with China and a rising global South to address global issues like climate change. Or it can launch another crippling assault on the public sector to fund a war drive that puts the entire planet at risk, clinging to the delusion that we are valued partners of the imperialist top dog across the pond. (IPA Service)

# Jhumoir Binandini: A dance of resilience and heritage

As Assam approaches a significant milestone in its rich cultural heritage, the state is poised to celebrate the unique artistry of the Jhumoir dance, paying homage to the tea-tribe communities whose contributions have been integral to its cultural and economic tapestry. On February 24, 2025, Assam will attempt to set yet another global record, this time with an extraordinary Jhumoir dance performance featuring over 8,000 dancers at the Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium in Sarusajai, Guwahati. This grand spectacle promises not only to showcase the vitality of Assam's cultural traditions but also to cement the role of the tea tribes in shaping the state's identity. The event is set to be graced by the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, marking the occasion with national recognition and underscoring the importance of preserving indigenous cultural legacies.

The Jhumoir dance holds a special place in the hearts of Assam's tea tribes, whose ancestors were brought to the region during the colonial era. It is more than a folk dance; it is an expression of the trials and triumphs of a community whose resilience against exploitation and adversity has been etched into the very rhythm of their traditions. The dance, often performed during the harvest season and at religious festivals such as KaramPuja, symbolizes not only joy and celebration but also a deep-rooted connection to the land, nature, and ancestral rites.

The legacy of Jhumoir has its origins in the agrarian traditions of the Adivasi communities brought to Assam by the British colonial administration during the 19th century. These laborers, primarily from regions like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and West Bengal, were brought under false

promises to work on the expanding tea plantations. What followed was a saga of systemic exploitation, where the laborers faced grueling work hours, minimal pay, and inhumane living conditions. Yet, amidst this suffering, the Jhumoir dance evolved as a powerful medium for the oppressed communities to channel their collective pain and hope for a better future.

As the rhythm of the drums echoed through the tea plantations, the songs and dances of the Jhumoir became an expression of solidarity, unity, and resistance. It was within this fusion of diverse cultural influences that Jhumoir took its modern form. The dance, performed primarily by women clad in simple yet elegant white saris with red borders, features intricate footwork and rhythmic movements that correspond to the musical instruments like the Madal, Dhol, and Shehnai. The accompanying songs, often sung by men, narrate the struggles and dreams of the workers—stories of migration, hardship, and the longing for a better life. Jhumoir, traditionally performed at harvest festivals and sacred rites, is both a celebration of the harvest and a ritual to honor nature. The dance is deeply intertwined with KaramPuja, a festival that marks the worship of nature, asking for blessings of prosperity and bountiful harvests. As the dance steps synchronize in unison, the performers embody both the resilience of their forebears and the optimism for a future that upholds the dignity of their labor.

The upcoming grand recital, which will feature more than 8,000 dancers from across Assam, is not only an effort to set a Guinness World Record but also an initiative to bring global attention to the tea



DEGREE OF THOUGHT  
By: Dipak Kurmi

tribes' rich cultural heritage. The state government, led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, has recognized the need to preserve and celebrate the unique traditions of the tea tribes, who make up a significant portion of Assam's population. With Assam's tea industry marking its bicentenary in 2023, the timing of the Jhumoir performance aligns with a broader narrative of cultural revival and recognition for a community that has long been marginalized.

The Jhumoir dance performance will be a contemporary adaptation of the traditional form, balancing modern choreography with deep respect for its roots. In the spirit of preserving the dance's cultural essence, the event promises to highlight the evolution of the Jhumoir while maintaining its soul. The Assam government has conducted extensive research, documentation, and workshops to ensure that the performance represents the diverse iterations of Jhumoir from different regions of Assam. As the state celebrates this cultural renaissance, the presence of Prime Minister Modi will add an extra layer of significance to the event. His visit to Assam as the chief guest at the Jhumoir recital underscores the importance of recognizing the contributions of Assam's tea-tribe communities. The performance will not only be a celebration of culture but also a testament to the

unity and strength of a community that has persevered through centuries of adversity. It will shine a light on the historical and cultural legacy of the tea tribes, giving them the recognition they rightfully deserve on a national and international stage.

In addition to the Jhumoir performance, Assam will also host the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit 2025, which will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi. This summit will serve as a platform to showcase Assam's economic potential and investment opportunities, further highlighting the state's progress while honoring its cultural diversity. The summit will feature numerous thematic discussions, ministerial sessions, and an exhibition to underscore Assam's industrial growth, trade, and global collaborations.

The legacy of Assam's tea-tribes is not confined to the realm of economic contributions; it is also deeply embedded in the state's cultural fabric. Despite their traumatic past and the harsh realities of forced migration, the tea-tribes of Assam have managed to preserve their traditions. Jhumoir, as a symbol of this heritage, continues to resonate with the community. It is a living testament to the endurance and adaptability of the tea-tribes, who, despite centuries of hardship, have woven their experiences into

the heart of Assamese culture.

However, the struggles of Assam's tea tribes are far from over. Despite the success of Assam's tea industry and the widespread recognition of its economic importance, the conditions of tea garden laborers remain a pressing issue. Many workers still live in squalid conditions, earning inadequate wages and lacking access to quality healthcare, education, and housing. The tea-tribes, although integral to the state's economy, continue to face systemic neglect.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of these workers, with overcrowded living conditions making them especially susceptible to the virus. Furthermore, recent evictions of tea workers from their ancestral lands in the name of development projects have sparked protests and unrest, reigniting the spirit of resistance that has long been a part of the tea-tribes' legacy. These struggles are reflected in the lyrics of Jhumoir songs, which continue to serve as a rallying cry for justice and recognition. The grand Jhumoir dance recital on February 24, 2025, is not just a cultural spectacle; it is a powerful reaffirmation of Assam's tea-tribes' identity. It symbolizes their journey of struggle, survival, and celebration, encapsulating the complexities of their history in every step, rhythm, and song. The performance will honor the tea-tribes' enduring spirit and ensure that their contributions to Assam's cultural and economic legacy are remembered. As the dancers take to the stage in unison, their movements will echo not only the past struggles of the tea-tribes but also their unyielding hope for a future where their voices are heard and their traditions are preserved for generations to come. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)

## Jhumur dance makes world record history

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Jhumur, the soul-stirring folk dance of Assam's tea tribe community, has made history by setting a world record. Thousands of dancers, clad in vibrant traditional attire, came together in a grand performance, swaying gracefully to the beats of the Dhol and Madol. The event, which witnessed an unprecedented gathering of Jhumur performers, was not just a feat of coordination but a powerful statement of cultural pride and heritage. This historic milestone has brought well-deserved recognition to a dance form that has long been an integral part of the tea tribe's identity but often remained outside mainstream cultural celebrations.

Jhumur is more than just a dance; it is a living tradition passed down through generations of Assam's tea garden workers. Originating from the communities that were brought to Assam by the British during the colonial period, Jhumur has been a medium of expression for the tea tribes for over a century. These laborers, who migrated from regions such as Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal, carried their traditions, rituals, and art forms with them. Among these, Jhumur emerged as the most defining cultural element, representing their struggles, resilience, and communal unity.

Performed during festivals, harvest celebrations, and social gatherings, Jhumur has always been more than a dance—it is an expression of the tea tribe's everyday life. The songs that accompany Jhumur narrate stories of their hardships, dreams, and love for nature. The rhythmic beats of the Dhol and Madol, combined with synchronized footwork and graceful hand movements, create a mesmerizing performance that reflects the collective spirit of the community. Despite its deep cultural roots, Jhumur remained largely confined to the tea estates, receiving little recognition beyond the community itself. However, this historic event has changed that forever, bringing Jhumur into the global spotlight.

The record-breaking event was held at a grand venue, where thousands of dancers performed in perfect harmony. Months of meticulous planning and rehearsals ensured that the perform-

ance would be a flawless representation of Jhumur's essence. The event not only aimed at setting a world record but also served as a tribute to the tea tribe community's rich cultural heritage. The participation of such a large number of performers symbolized unity and pride, showcasing the strength of a community that has contributed immensely to Assam's tea industry and economy.

For many of the participants, this performance was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Most of them had never danced beyond their tea garden settlements, and for them, being part of such a historic occasion was a matter of immense pride. Dressed in traditional red and white saris, adorned with ethnic jewelry, and moving in perfect synchronization, the dancers created a breathtaking spectacle. The beats of the Madol and Dhol resonated through the air, adding to the grandeur of the event. As the performance unfolded, the audience, including dignitaries, cultural enthusiasts, and global spectators, watched in awe, realizing that they were witnessing a moment of history in the making. This achievement is more than just a world record; it is a step towards cultural recognition and preservation. For decades, the tea tribes of Assam have contributed tirelessly to the state's economy, yet their cultural heritage has often been overlooked. This record-breaking Jhumur performance serves as a reminder that their traditions and artistic expressions deserve to be acknowledged and celebrated.

The recognition of Jhumur on such a large scale will also encourage efforts to preserve and promote this traditional art form for future generations. Beyond Assam, this event has also highlighted the importance of folk traditions in the larger context of Indian culture. In an era where modern and commercialized entertainment dominates the cultural landscape, folk dances like Jhumur are at risk of fading into obscurity. By organizing such a massive event and bringing Jhumur to the world stage, Assam has set an example of how traditional art forms can be revived and given the respect they deserve. This initiative has also opened doors for other indigenous cultural expressions to gain similar recognition.

The success of this record-setting performance has created a

ripple effect, inspiring more communities to take pride in their cultural heritage. Schools, cultural organizations, and academicians have now started discussions on integrating Jhumur into mainstream folk dance festivals, academic research, and cultural tourism. The inclusion of Jhumur in major cultural events will further cement its place in Assam's artistic identity. Additionally, initiatives to train young dancers in Jhumur have gained momentum, ensuring that this tradition continues to thrive. This achievement has also drawn attention to the tea tribe community's contributions beyond dance and music. For years, they have been the backbone of Assam's tea industry, working tirelessly to produce some of the world's finest tea. Yet, their social and economic struggles have often gone unnoticed. By celebrating their cultural legacy, Assam has taken a step toward acknowledging their contributions and addressing their rightful place in the state's social and cultural fabric. This event is a moment of pride not just for the performers but for the entire tea tribe community, reinforcing their sense of identity and belonging.

As the event concluded, the emotions among the dancers and spectators were palpable. Tears of joy, cheers of excitement, and an overwhelming sense of achievement filled the atmosphere. The final beats of the Madol echoed in the air, marking the end of a performance that will be remembered for generations. The recognition of Jhumur at the global level has ensured that this dance form will no longer remain confined to the tea gardens but will continue to be celebrated as a vital part of Assam's cultural heritage.

Jhumur's journey from the tea gardens to the world stage is a testament to the power of cultural preservation and community spirit. What started as a simple dance of the tea garden workers has now become a symbol of resilience, unity, and artistic excellence. This historic milestone is not just a celebration of a record-breaking performance but a promise to keep Jhumur alive for generations to come. Assam has made history today, and in doing so, it has ensured that Jhumur will continue to dance its way into the hearts of people across the world. (The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAM-PROTIK who can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

## Mystery over the use of USAID is deepening

By: Sushil Kuttly

Why did the \$21 million USAID largesse fail to bring about the desired regime-change in India. Foul people with fouler plans and alleged tin-pot conspiracies of wannabe tin-pot dictators. President Trump has only just begun to dismantle the "American deep state", some of the roots of which can be traced to an Indian version of America's deep-state.

Has President Trump, by revealing the \$21 million grant, set aside for boosting voter turnout in India, set the cat among the pigeons? "Why do we need to spend \$21 million on voter turnout in India? I guess the Biden administration was trying to get somebody else elected. We have got to tell the Indian government. This is a total breakthrough," Trump said.

So Prime Minister Modi went to the White House and heard straight from the horse's mouth of the "\$21 million plot." In another world, Trump would be called a "snitch" but Trump's first loyalty is to the Musk-led DOGE, which decided to cancel the \$21-million fund for "voter turnout" in India.

The \$21 million is part of the \$723 million in foreign aid funding that DOGE intends to cut. President Trump says Musk is not a White House employee and that anybody is free to call Musk "anybody."

"Why are we giving \$21 million to India? They have a lot more money," President Trump quipped. And Modi's 'Godi Media' couldn't believe anybody would want to "Out" Prime Minister Modi of all the people. One media outlet wrote: "India spends more on elections than the United

States and also sees better voter turnout", so what's the big deal? India spent Rs 1.35 lakh crore in the 2024 general election, which turns out to be \$16.2 billion. The US spend in the 2024 US Presidential election was \$15.9 billion, including for the congressional contests.

Isn't there a difference between voter turnout and voter awareness, and voter participation? Doesn't the Election Commission of India have a budget to conduct elections? Doesn't it have money for training poll officials, for mobilising poll officials and for paying security personnel? Doesn't voter awareness lead to an increase in voter turnout?

Also, doesn't payment for voter turnout constitute corruption; resorting to unfair means to win elections? Political parties also mount campaigns to woo votes and voters. The whole purpose of holding elections is to get voters to the voting booth. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections saw a voter turnout of 65.79%. The United States of America saw far less voter turnout.

The 'Godi Media' is asking who "got the money", and via which channel? No need for shortcuts. There's only one channel on everybody's lips: the USAID, which was set up in 1961 and is said to be behind 70% of the total US external funding. The question being asked is why this love and largesse for Indian recipients? Some of the alleged media beneficiaries are said to be wallowing in USAID greenbacks.

But the answers are only forthcoming from the United States, there is no Indian input. Indian investigators can't talk or won't talk. What's NSA Ajit Doval doing?

The Modi government cannot handle conundrums and jigsaws. The Modi dispensation including its armada of spokespersons haven't a clue of who is conspiring and what's cooking.

The big question remains: how were the USAID dollars channelled to accounts in India. With President Trump and 'presidential advisor' Elon Musk going all out with DOGE, the USAID website is kaput! It is not showing any "programme running in India", while there are ongoing engagements with Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

The media alludes to corruption on a large-scale but, as like in all things it is engaged with, the Government of India appears unconcerned. One former Chief Election Commissioner was beyond disbelief, rejecting all allegations that the Election Commission ever had monetary dealings with USAID, including to boost voter turnout.

But the question remains, to whom did the money go? "Would love to find out who received the \$21mn spent to improve 'voter turnout in India'... USAID is the biggest scam in human history," writer-economist and member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council SanjeevSanyal posted on 'X'.

Sanyal should ask his 'Boss' and stop acting like he is both deaf and dumb. The answer has to come from the Modi government. President Donald Trump should insist and refuse to let go! Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "best friend" owes it to the American people if not to the people of India. (IPA Service)

# A natural supplement may help people with a new type of heart disease

By: Jessica Freeborn

Experts are interested in finding the most effective treatments for new heart conditions, such as triglyceride deposit cardiomyopathy. In this condition, there is a problem with the breakdown of triglycerides by cells in the heart. The condition ultimately leads to heart failure.

A study examined individuals with triglyceride deposit cardiomyopathy who received the supplement tricaprin. Tricaprin is a medium-chain triglyceride (MCT), found in coconut oil and dairy products, and is used in food, cosmetics, and supplements.

The intervention group displayed notable cardiac benefits compared to participants who did not receive tricaprin. This included improvement in fat breakdown, durable heart failure recovery, and improvements in the left ventricle. Overall survival rates were also higher among the group that received tricaprin.

The findings were published in Nature Cardiovascular Research.

## What is TDCV as a heart condition?

Triglyceride deposit cardiomyopathy (TDCV) is a fairly recently discovered heart condition. As noted in the current research, the condition has to do with a problem with the intracellular breakdown of long-chain triglycerides. Thus, there is a buildup of lipids and energy failure in the heart's muscle cells and in the vascular smooth muscle cells. Some cases of TDCV have a genetic cause, while the cause is unknown in other cases.

Cheng-Han Chen, MD, a board-certified interventional cardiologist and medical director of the Structural Heart Program at MemorialCare Saddleback Medical Center in Laguna Hills, CA, who was not involved in the study, explained the following to Medical News Today:

"Triglyceride deposit cardiomyopathy (TDCV) is a rare cardiovascular disorder in which the body's heart and blood vessel cells are not able to properly process triglycerides as an energy source. This then causes heart muscle and coronary artery dysfunction, resulting in severe heart failure and coronary artery disease. The condition

is not entirely understood, and effective treatment options have been lacking."

Researchers of the current study wanted to understand how tricaprin, which is "a class of medium-chain" triglycerides, affected TDCV outcomes.

Previous research regarding tricaprin in this area had exhibited positive results, so this study wanted to look at overall survival rates in participants from registry studies who received tricaprin relative to the controls who did not receive tricaprin.

## How supplementing with tricaprin affects the heart

This study compared twenty-two participants who received tricaprin to 190 who did not. All participants had confirmed TDCV and had received their diagnosis at or after age twenty. Participants receiving tricaprin had to meet several inclusion criteria, including experiencing cardiac symptoms that were resistant to standard remedies. There were also several exclusion criteria for receiving tricaprin.

Among participants who received tricaprin, the average age that participants received their diagnoses was around 58 years old.

Participants underwent tests to evaluate myocardial lipolysis or the breakdown of fat by the heart muscle cells.

Individuals who received tricaprin experienced several benefits. For participants who received tricaprin, the tests that reflected fat breakdown suggested that cells in the heart were able to more effectively break down fat after receiving tricaprin compared to participants' baselines.

Researchers also observed clinical benefits for the group, such as improvement of heart failure symptoms and durable heart failure recovery. Researchers also observed improvements in the left ventricle, including better ejection fraction and reverse remodeling.

In terms of overall survival rates, the tricaprin group had 100% three-year and five-year survival rates. In contrast, the control group had a 78.6% three-year survival rate and a 68.1% five-year survival rate.

When looking only at participants who also had heart failure, which included 14 intervention participants and 128 controls, the tricaprin group again experienced a 100%



three-year and five-year survival rate, while the control group's three-year survival rate was 76.8%, and the five-year survival rate was 64.8%. This analysis excluded participants with NYHA 4, or heart failure stage four because no participants who received tricaprin had this level of heart failure.

Scott C. Feitell, DO, FACC, FHFA, director of Heart Failure and director of the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit at Rochester Regional, who was not involved in the study, offered the following comments on the study's findings to Medical News Today:

"This was a very well-designed trial with an excellent analysis done for a small patient population with a rare disease. Based on prior research, the team in this trial extended their proposed treatment model to a larger patient population, compared it to an untreated control arm, and followed patients for a longer period of time. They were able to not only demonstrate marked improvement in ejection fraction by echocardiography once patients received treatment, but they also used a novel radiotracer (I-123 BMIPP) to demonstrate enhanced lipid metabolism in patients on treatment. Most importantly patients felt better and had improved functional class."

## Study limitations

This study did have some limitations, some of which future research may be able to address. For example, this study focused on the Japanese population. Studying the effects in other groups will likely be helpful as research expands in this area.

Additionally, the authors note that it is unclear how newly developed drugs to treat heart failure will affect people who have TDCV and heart failure. Only a small number of participants received these noted medications. Future research may also be able to focus on this.

The data on the left ventricular ejection fraction of one participant with heart failure following tricaprin intervention are unavailable. This measurement is important as it is used to assess the heart's pumping efficiency in sending oxygen-rich blood to the body.

Additionally, the timing of TDCV diagnosis to participants starting tricaprin varied, which could have introduced bias risk in the research regarding overall survival. However, researchers used a specific method in their sensitivity analysis to try to account for this. While researchers were able to account for some factors in their analysis, it's possible

that some relevant components were missed. Additionally, this study did not involve blinding of participants.

Participants received tricaprin with support from the TGCV/Neutral Lipid Storage Disease (NLS) Patient Association and had to be requesting assistance from this association. This and other exclusion and inclusion criteria could have affected the sample and who was able to participate.

The Tochino Foundation collaborated with Osaka University to provide the Patient Association with tricaprin for free. The Patient Association also communicated periodically with participants. Additionally, the authors noted several conflicts of interests. All these factors could have affected the study.

The number of participants who received tricaprin was also fairly small, so larger sample sizes with more female participants may also be relevant to future work. Additionally, only three women included in the intervention group had heart failure, and this could have impacted these results. One participant who received tricaprin died 5.3 years after starting tricaprin.

## Will this supplement help all people with heart failure?

While TDCV is still rare, the authors note that the results may carry over to other individuals. They note that triglycerides are major components of lipid droplets, and lipid droplets are often in people who have heart failure. If future research confirms the findings, tricaprin could benefit people with heart failure in general.

Cardiologist Randy Gould, DO, FACC with Manhattan Cardiology in NYC, who was not involved in the study, noted the following: "Tricaprin resulted in regression of the triglyceride buildup in the blood vessels of the heart, improved clinical effects on cardiac function and greater survival results."

"The potential clinical effects of this data is to design future studies to determine if ticaprin has similar cardiovascular effects (TG [triglyceride] regression) in patients with elevated triglyceride levels, but do not have TDCV. If the results show improvement as well, then ticaprin may be an additional treatment option for patients with elevated triglycerides," he added. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

## Acoustic neuromas can now be easily treated with Advanced Cyberknife Radiosurgery

By: Dr. Aditya Gupta

When Ravi Kumar, a 45-year-old IT professional, started experiencing a persistent ringing sound in his right ear, he initially dismissed it as stress-related. However, over time, the ringing grew louder, and he began to notice a gradual loss of hearing in that ear. Concerned, he sought medical advice and was diagnosed with acoustic neuroma, a benign tumor on the hearing nerve. Given the size and location of the tumor, his doctors recommended CyberKnife radiosurgery. The treatment was swift and non-invasive, requiring just a few sessions, and within months, his symptoms began to improve. Today, Kumar's hearing has stabilized, and the tumor has stopped growing, allowing him to return to his daily life without the fear of invasive surgery or long-term complications.

Acoustic Neuroma which is also known as vestibular schwannoma, is a benign tumor which is non-cancerous and usually grows slow. It develops on the hearing nerve that leads from inner ear to brain. The branches of this nerve influence the balance, hearing and the pressure from an acoustic neuroma that can cause hearing loss, ringing in your ear and unsteadiness.

Identify the early symptoms!

The symptom starts with the gradual loss of hearing in one ear and the problem is accompanied by the ringing in the ear also with the feeling of fullness in the ear. The acoustic neuromas can cause the sudden hearing loss. The symptoms that occur over time includes:

1. Vertigo
2. Facial numbness and tingling
3. Problem with balance
4. Facial weakness
5. Change in taste
6. Difficulty in swallowing
7. Headaches
8. Clumsiness
9. Mental confusion

Cyberknife radiosurgery has revolutionized the treatment of acoustic neuroma

What Causes Acoustic Neuroma?

The cause of the development of acoustic neuroma is unknown. A rare hereditary disease "Neurofibromatosis" is associated with some cases of acoustic neuroma.

Acoustic Neuroma can also be caused by:

- Continuous exposure to loud noise
- Radiation on face and neck can lead to acoustic neuroma many years later.

In 1 out of 10 people, an acoustic neuroma is caused by neurofibromatosis type 2 (NF2). NF2 can run in further generations also. Person suffering from NF2 can develop benign tumours on the spinal cord and the coverings of the brain.

Acoustic neuromas are formed through type of cells called a Schwann cell. These cells cover the nerve cells of the body. That is why this tumour is also called vestibular schwannoma. Acoustic tumour grows with the nerve in the brain.

This nerve is called cranial nerves or the acoustic or vestibulocochlear nerve. This nerve is responsible to control the sense of hearing and also the balance of the body. Acoustic tumour is rare and in between 1



and 20 people in every million worldwide are diagnosed each year with an acoustic neuroma. And it is more common in women than men.

Acoustic Neuroma Treated with Cyberknife

According to the survey published in the international journal 'Sage Journal' two out of 100,000 people aged 30 to 60 develop acoustic neuroma, which makes this condition incredibly rare.

The Acoustic Neuroma treatment depends on the size of the tumour. If the tumour is large, there will be more medical problems. The small size of the tumour is less than 1.5 cm, medium is between 1.5 cm and 2.5 cm and large is 2.5 cm or larger. Small tumours require cyberknife due to their size while the larger tumours typically require surgery.

The newest radiation therapy option for acoustic neuroma is a form of radio surgery that requires absolutely no incisions using new technology called CyberKnife. Patients treated with this new non-invasive experience minimal to no side effects.

Radio surgery techniques can stop tumours from growing by using high-dose exact precision radiation treatment. Patients treated by CyberKnife® technology experience minimal to no side effects, and receive treatment on an out-patient basis. After patients undergo radio surgery, the acoustic neuroma is closely monitored to confirm the growth has stopped or that the tumour has begun to shrink.

The surgery includes advanced robotics, tumour tracking and imaging capabilities. The patients with particular symptoms like pressure symptoms, tinnitus, or imbalance may be best treated with surgery because surgery will relieve the symptoms more rapidly. Also, the large tumours mean the size greater than 3.0 cm are best treated with surgery because these tumours can sometimes swell and cause obstruction in the flow of cerebrospinal fluid.

Treatment starts with the CT scan. The CT scan image is then imported to the CyberKnife Treatment Planning System. The oncologist team make a plan to treat the tumour while avoiding surrounding important sensitive structures.

The process involves typically 1 or 3 sittings and per sitting lasts for maximum 40 minutes. The treatment does not require any sedation and is painless.

The chances of side effect are next to negligible. Hearing is preserved and achieved in 50-75% of the time. Temporary numbness of one side of face is 2-3%. After the CyberKnife surgery tumours stabilize in size then shrink with time slowly. (The author is the Director Neurosurgery and Cyberknife, Artemis Hospital, Gurugram)

## Advent of AI in Stroke care revolutionising the treatment and quality of life

By: Dr. Vipul Gupta

Stroke is a leading cause of disability and death worldwide, affecting millions of people each year. Rapid diagnosis and timely intervention are crucial for improving outcomes, as every second counts when it comes to saving brain tissue. Traditionally, stroke management has been reliant on clinical expertise and imaging technologies such as CT and MRI scans. However, with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), stroke care is undergoing a paradigm shift, offering faster, more precise, and highly efficient diagnosis and treatment planning.

### AI in Stroke Diagnosis: Enhancing Speed and Accuracy

One of the most critical aspects of stroke management is early and accurate detection. AI-powered tools are transforming stroke diagnosis by analyzing brain scans in real-time, significantly reducing the time required for interpretation. AI algorithms, trained on vast datasets of imaging studies, can swiftly differentiate between ischemic and hemorrhagic strokes - two distinct types that require vastly different treatment approaches.

AI-driven imaging platforms assist radiologists and neurologists by automatically identifying occluded arteries, detecting hemorrhages, and even assessing the extent of brain damage. This allows healthcare professionals to make quicker, more informed decisions, expediting the administration of life-saving treatments such as thrombolysis or mechanical thrombectomy.

### AI in Treatment Planning and Decision Support

Beyond diagnosis, AI is playing a vital role in personalized treatment strategies. AI models can predict patient outcomes based on historical data, helping doctors determine the best course of action. Machine learning algo-

ritms assess factors like age, medical history, stroke severity, and comorbidities to recommend tailored treatment plans.

For ischemic strokes, where blood clots obstruct blood flow to the brain, AI can rapidly identify suitable candidates for thrombolytic therapy (clot-busting drugs) or mechanical thrombectomy (clot removal). Similarly, in hemorrhagic strokes, AI can predict bleeding patterns and recommend optimal surgical interventions. Such precision minimizes the risk of complications and improves overall patient prognosis.

### Remote Stroke Care and AI-Driven Telemedicine

In rural and underserved regions where access to stroke specialists is limited, AI-driven telemedicine is bridging the gap. AI-enabled mobile applications and cloud-based platforms facilitate real-time consultations between emergency physicians and stroke experts, ensuring that patients receive timely interventions even in remote settings. For instance, AI-based stroke triage systems help paramedics assess stroke symptoms on-site, transmitting critical data to hospitals before the patient arrives. This allows stroke teams to prepare for immediate intervention, drastically reducing door-to-needle time a key factor in stroke survival and recovery.

### AI in Rehabilitation and Recovery Monitoring

Stroke rehabilitation is a long and complex process, requiring continuous monitoring and personalized therapy. AI-driven rehabilitation tools are transforming post-stroke care by enabling real-time tracking of a patient's recovery progress. Wearable devices equipped with AI analyze movement patterns, detect muscle activity, and provide personalized feedback to optimize rehabilitation exercises. AI-powered virtual assistants and chatbots offer cognitive and speech therapy to stroke survivors,

helping them regain lost functions. Additionally, AI-driven predictive analytics help doctors anticipate potential complications such as recurrent strokes or post-stroke depression, allowing for proactive intervention.

### The Future of AI in Stroke Care

As AI technology continues to evolve, its applications in stroke management will become even more sophisticated. Researchers are developing AI models that integrate genetic and biomarker data to predict stroke risk with greater accuracy. Furthermore, AI-driven robotic-assisted surgery is emerging as a promising tool for complex neurovascular procedures, enhancing precision and minimizing invasiveness.

However, the integration of AI in stroke care also presents challenges, including data privacy concerns, the need for robust validation of AI models, and ensuring equitable access to AI-driven technologies across all healthcare settings. Addressing these challenges will be crucial in realizing the full potential of AI in stroke management. Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing stroke management by improving diagnosis, accelerating treatment, enabling remote care, and enhancing rehabilitation. With its ability to process vast amounts of data and provide real-time insights, AI is not only saving lives but also improving the quality of life for stroke survivors. As the healthcare industry continues to embrace AI-driven innovations, the dream of reducing stroke-related mortality and disability is becoming a reality. By integrating AI into every stage of stroke care, from emergency response to long-term recovery, we are moving towards a future where stroke outcomes are no longer dictated by time and geography but by the power of intelligent technology. (The author is the Group Director and Head of the Department of Neurointervention at Paras Hospital, Gurugram)

## Rise of Robotic-Assisted GI Surgery in healthcare

By: Dr. Neeraj Chaudhary

In recent years, robotic-assisted surgery has been making significant strides in India, particularly in the field of gastrointestinal (GI) surgery. With the rising burden of GI diseases, including colorectal cancer, gastric cancer, and complex hepatobiliary conditions, robotic technology is emerging as a transformative force, offering precision, minimally invasive procedures, and faster recovery times for patients.

### Growing Adoption of Robotic Surgery

The adoption of robotic-assisted surgery in gastrointestinal (GI) procedures has seen a significant rise globally. Between 2012 and 2022, the utilization of robotic surgery in general surgical procedures increased from 1.8% to 17%. This growth is driven by the advantages of robotic systems, such as enhanced precision, reduced postoperative pain, and quicker recovery times. In 2020, approximately 1.24 million robotic-assisted surgeries were performed worldwide. In India, the adoption of robotic surgery in GI procedures is also on the rise. The increasing availability of advanced medical technologies and the growing expertise of surgeons in robotic systems are contributing to this trend. Patients in India are becoming more aware of the benefits of minimally invasive procedures, leading to a higher demand for robotic-assisted surgeries. As healthcare infrastructure continues to improve, it is anticipated that the adoption of robotic surgery in GI procedures will further expand.

### Advantages of Robotic GI Surgery

The benefits of robotic-assisted GI surgery extend beyond just preci-

sion. Traditional open surgeries often require large incisions, leading to prolonged recovery periods and an increased risk of infections. In contrast, robotic surgery enables minimally invasive procedures, significantly reducing postoperative pain and scarring. Patients experience lower risks of complications and infections, allowing for a smoother recovery process. Additionally, the advanced precision of robotic systems ensures improved outcomes in complex procedures, particularly in cancer surgeries.

### Expanding Accessibility Beyond Metro Cities

While robotic GI surgery is gaining momentum in urban India, challenges remain in expanding this technology to tier-2 and tier-3 cities. High initial costs and the need for trained specialists have limited its widespread availability. However, efforts are being made to make robotic surgery more accessible through training programs, collaborations, and cost-effective robotic systems. Government and private healthcare providers are also exploring ways to subsidize robotic procedures, making them affordable for a larger segment of the population.

### Future of Robotic GI Surgery

The future of robotic-assisted GI surgery looks promising, with advancements such as AI-integrated robotic systems, telesurgery, and indigenous robotic platforms on the horizon. As the technology becomes more cost-effective and widely available, more hospitals are expected to integrate robotic surgery into their practice, ensuring that patients receive world-class treatment with minimal discomfort. (The author is the Director - Robotic and Laparoscopic, GI-HPB Surgery and Oncology, Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida)

# Discontented Germany votes in election with economy, migration, far-right strength in focus

**BERLIN, Feb 23:** German voters are choosing a new government in an election Sunday dominated by worries about the years-long stagnation of Europe's biggest economy, pressure to curb migration and growing uncertainty over the future of Ukraine and Europe's alliance with the United States.

The centre-right opposition is favoured to win, while polls point to the strongest result for a far-right party since World War II.

Germany is the most populous country in the 27-nation European Union and a leading member of NATO. It has been Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier, after the US.

It will be central to shaping the continent's response to the challenges of the coming years, including the Trump administration's confrontational foreign and trade policy.

The top candidates, conservative front-runner Friedrich Merz and current Chancellor Olaf Scholz of the Social Democrats, voted within minutes of each other in different parts of the country on Sunday morning.

**What are Germans voting for?**

More than 59 million people in the nation of 84 million are eligible to elect the 630 members of the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, who will take their seats under the glass dome of



Berlin's landmark Reichstag building.

Germany's electoral system rarely produces absolute majorities, and no party looks anywhere near one this time. It's expected that two or more parties will form a coalition, following potentially difficult negotiations that will take weeks or even months before the Bundestag elects the next chancellor.

This election is taking place seven months before it was originally planned after center-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition collapsed in November, three years into a term that was increasingly marred by infighting. There's widespread discontent and not much enthusiasm for any of the candidates.

**Who could take charge?**

The environmentalist Greens

Centre-right opposition leader Friedrich Merz's Union bloc has consistently led polls, with 28-32 per cent support in the most recent surveys, and Merz is favoured to replace Scholz.

Scholz's Social Democrats have been polling between 14-16 per cent, which would be their worst postwar result in a national parliamentary election.

The far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, has been running in second place with around 20 per cent of the vote — well above its previous best of 12.6 per cent in a national election, from 2017 — and has fielded its first candidate for chancellor in Alice Weidel. But other parties say they won't work with it, a stance often known as the "firewall".

The environmentalist Greens

also are running for the top job, with outgoing Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, but have been polling a little behind Scholz's party.

Merz has pledged "stability instead of chaos" after Scholz's three-party coalition collapsed following long-running internal arguments, including over how to revitalize the economy.

But it's unclear whether the conservative leader, if he wins, will be able to put together a stable government that does much better. Merz hopes for a two-party coalition, but may end up needing a third partner to form a government.

The realistic candidates to join a Merz government are Scholz's Social Democrats, the Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats — who were the smallest partner in Scholz's collapsed government and may not manage to stay in parliament.

The Free Democrats and another small party are hovering at around 5 per cent of the vote, the threshold to qualify for seats in parliament. If they do, there may be no majority for a two-party coalition.

**What are the main issues?**

The contenders have made contrasting proposals to turn around the German economy, which has shrunk for the past two years and hasn't managed real growth in much longer. That's going to be a

central job for the new government.

Migration moved to the forefront of the campaign in the past month following deadly attacks committed by immigrants.

Merz vowed to bar people from entering the country without proper papers and to step up deportations if he is elected chancellor. He then brought a nonbinding motion calling for many more migrants to be turned back at Germany's borders. Parliament approved it by a narrow majority thanks to AfD votes — a first in postwar Germany.

Rivals made Merz's attitude toward AfD, which generated protests, an issue. Scholz accused Merz of "irresponsible gambling" and breaking a taboo. Merz has rejected those accusations, saying that he didn't and won't work with AfD. He has repeatedly and categorically said since that his party will "never" do so.

Mainstream parties have vowed to keep up support for Ukraine in its war against Russia. And after the Scholz government reached a NATO target of spending 2 per cent of gross domestic product on defence, the next administration will have to find a way to keep that going — and likely expand it, in the face of US demands — once a special 100 billion-euro (USD 105 billion) fund to modernize the military is used up in 2027. (AP)

# States threaten fines, jail time for local officials who resist Trump's immigration crackdown

**ATLANTA (US), Feb 23:** Republican state lawmakers seeking to aid President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration are threatening local officials who resist with lawsuits, fines and even potential jail time.

Lawmakers in more than 20 states this year have filed legislation targeting so-called sanctuary policies that limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities, according to an Associated Press analysis using the bill-tracking software Plural.

Some of those states already ban sanctuary policies but are now proposing to punish mayors, council members and other government officials who violate the prohibition.

The goal is to provide "teeth to those who are being aggrieved by local governments and local officials who are not abiding by Georgia immigration law," said Republican state Sen. Blake Tillery, whose legislation would allow lawsuits against anyone who implements sanctuary policies. His bill recently passed the Senate and is now in the House.

Opponents have raised concerns that the legislation could lead local police and sheriffs to detain immigrants for longer than they are supposed to under federal law out of fear of getting sued.

"We're threatening our local law enforcement who are doing the best job they can to keep our communities safe," said Georgia state Sen. Nikki Merritt, a Democrat.

The state proposals come as the Trump administration also has begun taking legal action against governments that have adopted policies inhibiting arrests and deportations by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The Department of Justice has sued Illinois, Chicago and Cook County, alleging they are violating federal law by not cooperating with immigration authorities.

Using lawsuits to enforce anti-sanctuary laws

A Georgia law enacted last year already mandates that local law enforcement cooperate with federal authorities to identify and detain immigrants in the U.S. illegally, or else lose state funding and face misdemeanor charges. The legislation recently passed by the state Senate doubles down by letting people sue local governments, of-

ficials and employees for violating the ban.

Immigrants and advocates in Georgia say the legislation, if passed, could stoke fear in communities already worried about ICE officials arresting loved ones in homes, churches or schools.

"This all relates to Donald Trump's war on immigrants and local people trying to garner favor with him through legislation that doesn't solve any problems," said Charles Kuck, an Atlanta immigration attorney who opposes the legislation.

Mike Mitchell, deputy executive director of the Georgia Sheriffs' Association, said the organization has a "neutral" position on the bill but noted sheriffs already are following immigration law.

Louisiana passed a law last year requiring law enforcement agencies to "use best efforts" to enforce federal immigration law. Earlier this month, Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill sued the sheriff's office in New Orleans, alleging it is violating the state ban on sanctuary immigration policies.

The Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office declines ICE requests to hold detainees for extra time except when they face murder, rape, kidnapping, treason or robbery charges, according to a 2013 policy put in place under a consent judgment in federal court. The attorney general's lawsuit seeks to end that federal court order.

The sheriff's office also restricts the information it shares with ICE and prevents federal immigration agents from entering its facilities without court authorization or interviewing detainees without legal counsel.

The sheriff's office said in an emailed statement that it "remains in full compliance with all applicable state laws and valid court orders related to ICE detainees."

Imposing fines and jail time

An anti-sanctuary measure was the first item signed into law by Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden of South Dakota after he took over for former Gov. Kristi Noem, who was picked by Trump to be homeland security secretary. The law bans state and local policies that limit communication with federal officials about people's immigration status, however it contains no penalties. (AP)

# Meloni slams Left's double standards

**WASHINGTON, Feb 23:** Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has slammed the Left's "double standards" in perceiving conservatives globally, saying when leaders like herself, US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi collaborate they are called a "threat to democracy" while leftist leaders are praised for similar alliances.

Meloni's remarks came as she addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington via video link from Rome.

During the address, Meloni praised Trump and said the Left is nervous about Trump's victory.

"Their irritation has turned into hysteria, not only because conservatives are winning, but because conservatives are now collaborating globally."

"When Bill Clinton (former US president) and Tony Blair (former British prime minister) created the global leftist liberal network in the 90s, they were called stalwarts."

"Today, when Trump, Meloni, (President of Argentina Javier) Milei or maybe Modi talk, they are called a threat to democracy. This is the last double standard, but we are used to it, and the good news is people no longer believe in their lies, despite all the mud they throw at us. Citizens keep voting for us," said Meloni.

She said people vote for them as "we defend freedom, we love our nations, we want secure borders, we preserve businesses and citizens from the green leftist insanity and we defend family life."

"We fight against wokeism...and we stand for common sense," she said.

People are not as naive as the Left considers them, she said.

Meloni said that the United States and Europe would remain close under Trump, despite soaring tensions between the allies including over Ukraine.

Ties between Europe and the United States have been strained in the first weeks of Trump's second term after the US leader reached out to Russia and warned of a shift away from Europe, raising fears of Trump's commitment to the NATO alliance.

"Our adversaries hope that President Trump will move away from us (Europe)," Meloni said. (PTI)

# Trump again attacks USAID, claims USD 18 mn given to India to help with elections

**WASHINGTON, Feb 23:** US President Donald Trump has claimed that the Biden administration allocated USD 18 million in funding to India to help with its elections, arguing that the country doesn't need this money.

His remarks during a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) on Saturday after he repeatedly attacked the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for allocating USD 21 million in funding to India for "voter turnout".

In his speech, Trump also accused India of taking advantage of the US.

"18 million dollars for helping India with its elections. Why the hell? Why don't we just go to old paper ballots, and let them help us with their elections, right? Voter ID. Wouldn't that be nice? We're giving money to India for elections. They don't need money," he said.

"They take advantage of us pretty good. One of the highest tariff nations in the world...We have a 200 per cent (tariffs) there and then we're giving them a lot of money to help them with their election," Trump said.

Trump also criticised the USAID for giving USD 29 million to Bangladesh.

"USD 29 million goes to strengthen the political landscape and help them out so that they can vote for a radical left communist in Bangladesh," he said, without naming anyone.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that USAID under the previous administration led by Joe Biden allocated USD 21 million in funding to

India for "voter turnout", sparking a row in the country over the assistance.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday said the information put out by the Trump administration people is "concerning" and that the government is looking into it.

During an interaction at an event in New Delhi, he also said the USAID was allowed in India "in good faith, to do good faith activities", and suggestions are being made out of America that "there are activities which are in bad faith".

"So, it surely warrants a look. And, if there is something to it, I think the country should know who are the people involved in the bad faith activities," the external affairs minister said.

The Congress party on Saturday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "talk to his friend" and strongly refute the allegation.

On Thursday, at a Republican Governors Association meeting, Trump claimed that the USD 21 million funding to India for "voter turnout" was a "kickback" scheme, as he continued to attack the previous Biden administration.

Trump had raised similar concerns on Thursday and Wednesday, days after his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) led by Elon Musk claimed that USAID contributed USD 21 million to the Election Commission to boost voter turnout in India as he listed items on which the "US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent."

On February 16, DOGE also noted that all of the items had been cancelled. (PTI)

# 'India remains cornerstone of UN peacekeeping, its women peacekeepers indispensable'

**UNITED NATIONS, Feb 23:** India remains a cornerstone of UN peacekeeping and its women peacekeepers have demonstrated that missions with greater female representation improve operational outcomes and contribute to lasting peace, the United Nations peacekeeping chief has said.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix will visit New Delhi this week to attend the conference 'Enhancing the Role of Women in Peacekeeping: A Global South Experience' being organised by India on February 24-25.

"India remains a cornerstone of UN peacekeeping" and "Indian women peacekeepers are redefining peacekeeping itself," Lacroix told PTI in an exclusive interview here. Noting that it's a "privilege" to attend the conference in India, Lacroix said the gathering would bring together women officials from about 50 countries in the Global South to discuss the evolving challenges in peacekeeping and the critical role women play in advancing peace and security.

"More women in peacekeeping means a more effective peacekeeping. India has long been a leader in advancing women, peace and security in peacekeeping missions — not only as a top troop and police contributor but also as a pioneer in advancing gender parity, its leadership in training and capacity

building and its commitment to increasing women's participation in missions," he said in the written interview ahead of the conference.

He said the presence of Indian women peacekeepers "proves that missions with greater women representation build stronger relationships with communities, improve operational outcomes, and contribute to lasting peace."

"Moving forward, creating enabling environments, addressing gender barriers, ensuring the mental well-being of peacekeepers, strengthening strategic communication, and countering misinformation must remain priorities. Women in peacekeeping is not just about fairness—it is a strategic necessity for mission success," he said.

Lacroix said "India's women peacekeepers have proven to be indispensable in UN peacekeeping, forging trust between our uniformed personnel and local communities in some of the world's most challenging conflict zones."

"Their presence contributes to the success of peacekeeping efforts. Through community engagement, they build crucial connections with local women, build trust, contribute to early warning and protection efforts, improve humanitarian outreach and act as role models for women and girls in the communities they serve," he said. (PTI)

# Thousands set to attend funeral of late Hezbollah leader Nasrallah 5 months after his death

**BEIRUT, Feb 23:** Tens of thousands of people gathered in Beirut early Sunday to attend the funeral of Hezbollah's former leader, nearly five months after he was killed in an Israeli airstrike on a southern suburb of the Lebanese capital.

Hassan Nasrallah was killed when Israel's air force dropped more than 80 bombs on the militant group's main operations room. His death was a major blow for the Iran-backed group that the late leader transformed into a potent force in the Middle East.

Nasrallah was the group's leader for more than 30 years and one of its founders. He enjoyed wide influence among Iran-backed groups in the region and was widely re-

spected in the so-called Iran-led axis of resistance that included Iraqi, Yemeni and Palestinian factions.

Officials from around the region including Iran's parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi were expected to attend the funeral at the Lebanese capital's main sports stadium.

Lebanese officials including the parliament speaker and representatives of the president and prime minister were expected to attend the funeral believed to be Lebanon's largest in two decades.

Senior Hezbollah official Ali Daamouh told reporters Saturday that about 800 personalities from 65

countries will be attending the funeral in addition to thousands of individuals and activists who came from around the world.

"Come from every home, village and city so that we tell the enemy that this resistance will stay and is ready in the field," Daamouh said, referring to Israel.

Nasrallah will be laid to rest later Sunday in Beirut while his cousin and successor Hashem Safieddine, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike on a Beirut suburb a few days later, will be laid to rest in his hometown in southern Lebanon. The two had temporarily been buried in secret locations. Hezbollah earlier this month announced plans for their official funerals. (AP)

# Pope is conscious, receiving supplemental oxygen

**ROME, Feb 23:** Pope Francis was conscious but still receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen Sunday following a respiratory crisis and blood transfusions, as he remains in critical condition with a complex lung infection, the Vatican said.

The brief statement early Sunday didn't mention if Francis was out of bed or eating breakfast, which it had on previous days. "The night passed quietly, the pope rested," it said.

The Vatican later said Francis was conscious, continuing to receive supplemental oxygen and that further clinical tests were being conducted. A more detailed medical update was expected later Sunday.

On Saturday, doctors said the 88-year-old pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, was in critical condition after suffering a prolonged asthmatic respi-

ratory crisis while being treated for pneumonia and a complex lung infection.

The pope received "high flows" of oxygen to help him breathe through a nasal tube. He also received blood transfusions after tests showed low counts of platelets, which are needed for clotting, the Vatican said in a late update.

The Saturday statement also said that the pontiff "continues to be alert and spent the day in an armchair although in more discomfort than yesterday." Doctors said the prognosis was "reserved".

Doctors have said Francis' condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. His condition has revived speculation about what might happen if he becomes unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, and whether he might resign. Prayers for pope at Vatican. (AP)

# French aircraft carrier stages combat drills with Filipinos in disputed sea

**MANILA, Feb 23:** France's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and accompanying warships were in the Philippines on Sunday after holding combat drills with Filipino forces in the disputed South China Sea in a show of firepower that would likely antagonise China.

The Charles de Gaulle docked on Friday at Subic Bay, a former US Naval base northwest of Manila, for a break after more than two months of deployment in the Indo-Pacific. The French carrier engaged with security allies for contingency readiness and to promote regional security, including with Filipino forces, navy ships and fighter jets.

They held anti-submarine warfare drills and aerial combat training on Friday in the South China Sea, Philippine and French officials said.

Last year, the French navy deployed a frigate for the first time to participate in a joint sail with United States and Philippine counterpart forces in and near the disputed waters. It was part of the



largest annual combat exercises in years by American and Filipino allied forces. The drills, known as Balikatan (Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder"), involved more than 16,000 military personnel.

China strongly criticised the exercises then, saying the Philippines was "ganging up" with countries from outside Asia in an obvious reference to the US and its security partners, and warned the drills could instigate confrontation and undermine regional stability.

France's recent and ongoing military deployments to the Philippines underscore its "commitment to regional security and the shared goal of strengthening maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific."

Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesperson Co Xerxes Trinidad said.

The Charles de Gaulle, the only nuclear-powered aircraft carrier in the world other than those of the US Navy, led a strike group that included three destroyer warships

and an oil replenishment ship in its first-ever visit to the Philippines, French officials said.

France has been shoring up its military engagements with the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations at odds with China in the disputed waters, a key global trade and security route although it says those emergency-preparedness actions were not aimed at any particular country.

China, however, has bristled at any presence of foreign forces, especially the U.S. military and its allies, which carry out war drills or patrols in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety although it has not publicly released exact coordinates of its claim other than 10 dashed lines to demarcate vaguely what it calls its territory on maps.

Beijing's claims overlap with those of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan in long-unresolved territorial standoffs. Indonesia has also figured in violent confrontations with Chinese coast guard and fishing fleets in the Natuna waters. (AP)

### Man arrested with elephant tusks

**HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, Feb 23:** Intensifying the anti-poaching initiative, a man was apprehended with two elephant tusks in Baksa district on Saturday.

According to source, a team from the forest department, led by Sheshidhar Reddy, deputy field director of the Manas Tiger Project, conducted an operation on Saturday that led to the arrest of a man in possession of two elephant tusks.

The arrested individual was identified as Sadhin Narzary (54), son of late Sadar Narzary from No 2 Bongrun village under Harsinga police station in Udalguri district.

Acting on intelligence inputs, the forest department team apprehended Narzary and seized the tusks, which were allegedly meant for illegal trade.

"The forest department has intensified a strict operation against the poaching of wild animals and conservation of forest and environment across the region. During the operation, a man was apprehended along with elephant tusks. The forest department officials have initiated the operations, and seized the elephant tusks", said a senior police officer.

### Nonia community protest in Delhi

**HT Bureau DIPHU, Feb 23:** Hundreds of representatives and leaders of the Nonia community across India gathered at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar on Sunday for a massive protest organised by the Rachnatmak Nonia Sanyukta Sangh (RNSS). Led by RNSS National General Secretary, Abhishek Kumar, the demonstration called for urgent government action to address long-standing demands related to socio-economic rights, social recognition, and welfare measures for the marginalized community.

The protest saw participation from prominent RNSS leaders, including National treasurer Kalicharan Mahato, National co-treasurer Manoj Mahato, Delhi state president Sanjay Mahato, and Assam State President Arjun Mahato.

Delegations from states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, and Assam joined the agitation. Senior social workers, women activists, and legal advisor of Assam's Gauhati High Court, Advocate Rad-

## 'Role of stalwarts should be inspiration for re-engagement with neighbouring states'

### Former Assam information commissioner delves into cultural significance

**HT Correspondent JORHAT, Feb 23:** Chancellor of Nagaland University Samudra Gupta Kashyap delivered the 18th biennial 'Tulsi Narayan Sarma Memorial Lecture', at the Jagannath Barooah College (Autonomous), Jorhat, on Saturday on the topic 'Our Awareness about Our Neighbourhood.'

The lecture was organised under the aegis of Tulsi Narayan Sarma Memorial Trust.

Dr Kashyap, a former noted journalist, and a former Information Commissioner of Assam, said that the ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of its neighbourhood provided Assam a uniquely advantageous position.

"Despite the tremendous goodwill towards the state and Assamese culture among the neighbouring states and its people we have failed to acknowledge this and reciprocate in kind," Kashyap opined.

He said the broad-minded tradition of visionaries like Srimanta Sankardeva, Lakshminath



Bezbaroa, Jyotiprasad Agarwalla, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Dr Bhuben Hazarika should inspire a responsible re-engagement with our historic cultural affinities as global citizens, both with the north-eastern States and the five countries beyond our national borders.

Earlier, the programme began with the 'Tulsi Vandana', a musical tribute in Sanskrit paid to Tulsi

students and Sakuntala Devi, daughter of late Tulsi Narayan Sarma. Sakuntala Devi, in her address, spoke of the untiring efforts and sacrifice of her father to establish the college in way back in 1930. The event concluded with the distribution of TN Sarma Memorial Awards to the highest scorer in Sanskrit Honours.

The recipients for the year 2022, 2023 and 2024 were Debashish Kalita, Shrutilekha Bora and Supriya Sahoo respectively. On the occasion, Manik Lal Phukan Trust Memorial Awards were also distributed to the best graduate in Science along with the top scorer in Geography Honours.

The best graduate award in Science went to Mahek Sharma, Barsha Gogoi and Ashok Tamuli, all from Zoology department for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024 respectively. The recipients from the Geography department were Tribeni Sonowal, Abhigyan Dutta and Suman Priya Bhuyan for the past three consecutive years.

### Governor's medal conferred on students at Nagaon College (Autonomous)

**HT Correspondent NAGAON, Feb 23:** The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of Nowgong College (Autonomous) organised the prestigious Governor's medal conferment ceremony to the meritorious students of Nowgong College (Autonomous) on Friday last here.

The proceedings of the ceremony was initiated by Bhuban Chandra Chutia, coordinator of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell, and presided over by Sarat Kumar Dutta, president of the governing body and Pulin Ch Borah, principal (i/c), Nowgong College (Autonomous) welcomed the guest, medalist and participants.

NSS president of India Awardee Dr Ranjan Kumar Kakati, director of Student Welfare at Gauhati University, attended the occasion as the chief guest.

In his address, Kakati encouraged students to prioritise both their academic pursuits and professional aspirations while actively engaging in social initiatives. He

emphasised the significance of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which places greater focus on skill development and entrepreneurship, urging educational institutions to incorporate these principles into their curricula to foster self-reliance through local resources.

Jagannath Vishwakarma, a distinguished alumnus of Nowgong College and currently a researcher and scientist at the University of Bristol, London, shared valuable insights on research opportunities. He inspired students to embrace challenges, stating that true success lies in overcoming failures.

The event was also graced by Dr Sarat Borkatoki, former principal of Nowgong College as the special Guest. He guided students on how they could contribute to the institution's growth.

Kakati conferred the Governor's medal to exceptional students who graduated with Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Arts, Commerce, and Science from Now-

gong College in 2023-2024 session. The gold medals were presented to Plabita Saikia (Mathematics), Rashmi Rekha Bora (Economics), and Ananya Sarma (Commerce), as well as Bastav Raj Saikia (Chemistry) and Mubashira Ahmed (Geography). Silver medals were awarded to Bastav Bora (Mathematics), Barlina Saikia (Sociology), Dipannita Roy (Commerce), Anjan Bora (Chemistry), and Mihika Mazumdar (Geography). The Governor's bronze medal recipients included Sonia Das (Economics), Jhimli Bhattacharjee (Zoology), Gaurav Poudel (Commerce), along with Priyam Jyoti Deka (Zoology) and Krishnakshi Bora (Education).

Additionally, awards were presented to winners of various competitions held during the 80th Youth Federal and College Week-2025. The ceremony was attended by over 1,500 participants, including students, faculty, retired faculty members, non-teaching staff, and alumni of Nowgong College.

### CEM Boro inaugurates auditorium hall in Chirang

**HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, Feb 23:** Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) inaugurated the newly constructed Martyr Sujit Narzary Memorial Auditorium at Kajalgaon in Chirang on Sunday.

The auditorium was constructed by government of BTR to facilitate community welfare services amongst the citizens.

CEM Pramod Boro stated that the constructed auditorium would serve as a platform for the artists of Kajalgaon to showcase their talents and a unifying space for the community to come together. He said that the government of BTR has initiated various humanity welfare services across the Bodoland region.

"I'm glad to have inaugurated the Martyr Sujit Narzary Memorial Auditorium at Kajalgaon, Chirang, today. I'm certain that this auditorium will serve as a platform for the artists of Kajalgaon to showcase their talents and a unifying space for the community to come together", Boro said. Among others, Lok Sabha MP, Joyanta Basumatary, BTR executive member, Ranjit Basumatary, MLA Nirmal Kumar Brahma, MCLA Madhab Chandra Chetry were present in the event.

### Mising Film- 'Yakashi's daughter' in Bengaluru International film festival

**HT Correspondent GOLAGHAT, Feb 23:** Jayanta Madhab Dutta's debut film "Yakashik Omede" ('Yakashi's daughter'), a Mising film has been selected in the "Unsung Incredible India" section at the 16th edition of Bengaluru International film festival to be held from March 1 to 8.

The film was earlier selected at the "21st Third Eye Asian International film festival 2025" in the "Asian spectrum" section and received high appreciation from the audience, said the director of the film.

The film revolves round the theme of child marriage, discord and disharmony among the generations of a marginalised tribal society of Assam.

The film is produced by eminent business man Rajeswar Saikia under the banner of Kaziranga Pictures. The sound of the film is designed by the renowned sound designer of the Mumbai Film Industry Amrit Pritam and Debajit Changmai who are co-Producers of the film as well.

Colour grading is done by Sujit Borah, an eminent colour grader of Mumbai. Music is composed by Amrit Pritam and Bhagabat Pritam. Hiranya Pegu, Saurav Saikia,



Jatindr Saikia, Amar Phukan served as assistant directors. The camera of the film is managed aesthetically by Saurav Saikia as DOP, assisted by Sasungka Saikia and edited by Bikash Baruah.

The director of the film who will present as key person of the 2nd Assam International Rural film festival to be held from March 14 to 16 at Dholi in Titabor is happy about the selection of the film in this category.

"It has been crafted with almost a new and inexperienced team of acting, editing, direction and camera. I still feel we have miles to go to achieve more. It would also encourage the upcoming regional films," the director said.

### Heavy hail storm grips West KA

**HT Correspondent KHERONI, Feb 23:** Intense rainfall and heavy hail storm gripped several hilly areas, including the remote village of Langhemphi, located 32 kms from Hamren, the district headquarters of West Karbi Anglong, near the Assam-Meghalaya border. Similar conditions have been reported across several parts of Baithalango and Zerikinging areas, with plummeting temperatures and roads disrupting daily life and isolating communities.

Local residents confirmed that the continuous hail storm over a few hours has led to a sharp decline in temperatures, with mountain areas recording sub-zero conditions. A thick layer of ice and snow has rendered key roads impassable, particularly in elevated zones, stranding residents and halting vehicular movement.

In Baithalango, similar chal-



lenges have been reported, with rainfall compounding difficulties in lower-altitude areas. The region's typically rugged terrain has become increasingly hazardous. Regional Meteorological Centre Guwahati have issued forecasts suggest the hail storm and rain may persist over the next 24-48 hours, prolonging the crisis, rainfall may continue for few days across the state.

### Dhubri police busts fraudulent scheme preying on underprivileged women

**HT Correspondent DHUBRI, Feb 23:** The Dhubri district police uncovered a scam on Saturday evening that had been deceiving underprivileged women under the guise of the "Support India Development Program" scheme.

The scam, which had been operating since January in the Halghora area near Dhubri town, was based on a chain business model that exploited unsuspecting victims.

One accused, identified as Akram Hussain Laskar (31), son of Johirul Hoque Laskar, from Kuleswar, Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, was arrested by a police team led by Sub-Inspector Nilim Talukdar.

Laskar, who claimed to be the branch manager of the office from where the fraudulent activities were conducted, was taken into custody for his involvement in the scam.

Laskar had been running the fraudulent operation from a rented house under Dhubri Police BN College Town Outpost, luring individuals by selling household items in exchange for ₹ 2,000 to ₹ 3,000 after filling out a membership form. To sustain the scheme, members were encouraged to recruit others, effectively forming a chain business.

During the investigation, Laskar failed to produce any valid documents related to their activities. The police also found that all transactions were made in cash. A raid at the office resulted in the seizure of over ₹ 2 lakh in



cash. The scam promised agents a benefit of ₹ 100 for each new membership, along with pearl-like objects for making necklaces. Members were assured a payback of ₹ 400 upon submitting 40 completed necklaces within a week. This elaborate scheme attracted over 3,000 women in the region, many of whom had joined in hopes of earning a livelihood.

However, the fraudulent nature of the program was eventually exposed, leading to Laskar's arrest.

Meanwhile, another key suspect, Rashidul Rahman, a resident of Ward No-14, Dhubri, is currently absconding. Victims who gathered at Dhubri Sadar Police Station on Sunday identified Rahman as the individual who convinced many women to join the scheme.

Authorities have urged the public to remain cautious of similar fraudulent schemes and to report any suspicious activities to the police to prevent further exploitation. Further investigations are underway to trace the larger network behind this illegal trade.

### Voluntary blood donation camp

**HT Correspondent MARGHERITA, Feb 23:** The Indian Red Cross Society Margherita sub district Branch on Sunday organised a voluntary blood donation camp and awareness programme at Ramkrishna Mission in Digboi under Margherita Co-District which was hoisted by Ramkrishna Mission, Digboi.

The event was chaired by Dipak Bhattacharjee, a lifetime member of the Indian Red Cross Society while Pabitra Borgohain general secretary of Indian Red Cross Society Margherita sub district branch delivered the welcome speech, highlighting the importance of voluntary blood donation and the need for safe and secure blood to prevent patient deaths.

Prominent and distinguished guests, including Swami Arunatma nanda Maharaj secretary of Ramkrishna Mission, Digboi, Anil Saikia retired teacher of Soumarpath Vidyalaya Digboi, Lakhinandan Gogoi retired deputy commissioner, Diganta Saikia noted social worker of Digboi, Pramod Deb, Dr Gautam Purkayastha vice principal of Margherita College and Dibakar Bhattacharjee retired general manager of IOCL Digboi attended at the event and spoke about the benefits of blood donation.

During this blood donation camp bloods were collected from 48 donors and it were taken to Tinsukia Civil Hospital by the blood collection team.

The event was successfully conducted with the support of the Central Industrial Security Force, Assam Industrial Security Force and Ramkrishna Mission, Digboi.

### ECCE certificate course for anganwadi workers in Dima Hasao

**HT Correspondent HAFLONG, Feb 23:** The department of women and child development Assam, in collaboration with SCERT, Assam, inaugurated a 6(six) months certificate course on ECCE for Anganwadi Workers (10+2) and above in Dima Hasao at Keshav Smarak Nyas in Haflong on Sunday.



The programme was attended by executive member, NCHAC, Donpainen Thaosan as chief guest in the presence of Rowelson Rongpi, Addl director, education, Kunjalata Lachon, Dy director, WCD, other dignitaries, and Anganwadi workers.

The programme aims to provide comprehensive training to Anganwadi workers, equipping them with the essential skills and knowledge required for fostering the holistic development of children under six years of age.

Emphasising the importance of early childhood education in shaping the future of young minds, executive member NCHAC Donpainen Thaosan encouraged participants to seize the opportunity. He expressed that whatever they learn in the training should be applied to benefit the children.

Speaking in the inaugural session, deputy director, Kunjalata Lachon, stressed the importance of early childhood education in laying the foundation for lifelong learning and nation-building. She highlighted that well-trained Anganwadi workers play a crucial role in the development of young children, helping them grow into responsible and capable citizens. "If the Anganwadi worker is very good, then the whole Anganwadi centre environment will be child-friendly and vibrant," she added.

## People across communities take part in thatch cutting at Jamugurihat

### Year-long prog ahead of Sankar Sangha convention in Feb 2026

**HT Correspondent BISWANATH CHARIALLI, Feb 23:** The Tezpur Zila committee of Srimanta Sankardev Sangha organised a community thatch grass cutting programme on Sunday at Jamugurihat.

The upcoming 95th annual conference of the Sangha is going to be held at Dhalabail here in February 2026 so the district committee has adopted a series of year-long activities to commemorate the upcoming mega event.

On the occasion people from different sections of life put their hands together and made the programme a success. As per the call of the district committee and the reception committee thousands of people assembled at Kanyaka Bahumukhi Krisi Pam and joined their hands in cutting the thatch grass on the eastern bank of Jyia Bharali river. As per the tradition,



the temporary houses of the programme such as pandals of the meeting, delegates meeting area, dining hall etc. have to be prepared with the thatch grass. In this connection, nearly three thousand members from various parts of the state viz Dhekiajuli, Kaliabor, Biswanath, Tezpur and from

many villages of Jamuguri-Sootea assembled together and cut down the thatch grasses. During the process of thatch cutting devotees perform Dihanam, Hari Naam besides ghosas from the Kirtana.

Talking to this correspondent district secretary of Srimanta Sankardev Sangha Pradip Ray,

### Morigaon journalists take stock of health conditions of veterans

**HT Correspondent MORGIAON, Feb 23:** The members of Morigaon District Journalist Association took stock of the health conditions of the founder secretary and former president of the Morigaon District Journalists Association Nabakanta Bardoloi at his residence on Sunday.

The members of the association led by its president Ajit Sharma and the secretary Guljariall Sarma met the veteran journalist and felicitated him with a traditional gamosa, japi, diary at his residence this morning and wished him good health and long life. The members of former president of Morigaon District Journalists Association Birinchi Kumar Sharma, former secretary Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, assistant secretary Jun Farid Yunis, journal secretary Bharat Kumar Nath, senior members of the association Ritumani Mahanta and Pranjal Sharma accompanied the president and the secretary of the association.

The organization also visited the residence of former Morigaon Municipal Board's chairman Dilip Kumar Das, who has been lying in bed for a long time. The team of journalists wished him a speedy recovery and long life.

## Delhi CM says govt exchequer left empty by previous regime

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday alleged that the previous AAP government had left an "empty public exchequer" before the BJP dispensation, and assured that ₹ 2,500 monthly payment scheme for women would be implemented with detailed planning.

Gupta attended a meeting along with other BJP MLAs at the state party office ahead of the first session of the newly constituted 8th Delhi Assembly scheduled on Monday.

Addressing a press conference after the meeting, the newly appointed chief minister said several phases of meetings have been held with the officers over the implementation of the Mahila Samridhi Yojna under which ₹ 2,500 per month is to be paid to the eligible women in Delhi.

"The condition which the (previous) government has left for us... when we sat with officers to review the financial status of the current government, we found that the government exchequer empty," she said on a question about the preparation to implement the scheme.

Gupta, however, assured that the scheme will surely be implemented with detailed planning.

State BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the BJP government's only agenda was ensuring a developed Delhi and solving the problems of the people. (PTI)

## Members of J&K Handicapped Association detained after protest march against govt

**SRINAGAR, Feb 23:** Police on Sunday detained several members of Jammu and Kashmir Handicapped Association (JKHA) after they took out a protest march here against the government's "failure" to improve the lives of the disabled, officials said.

Dozens of members of the JKHA assembled near the Press Enclave here holding banners and raising slogans, and called for an immediate government action for the welfare of the disabled community in Jammu and Kashmir, the officials said.

The protesters alleged successive governments have failed to improve the lives of the community.

They demanded launching of a special recruitment drive for qualified disabled persons, and enhancement in the monthly pension from ₹ 1000 to ₹ 5000.

They also demanded low-interest loans covered in subsidy and vertical reservation in jobs.

The demands also included four per cent reservation in MGNREGA work as well as in assemblies, municipalities, and panchayats.

The protesters also demanded setting up of an advisory board for their socio-economic development, and opening of separate counters for them in government offices and banks.

They tried to take out the march on the main road outside the Press Enclave, but were stopped by police, and several of them were detained, the officials said. They were later released, the officials added. (PTI)

## Amid disquiet buzz, BJP minister Ganesh Naik to hold 'janata darbar' in Shinde stronghold Thane

**THANE, Feb 23:** Maharashtra Forest Minister and BJP leader Ganesh Naik will on Monday hold a 'janata darbar' in Thane, a stronghold of Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena president Eknath Shinde, the development coming amid buzz of disquiet in the ruling Mahayuti alliance.

Large hoardings have been put up for Naik's event to be held near the collector's office in Thane city, which is being seen in some political circles as a direct challenge from the BJP to the Shiv Sena's influence in the area.

There has been talk of unease in the ties between the BJP and Shiv Sena for the past few weeks, which once again came to the fore with Shinde's "do not take me lightly" warning on Friday.

Those who took him lightly were toppled, Shinde, whose rebellion brought down the Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government, had added.

"Those who have to understand must take the hint. I will continue to do my work," Shinde, deputy chief minister in the Devendra Fadnis government, had said when asked by reporters about who was the target of the warning.

Incidentally, the rivalry be-

# Atishi becomes first woman to be LoP in Delhi assembly

'AAP will show what a strong opposition's role is in the House'

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Former Delhi chief minister and MLA from Kalkaji constituency Atishi was chosen as the Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly at a meeting of AAP MLAs here on Sunday.

With this, Atishi becomes the first woman to hold the post. AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal was also part of the meeting of the party's 22 MLAs where Atishi was picked.

In a press conference, AAP's Delhi unit convenor Gopal Rai said by consensus all AAP MLAs have chosen Atishi as the Leader of Opposition (LoP).

MLA from Burari, Sanjeev Jha, proposed Atishi's name as LoP and all MLAs supported the proposal, said Rai, who is also the MLA from Babarpur.

Speaking at the press conference, Atishi thanked the party chief Kejriwal and all the MLAs.

"AAP will show what a strong opposition's role is in the House and will raise all issues with full force. AAP will ensure that the BJP



fulfils all its promises as the party in power. Specifically, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise to provide ₹ 2,500 to women in the city by March 8. We promise that we will make the Rekha Gupta-led BJP government fulfil this promise."

The first session of the Delhi Assembly will begin on February 24. In the three-day session, the ruling BJP government has said that pend-

ing CAG reports against the performance of the previous AAP government will be tabled in the House.

On the expected tabling of CAG reports, Atishi said it is a routine procedure and that she had sent these reports to the House as CM.

Kejriwal, in a post on X, said, "I congratulate Atishi ji for being elected as Leader of AAP in the House. AAP will play the role of

constructive opposition in the interest of the people of Delhi."

Atishi also posted on X and said, "The people of Delhi have entrusted us with the role of opposition, and as a strong opposition we will ensure that the BJP government fulfils all its promises made to the people of Delhi."

"During the elections, Modi Ji had guaranteed to give ₹ 2500/month to all the women of Delhi. We will definitely get this promise fulfilled by the BJP government," she said.

Former deputy CM Manish Sisodia also congratulated Atishi. "The Aam Aadmi Party will play the role of a responsible and active opposition, always giving priority to the interests of the people of Delhi," he posted on X.

The BJP ousted AAP from power in Delhi, winning 48 of the 70 seats in the assembly polls held on February 5. Kejriwal, Sisodia and several top leaders of the party lost their seats in the polls. (PTI)

## Congress MLAs continue 'dharna' in Rajasthan Assembly over suspension of 6 MLAs

**JAIPUR, Feb 23:** The deadlock between the opposition Congress and the government over the comment of minister Avinash Gehlot on former prime minister Indira Gandhi during the Question Hour on Friday continued with the Congress MLAs carrying on their 'dharna' in the Assembly.

The Congress MLAs have been sitting on the 'dharna' since Friday evening after the House was adjourned. They spent nights there, demanding that the comments be expunged from the proceedings and suspension of their six MLAs, including PCC chief Govind Singh Dotasra, be revoked.

Leader of Opposition Tikaram Jyoti said on Sunday that the 'dharna' will continue if the demands are not met. He said that the government itself does not want to end the deadlock and the ministers have held talks with the agitating Congress MLAs in the Assembly just for "formalities".

Minister of State Jawahar Singh Bedham and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel met the senior Congress MLAs on Saturday night but the talks remained inconclusive. On Friday night also, the ministers held talks with Jyoti and other senior MLAs.

During the Question Hour on Friday, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Avinash Gehlot pointed to the opposition and said, "In the 2023-24 budget of also, like always, you

named the scheme (on working women's hostels) after your 'dadi' (grandmother) Indira Gandhi."

The remark led to a heavy uproar in the House, which led to three adjournments.

Government chief whip Jogeshwar Garg moved a proposal to suspend Congress MLAs Govind Singh Dotasra, Ramkesh Meena, Amin Kagzi, Jakir Hussain, Hakam Ali and Sanjay Kumar, which was passed by a voice vote.

The Congress MLAs started 'dharna' in the House after it was adjourned.

Talking to reporters outside the Assembly on Sunday, Tikaram Jyoti said that the government does not want the deadlock to break.

"We had said on the first day that we are ready to end the issue and demanded that the remarks made by the minister in a sarcastic tone should be expunged and the suspension of our six MLAs should be revoked but the entire BJP is busy saving the minister by saying that whatever he said was right."

"This is not good in a parliamentary democracy. The fight here is ideological but the ruling party is full of stubbornness and arrogance and is only pretending to make efforts to end the deadlock," he said.

Meanwhile, Bedham said that talks with the Congress MLAs were held last night and they should end the 'dharna'. (PTI)

## Unwarranted publicity of business notices tantamount to breach of privilege: J&K Speaker



**JAMMU, Feb 23:** Taking a serious note of publicity of the House business notices ahead of the Budget Session, Speaker of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather has asked the members to desist from the "breach of privilege".

He said it is improper to give unwarranted publicity to the notices of questions, Bills, resolutions and other similar matters connected with business of the House.

The Budget Session of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly is scheduled to begin on March 3.

The Speaker, taking serious notice of recent unwarranted publicity of

the notices given by legislators in connection with the business of the House to be taken up during the ensuing budget session, has expressed displeasure over this practice, saying this is against the parliamentary practices, conventions and established rules, a spokesperson of the Legislative Assembly said in a statement.

"According to parliamentary practice, usage and established convention, and prevalent rules of this house, it is improper to give unwarranted publicity to the notices of questions, bills, resolutions and other similar matters connected with business of the house," the statement said, quoting the Speaker.

Rather expressed displeasure against the members responsible for such publicity which tantamount to breach of privilege as per the prescribed rules and directed the members to desist from this practice in future, the statement said. (PTI)

## Sapkal raises concern about cannabis cultivation in Buldhana; seeks thorough probe

**MUMBAI, Feb 23:** Maharashtra Congress chief Harshwardhan Sapkal on Sunday expressed concerns about the seizure of cannabis worth ₹ 12 crore from a farm in Buldhana district, claiming that one farmer could not have managed extensive cultivation without political backing.

Talking to reporters, Sapkal urged the local police to conduct a thorough investigation to find people behind the illegal operation.

"A farmer could not have managed such extensive cultivation without political backing. I urge the local police to conduct a thorough investigation to find the individuals behind this operation. Even as narcotic substances were cultivated in Buldhana, the police were occupied with extortion activities," the Congress leader said when asked about the police's raid on a farm in the district on Saturday.

According to reports, authorities confiscated cannabis plants worth

more than ₹ 12.6 crore from a farm and arrested a farmer.

Following this operation, law enforcement has heightened vigilance across the district to prevent further illegal farming activities.

Sapkal claimed conventional farming has become unaffordable for many, pushing farmers to cultivate illegal drugs. "If such a trend is seen in the state, it is a warning. I urge the government to take action. The current administration seems to be neglecting constitutional duties and is focusing on maintaining power," he said. The Congress leader pointed out that the revenue deficit in the state has led to the cessation of various government schemes and criticised the government for focusing on its interests.

He further urged the government to make "Chhava", the film based on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji, tax-free, citing that the state government is yet to act on the demand made on Shiv Jayanti earlier this week. (PTI)

## Cong to hold AICC session in Ahmedabad on April 8-9



**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** The Congress on Sunday announced that it will hold its AICC session in Gujarat's Ahmedabad on April 8 and 9 to deliberate on the challenges posed by the BJP's "anti-people" policies, its alleged attack on the Constitution and charting the party's future road map.

In a statement, Congress general secretary, in-charge organisation, K C Venugopal, said the upcoming session will serve not only as a platform for crucial deliberations but also as a reaffirmation of the Congress party's collective resolve to address the concerns of the common people and present a strong alternative vision for the nation.

"This significant gathering will bring together AICC delegates from across the nation to deliberate on the challenges posed by the anti-people policies and the relentless attack on the Constitution and its values by the BJP, while charting the party's future course of action," Venugopal said.

The session will commence on April 8 with an extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, followed by the AICC Delegates' meeting on April 9, he said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge will preside over both the meetings, which will be attended by Congress Parliamentary Party

## Mehbooba slams J&K Assembly speaker, accuses him of imposing form of 'martial law'

**SRINAGAR, Feb 23:** PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday said the role of the speaker of an Assembly is to safeguard the rights of the members of the House and not act as a censor.

Her remarks came after Jammu and Kashmir Assembly Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather took serious note of publicity of the House business notices ahead of the Budget session. The speaker has asked the members to desist from committing a breach of privilege.

Mufti accused Rather of imposing a form of "martial law" while occupying a constitutional position.

"While Rather Sahab may be concerned with preserving the sanctity of legislative proceedings, as Speaker, his primary role is to safeguard the rights of members, not to act as a censor," the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said in a post on X.

She said transparency and public awareness about legislative activities should not be seen as an infringement on parliamentary practices.

"On the contrary, informing the public about notices, questions, and resolutions in advance promotes accountability. Many significant parliamentary bills, such as the recent Waqf Bill, are debated publicly for months. "Regrettably, it appears that Rather Sahab, a seasoned politician, is imposing a form of

chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, all chief ministers of the Congress-ruled states, national office bearers, senior party leaders, and other AICC delegates, Venugopal said.

This AICC session is being convened as a continuation of the resolutions adopted at the Belagavi Extended CWC meeting (Nava Satyagraha Baitthak), which commemorated the 100th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's presidency at the 1924 Congress session, he said.

Recognising the urgent need to preserve, protect, and promote the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, and the Constitution, it was decided that between January 26, 2025 and January 26, 2026, the Congress will launch a massive, nationwide public outreach campaign called the Samvidhan Bachao Rashtriya Padayatra, along with an AICC session in Gujarat, the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi, Venugopal recalled.

"The upcoming session will serve not only as a platform for crucial deliberations but also as a reaffirmation of the Congress party's collective resolve to address the concerns of the common people and present a strong alternative vision for the nation," he said. (PTI)

The Budget session of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly is scheduled to begin from March 3.

The speaker has said it is improper to give unwarranted publicity to the notices for questions, bills, resolutions and other similar matters connected with the business of the House.

Meanwhile, Mufti joined the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) signature campaign seeking a ban on liquor in Jammu and Kashmir at south Kashmir's Pulwama.

The campaign was launched by her daughter and party leader Iltija Mufti here on Saturday.

Talking to reporters in Pulwama, the PDP chief appealed to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to support the bills brought by her party.

"I request Abdullah to lend his support to pass these bills. I request the speaker that his role is to safeguard the rights of the members and not to threaten them not to talk on the resolutions and bills to be brought in the Assembly. What is this? There should be a debate on those in the public," she said.

Mufti also appealed to Abdullah that such business rules should not be framed in the Union Territory that put a stamp of approval on the unconstitutional and illegal decisions of August 5, 2019, and that too by a popular government like his. (PTI)

# Those with slave mentality mock India's religious beliefs with foreign backing: Modi

**CHATTARPUR (MP), Feb 23:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday slammed a section of leaders over their critical remarks on Maha Kumbh, saying those with "slave mentality" keep attacking the country's religious and cultural traditions with the backing of foreign powers.

Modi termed the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj as the "Maha Kumbh of Unity" after laying the foundation stone for Shree Bageshwar Medical Sciences And Research Institute, which will include a cancer hospital, at Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh.

Bageshwar Dham is a prominent religious site associated with Lord Hanuman, frequented by thousands of people.

"These days we see that there is a group of leaders who mock and ridicule our religion. They are bent upon breaking the unit and are engaged in dividing people."

"Many times, foreign powers too are seen trying to weaken the country and religion by supporting these people," Modi said.

Modi's remarks came amid a



row over West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee dubbing Maha Kumbh as Mrityu Kumbh citing mismanagement and incidents of stampede. She had also accused the authorities of suppressing the death toll.

Modi said the haters of the Hindu faith have been living in different disguises for centuries.

"These people with slave mentality attack our beliefs, temples, saints, culture and traditions. These people abuse our festivals, traditions, and beliefs," he said.

Modi further said the agenda of this section was to break the society and unity of the country.

"They have the audacity of throwing slush at our religion and culture which is intrinsically progressive," he added.

Modi underlined the religious significance of Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj which is taking place after 144 years.

He praised 'safai karmis' (sanitation workers) and police personnel for doing a great job in making

the Maha Kumbh a successful event.

"This is the great Kumbh of unity where thousands of doctors and volunteers work with dedication and the spirit of service. People visiting the great Kumbh of unity appreciate these efforts," he said.

Modi also hailed services rendered by ophthalmologists to the needy people at the mega religious congregation attended by crores.

He said for ages, Hindu mutts, dhams and temples have been serving as the centres of worship and belief and also for science and research.

"Hindu seers imparted the knowledge of yoga and science. The world is following Yoga. Yoga has made the country proud and making our flag fly high," he said.

The PM said he always worked with the principle of 'sabka saath, sabka vikaas' and has added the vow of 'sabka ilaaj and sabko aarogya'.

Highlighting efforts made by his government in fighting cancer, Modi said cancer daycare centres

will be opened in all districts of the country in the next three years.

He pointed to Budgetary announcements aimed at fighting cancer and the decision to make cancer medicines cheaper.

"Modi is your son, and I will continue to serve you all," the PM added.

The cancer hospital, to be set up under Shree Bageshwar Medical Sciences And Research Institute, is the brainchild of self-styled godman Dharendra Shastri, the Peethadhishwar of Bageshwar Dham.

Modi said the 100-bed cancer hospital will come up on 10 acres in the first phase over the next two years, with a cost of ₹ 218 crore.

The prime minister praised Dharendra Shastri, saying he has undertaken another important initiative to serve people, the poor, and cancer patients through this modern cancer hospital, which will be constructed in an area in the impoverished Bundelkhand region.

MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Shastri also addressed the gathering. (PTI)



# Wayanad landslide survivors temporarily halt agitation after talks with authorities



**WAYANAD (KERALA), Feb 23:** The survivors of July 2024 Wayanad landslides on Sunday temporarily called off their agitation demanding speedy rehabilitation, following discussions with authorities.

Earlier in the day, tension prevailed in Chooralmala in this hill district as police blocked protesters from carrying out a march in protest of the alleged delay in rehabilitation process.

"We have withdrawn the strike temporarily following the talks with the police. However, we will meet the District Collector and bring up the matter that 17 families have been omitted from the beneficiary list for rehabilitation. If the issue is not addressed, we will stage a sit-in protest," a leader of the action committee told media.

The protest began with the protesters constructing makeshift huts in the landslide-hit area by 9 am. Later, a march was blocked by the police team near the Bailey Bridge in Chooralmala, according to visuals of TV channels.

However, the police have not allowed the protest in the landslide-affected area leading to verbal duels between the protesters and police. The protest was organised under the leadership of the Jana Shabdham Action Committee.

Meanwhile, the People's Action Committee (Janakeeya Action Samiti) has announced a hunger strike in front of the Wayanad District Collectorate on Monday.

The protesters are demanding faster rehabilitation and a comprehensive relief package from the central government, above the 5 cents of land allotted to them.

According to CPI(M) sources, the strike was "politically moti-

ated". The LDF Wayanad district committee has decided to launch an agitation in New Delhi on Monday demanding that the union government disburse funds for the rehabilitation.

Revenue Minister K Rajan assured that there is no need for worry, as everyone who lost their homes will be provided with new housing.

Rajan stated that the government is not strictly limiting rehabilitation to 5 cents of land and is assessing the possibility of providing more.

"If additional land can be allotted, it will be done," he said, adding that the government is committed to extending all possible assistance.

He cautioned against misinformation being spread among disaster victims, stating that it would serve no purpose.

The government is ready to engage in discussions with concerned parties raising issues. Complaints regarding those left out of the beneficiary list will be reviewed, he added.

Stressing the need to avoid controversy, the minister assured that anyone can file a complaint, and a transparent investigation will be conducted.

Congress leader and Kalpetta MLA T Siddique announced a hunger strike in front of the Collectorate in protest against the delay in the rehabilitation even after seven months of the disaster.

"The government is offering houses on five cents of land without consulting the disaster victims, raising concerns about the nature of the rehabilitation process," he said. (PTI)

# Army Chief Gen Dwivedi embarks on 5-day visit to France

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi will hold wide-ranging talks with his French counterpart Gen Pierre Schill in Paris on Monday focusing on boosting military cooperation between the two countries.

The Army chief began a five-day visit to France on Sunday with an aim to strengthen India-France military collaboration.

"Gen Dwivedi's visit aims to strengthen the military collaboration between India and France, exploring new avenues of cooperation and enhancing strategic partnerships between the two nations' armed forces," the Indian Army said. It said the aim of the meeting between the two army chiefs will be to foster stronger military ties between the two nations.

Gen Dwivedi's itinerary also includes a visit to the Ecole Militaire, the prestigious Military School and Institution complex in Paris.

At the institute, he will be briefed on Future Combat Command (CCF). Additionally, Gen Dwivedi

will be briefed at the Technical Section of the French Army (STAT) and will visit the Battle Lab Terre at Versailles.

On February 25, Gen Dwivedi will travel to Marseille, where he will visit the third division of the French Army and will be briefed on its mission and role, India-France training cooperation, and the French Army's modernisation programme.

The following day, he will visit Carpiagne to witness a dynamic demonstration of the Scorpion Division with live firing exercises, the Indian Army said in a statement.

On February 27, the Army chief will visit the Neuve Chapelle Indian War memorial to lay a solemn wreath in honour of the fallen Indian soldiers who participated in World War I.

Later in the day, he will deliver a talk at the Ecole de Guerre, the French Joint Staff College, highlighting the evolving nature of modern warfare and India's strategic vision. (PTI)

# Homemakers to changemakers: Women entrepreneurs help empower rural Bihar against climate challenges

**MUZAFFARPUR (BIHAR), Feb 23:** In the heart of rural Bihar, where groundwater depletion, extreme heat and erratic weather have caused havoc for farmers, a quiet transformation is underway.

A group of women, once confined to their homes despite their education, have emerged as agri-entrepreneurs, transforming not only their own lives but also helping their communities adapt to the growing threats of climate change.

Each agri-entrepreneur (AE) works with at least 150-200 small and marginal farmers, who are hit the most by these worsening climate challenges. They provide solutions to farmers on irrigation, provide climate-resilient seeds, help out with crop diversification, and act as a helpdesk for digital work—essentially a one-stop centre for all problems they may encounter.

Their remuneration is proportional to the range of services they provide farmers within a panchayat.

Soni Kumari from Hajipur, for instance, began her journey as an agri-entrepreneur last year by registering a farmer for a farmer card. She then prepared a detailed business plan based on the

farmer's profile—his social indicators, finances and cropping patterns.

She then entered the farmer's requirements into a Management Information System, creating a database of her customers to understand demand and create a business plan for her enterprise.

Once a homemaker, Soni who is a science graduate said she never imagined she would one day be at the forefront of promoting sustainable farming practices.

"I opened a shop with a micro-financing loan, where I stock everything from climate-resilient seeds to organic manure and fertilisers. We even have a drone for irrigation," Soni said.

The drone technology Soni uses has been a game-changer for her, she added.

It sprays water evenly across fields, ensuring efficient water use and reducing labour costs. "We can irrigate one acre of land in just 5-7 minutes at ₹ 300-500. Without the drone, this task would take 3-4 hours and labour costs would have been much higher," she said.

But drones are a big investment for the community as the battery lasts only 10-15 minutes per charge and replacing a battery would cost

# India's ONOS to democratise access to high-quality academic content: Cambridge University Press

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** India's One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) initiative will democratise access to high-quality academic content, which only wealthier institutions could afford earlier, according to Mandy Hill, Managing Director of Academic Publishing, Cambridge University Press (CUP).

In an interview with PTI, Hill, however, flagged that unlocking the potential of Indian academia is not just about access but about empowering researchers to make meaningful contributions to the global knowledge economy.

Hill was in India recently to discuss how CUP can support the government's ambitions with ONOS and plan for the next steps.

"The New Education Policy (NEP) has many components. However, ONOS is particularly significant for our journals publishing business. This initiative ensures that researchers across India, regardless of their institution, have uniform access to high-quality academic content," she said.

"Previously, only wealthier institutions could afford comprehensive subscriptions, while others had limited or no access. 'ONOS' democratises this access, enabling Indian academics to improve both the quality and quantity of their research output," she added.

The Centre had in December launched the "One Nation, One Subscription" initiative under which 3,400 international journals covering science, technology, engi-



neering, medicine, mathematics, management, social sciences and humanities would be made available to researchers in the first phase.

"ONOS" will be coordinated by a central agency -- the Information and Library Network (INFLIB-NET), an autonomous inter-university centre of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Hill asserted that Cambridge's focus is on academic publishing, specifically research journals aimed at researchers rather than students.

"Our journals programme aligns well with the NEP's goals, particularly in supporting researchers with access to high-quality information. Before 'ONOS', central universities often had their own digital libraries, offering varying levels of access. Some institutions subscribed to our entire programme, others to selected titles, and some had no access at all. 'ONOS' ensures equitable access across public institutions, which is a transformative step," she said.

"We also see 'ONOS' as phase one of a broader vision. The next phase should focus on open access, ensuring not just access to global research but also greater visibility and impact for Indian research worldwide. This aligns with the government's plans, and we are excited to collaborate on this transition," Hill said.

Asked about plans in the pipeline, Hill said, while 'ONOS' provides ubiquitous access, it is equally important to help Indian researchers publish more in high-quality journals.

"Currently, we receive a high volume of submissions from India, but the acceptance rates remain lower. To address this, we aim to support academics through author workshops, clear guidance, and open conversations about improving publication standards. Quality remains our top priority, and we want to help Indian researchers meet those benchmarks," she said.

To maximise the impact of its participation under 'ONOS', the CUP is planning a series of activities, across the country, tailored specifically to support the academic and research community.

These include a series of publishing workshops designed to enhance scholarly communication, guidance on Article Processing Charges (APC) services to facilitate publishing and build a researchers community, and the introduction of credit-based programmes aimed at further supporting research.

The CUP has recently signed an agreement with Visvesvaraya Technological University (VTU) which will provide e-book access to 211 institutions, benefiting over 350,000 students and researchers.

"This initiative focuses on equitable pricing and broad access, reflecting our mission to democratise information. Beyond 'ONOS', we continue to work with private institutions through transformative agreements, enabling them to access our content and publish open access for free. These efforts complement 'ONOS' and ensure comprehensive coverage," Hill said.

"By providing equitable access to high-quality content and supporting researchers in publishing globally impactful work, Cambridge is proud to contribute to India's academic and research ecosystem. Unlocking the potential of Indian academia is not just about access—it's about empowering researchers to make meaningful contributions to the global knowledge economy," she added. (PTI)

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# FDA issues show cause notice to pharma firm in Palghar for illegal export of opioids

**PALGHAR, Feb 23:** Maharashtra's Food and Drug Administration has issued a show cause notice to a pharmaceutical company here for alleged illegal export of opioids, an official said on Sunday.

Following the Central government's directives on Friday, a joint team of drug inspectors from the Aaveo state government raided Aaveo Pharmaceuticals, a Palghar-based company allegedly involved in exporting these drugs, the FDA stated in a release.

Aaveo Pharmaceuticals, however, has denied the allegations and said it is fully cooperating with the government authorities in the probe.

As per a statement issued by the FDA, the action was taken after the BBC's investigative report highlighted that Tapentadol and Carisoprodol manufactured in India were illegally exported to African countries, where they are misused for recreational purposes.

Authorities have seized all existing stock in the company, prohibited further production, and initiated stringent legal action against the company in Palghar, the FDA said.

The company has been served a show cause notice under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940, and officials have assured that all necessary legal measures will be taken without any delay, fear, or favour.

A spokesperson of Aaveo Pharmaceuticals said the company has always adhered to the rules and regulations set by various regulatory authorities to manufacture and export its products.

"Tafrodol is our registered trademark, which contains both Tapentadol and Carisoprodol. This combination is licensed by the relevant State Food and Drug Administration and is exported under the necessary No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Assistant Drug Controllers (ADC) and with an export licence issued by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organiza-

tion (CDSCO)," he said.

He further said that Aaveo Pharmaceuticals is not the only company in India manufacturing a similar combination product.

"Several companies are unlawfully using our brand name and logo. We have already filed multiple legal cases against such companies, and the matter is currently being heard in the High Court," the spokesperson said.

He added that the company is fully cooperating with the relevant government authorities, providing all required support and granting access to the necessary documentation for their investigation.

The Union government issued an advisory on Friday directing all state governments to withdraw export NOC (no objection certificate) for all unapproved combinations of Tapentadol and Carisoprodol and revoke manufacturing permissions for these drugs to prevent their misuse. (PTI)

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# Border row flares up in Belagavi affecting bus services between Karnataka - Maharashtra

**BENGALURU, Feb 23:** Bus services between Karnataka and Maharashtra have been affected due to attack on bus drivers from both sides amid the sudden flare-up of border row in Belagavi in the last two days.

The decades-old dispute resurfaced on Friday when a bus driver and a conductor were beaten up for allegedly not speaking in Marathi at Marihal in Belagavi.

The bus conductor stated in his police complaint that a girl asked for a ticket in Marathi. When he said he did not know Marathi and asked her to speak in Kannada, she and her male friend attacked him.

At Marihal, a group of youths intercepted the bus and beat up the conductor. While police arrested four people for the attack, the conductor has also been booked for 'indecent behaviour' with the minor girl on a complaint

filed by the girl, Belagavi Police Commissioner Yada Martin Marbaniang told reporters.

In a retaliatory act, miscreants attacked and blackened a bus driver of Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) Bhaskar Jadhav at Guyilal in Hiriyur Taluk of Chitradurga district on Saturday.

Police have arrested a few who were allegedly involved in the crime.

Following the incident, the Maharashtra Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik on Saturday ordered the suspension of the state transport buses to Karnataka. Sarnaik said the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) bus, which was plying from Bengaluru to Mumbai, was attacked in Chitradurga around 9.10 pm on Friday by Kannada activists. (PTI)



around ₹ 90,000, she added.

Soni's journey is part of a larger movement supported by JEEVIKA, a state-level women's socioeconomic empowerment programme that provided her with the initial training.

So far, 5,178 AEs are providing services to more than 8 lakh farmers and covering 2,21,000 acres of land, according to official data.

They provide seeds, pesticides, fertilisers, farm equipment and offer services on nursery management, collective marketing and digital banking.

The overall profit generated by the AEs to date is ₹ 1.54 crore, said Abhishek Kumar, Programme Of-

ficer for Women's Economic Empowerment at Project Concern International India.

Kumar who works closely with them said they serve a key function in spreading awareness about climate-resilient farming techniques.

Chanchal Devi from Mushari, for instance, encourages farmers to grow water-efficient crops like palak, la saag and cucumber.

"Given the water shortage, we need crops that thrive with less water. I also teach farmers how to grow multiple crops together, like planting creepers alongside soil-intensive plants to save water and resources," Chanchal said.

Sarita Kumari, a farmer who

buys seeds and fertilisers from Chanchal's shop, explained that uncertain weather conditions have made farming a very unpredictable business so the presence of agri-entrepreneurs helps.

"We earlier had to travel to the nearest town to buy seeds and there also we would get traditional seeds, not the climate-resilient ones. So it definitely helps. We have not used the drone irrigation a lot but it is becoming popular here," the farmer said.

Most agri-entrepreneurs source their seeds from Dr Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University in Samastipur in Bihar.

By diversifying crops and adopting water-saving techniques, farmers can reduce their vulnerability to climate shocks, said Avantika, a member of Syngenta Foundation India, which works with the women entrepreneurs.

To help farmers cope with the economic impacts of climate change, the women are also promoting the planting of high-value cash crops, she said.

Crops such as capsicum, cauliflower, broccoli, and chillies are grown using high-yielding seeds, enabling farmers to fetch better prices in the market.

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# Production, export of pain relief drugs halted in West Africa

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** The apex drug regulatory authority has prohibited the production and export of all combinations of pain relief medicines tapentadol and carisoprodol, over news reports that unapproved combinations of the drugs exported to West African countries are driving an opioid crisis there.

In a communication, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has asked the drug control authorities of states and Union territories to withdraw all export NOCs and permission to manufacture all combinations of the two drugs.

Tapentadol is an opioid medication that is used to treat moderate to severe pain. Carisoprodol is a muscle relaxant which works on the centres in the brain and spinal cord to relieve pain. Both Tapentadol and Carisoprodol are approved individually by Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) but not approved as a combination in the country. Also, they are not part of NDPS drugs list in India.

"This is in connection with a recent article from BBC whereby, it has been written that the combination drug Tapentadol and Carisoprodol has significant abuse potential and this combination is being exported to West African countries from India," the communication sent by DCGI on Friday said.

Looking into the potential to have a harmful impact on people, DCGI requested an immediate withdrawal of all export NOCs and permission to manufacture, issued for all combinations of tapentadol and carisoprodol. (PTI)

# '62 crore devotees have come to Maha Kumbh, one of century's rarest events'

**AGRA (UP) Feb 23:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said 62 crore devotees have come to the Maha Kumbh so far and the gathering of such a large number of people during a certain period is in itself "one of the rarest events of the century".

Welcoming all the guests at the Unicorn Companies Conclave in Agra, Chief Minister Yogi said, "I can call it the Unicorn Maha Kumbh of the startup world. There is an attraction towards the Maha Kumbh at this time."

According to a statement, he said, "This is important for me. Today, I have come to Braj Bhoomi, behind which there has been a spiritual and cultural background."

Braj Bhoomi has influenced India's civilisation and culture for a long time, he added.

Talking about the devotees coming to the Maha Kumbh, Adityanath said, "I think that in any event in the world, whether it is spiritual or for any tourism purpose, the gathering of such a large number of people during a certain period in that ceremony and being united with that event is in itself one of the rarest events of the century."

Adityanath, also the 'Mahant' of the Gorakshapeth, remarked that it must have been envisioned that a time would come when people in India might feel disconnected from their traditions and culture. He emphasised that the Kumbh would serve as a powerful medium to re-establish that vital connection, bringing the people back to their spiritual roots and cultural heritage.



The statement said Adityanath urged the youth of UP to become job creators, highlighting the state's transformation from having a lack of opportunities to a thriving startup hub. He praised young innovators for driving growth, emphasising that those ahead in technology now lead in startups.

Recalling a 2019 visit to Bundelkhand, he shared how five women sought jobs, including one who had only passed fifth grade. The government initiated milk production training, resulting in a ₹ 1,500-crore turnover with 42,000 women involved in it. Agra's milk producers have performed even better, he added.

The chief minister stressed that UP is not just an agricultural state but a centre of Sanatan knowledge and tradition. An investment conclave is facilitating discussions with unicorn companies, recognising that no startup succeeds without investors.

He reiterated efforts to make UP a \$1 trillion economy, crediting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for fostering startup culture through initiatives like Startup India, Standup India and Make in India.

The statement said with over 14,000 startups in UP -- 7,000 led by women -- the state is making strides. Adityanath cited a physics student who built a unicorn, proving that when technology meets innovation, success follows, it said. (PTI)

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Bihar— Nalanda, Patna, Bhojpur, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, East Champaran, Saharsa, Purnia, Kishanganj, Katihar, Khagaria, and Begusarai—and is solely managed by the agri-entrepreneurs themselves.

Bihar, like many parts of India, has increasingly become vulnerable to the impact of climate change with erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and unpredictable weather patterns making farming more challenging than ever, particularly for small and marginal farmers whose livelihoods and food security are at risk.

However, some challenges remain—the high cost of technology such as drone batteries and the need for more widespread awareness about sustainable practices.

Women who spoke to PTI said they are planning to expand their business further and involve more women with them.

"I never thought I'd be doing something like this—helping farmers, using drones, running a shop. But now, when I see how much easier it is for farmers to irrigate their fields or grow better crops, I feel proud. I now plan to involve more women to be part of this," said Chanchal. (PTI)

# When my films fail, I feel depressed for two weeks: Aamir Khan



**MUMBAI, Feb 23:** Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan says he takes a movie failure hard, often reflecting and feeling depressed for about two weeks.

During a session "60 and Not Done- The Screen and Spotlight" at the ABP Network's Ideas of India 2025, the actor said he values his failures because they push him to do better work.

"When my films fail, I get depressed. I get emotional and I cry a lot for two to three weeks. Later, I sit with my team and think about what went wrong with the film, we try to understand what the audience said about the film, so that we don't repeat our mistakes. I value my failures.

"Once I've been through that process, then I look forward to working on my upcoming films with enthusiasm. One should take positive things from their failures, it teaches you to be better at work," said Khan, whose last two releases "Laal Singh

Chaddha" and "Thugs of Hindostan" performed abysmally at the box office.

Speaking about about the failure of the two movies, the actor said he is disappointed that he couldn't deliver praiseworthy performances, especially

in "Laal Singh Chaddha", which was a remake of Tom Hanks' "Forrest Gump".

"I felt very bad. We didn't earn money. I'm an emotional person. I felt 'Thugs...' was a weak film, we couldn't make what we wanted to. Filmmaking is a difficult film and sometimes we are not able to make films the way we want to.

"In 'Laal Singh Chaddha', I feel my performance was too high, Tom Hanks did such great work in the original he takes you on a ride, I was not able to do so." Khan said. He credited his family for their unwavering support during tough professional times.

"When 'Laal Singh Chaddha' didn't do

well, my family knew I was very much involved with the film, so they were all there with me. Sometimes Junaid, Ira, Kiran, and mother or someone or the other, would come to show their support," Khan added.

The actor also expressed pride in the success his films attained in China, particularly the 2009 comedy-drama "3 Idiots". The Rajkumar Hirani-directed feature, also starring R Madhavan, Sharman Joshi, Kareena Kapoor Khan, and Boman Irani, revolved around the story of three college friends and weaved in a message about pursuing one's passion and defying social conventions.

"The success of my films in China shows that cinema crosses national barriers, it is the victory of the Chinese audience. '3 Idiots' went viral in China because of piracy, I became a star in China because of piracy. We were happy that our film was doing well in India," Khan, who will turn 60 next month, said. (PTI)

## TALAT MAHMOOD'S KIN WANTS BIOPIC ON SINGING LEGEND

**KOLKATA, Feb 23:** Sahar Zaman, grand-niece of 'King of Ghazals' Talat Mahmood and author of a biography of the singing legend, wishes a biopic of the singing legend be made in his 101st birth anniversary year.

Zaman, a well-known television journalist, also said she would be happy if a filmmaker like Sanjay Leela Bhansali directs the biopic with Ranbir Kapoor essaying the role of Mahmood who also starred in 13 films between 1945 and 1958.

Mahmood was born in Lucknow on February 24, 1924 and breathed his last on May 9, 1998, in Mumbai where he worked for many years from 1950. He also worked in the Kolkata film industry for a few years during its heyday in the early '40s.

"There needs to be initiatives by state governments to organise events to commemorate personalities like Talat Mahmood, Raj Kapoor and others in their centenary years," Zaman told PTI.

A session was organised on the book, 'Talat Mahmood: The Definitive Biography,' written by Zaman and published in 2023, the birth anniversary year of the 'Padma Bhushan' recipient, on Saturday. "I wish a biopic is made on his life tracing in detail his eventful journey spanning

three cities - Lucknow (his home town), Kolkata and Mumbai," she said.

Zaman said she wished someone like Sanjay Leela Bhansali helm such a project.

"He is one of those filmmakers who can frame the vastness, keeping in mind the detailing required to recapture that era spanning over three cities," said the singer's kin.

Zaman said she would love to have Ranbir Kapoor essay the lead role if any such biopic is made.

Asked how Mahmood as a sensitive person reacted to ghastly incidents like the '1946 Great Calcutta Killings' riots and the Mumbai riots of 1992 after demolition of Babri Masjid, she said, "A singer like him would always talk about deep human emotions."

"A lot of things are reflected in ghazals and their words... spoken through music, instead of statements. Remember, artists are unifying factors," Zaman said.

Zaman then narrates one incident involving the then Shiv Sena supreme Bal Thackeray and the King of Ghazals in the 60s. "The year he got the Marathi Singer of the Year award, Thackeray sir invited him to his residence and said: 'I am a huge fan of yours. You bring such softness to the lyrics'. And that mutual respect and admiration remained

over the years," she said.

Mahmood sang in 16 regional languages - including Bengali, Assamese, Marathi, Sindhi, Malayalam and Telugu - and lent voices to over 800 songs having commanded love and admiration of billions of followers.

Asked if partition and the subsequent events in the sub-continent curbed the visit of Mahmood to attend concerts in Pakistan, Zaman said even at difficult times, he did go there.

"Part of his family lived there and he would go there for concerts. My book has a chapter on this. I have narrated how a concert of Talat Mahmood caused a massive traffic jam near the venue in Pakistan and Mehdi Hassan ji on the way to the concert was also stuck in that jam," said his biographer.

Zaman said that another friend of his in Pakistan, singer Noor Jehan, was wanted him to sign a contract for nine films to be made in Pakistan, but Mahmood gently declined saying he could not live long away from India.

"When he had consciously made the decision to live in India after partition, he never wavered from that. He loved his motherland, he loved India and he believed in the secular and pluralistic values of India," she said. (PTI)

## KATE HUDSON REGRETS NOT DOING 'THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA'

**LOS ANGELES, Feb 23:** Hollywood star Kate Hudson says she regrets turning down the lead role of Andy Sachs in the hit comedy drama "The Devil Wears Prada".

most Famous", and "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery", said she couldn't take up the part due to her busy schedule.

"That was a bad call. And it was like



Hudson, known for movies like "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days", "Al-

a timing thing. It was one of those things where I couldn't do it, and I

should've made it happen, and I didn't," the actor told Capital FM according to The Hollywood Reporter.

"That was one where when I saw it I was like, ugh. But again, everything happens for a reason. There's a reason for that. That was a real like, 'I should've made that work,'" she added.

The 45-year-old actor said she was committed to several other projects when the film was offered to her.

"It's funny, it's waves of things that are happening and people shooting at different times. It's not like you don't do them because you don't want to do them. It's like, oh, you're doing something else. And it just sucked, you know," she said.

Also starring Meryl Streep, Emily Blunt and Stanley Tucci, the 2006 comedy-drama was directed by David Frankel and emerged as a massive box-office success. (PTI)

## Ajith Kumar involved in two car crashes during Spain race

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Tamil superstar Ajith Kumar was involved in two car crashes during a high-speed racing event in the Spanish city of Valencia.

Ajith's manager Suresh Chandra shared the news on social media platform X, posting a video which captured the moment when the actor's car rear-ended another racer's vehicle and flipped multiple times before coming to a halt.

The 53-year-old actor, who owns the racing team Ajith Kumar Racing, is participating in the Porsche Sprint Challenge: Southern Europe competition. The race's first two rounds were held in Portugal's Portimao, followed by rounds three and four in Estoril.

Chandra said Ajith completed the fifth round of the race without incident and finished in 14th place.

"Round 6 was unfortunate. Crashed 2 times due to other cars. The annexes video clearly shows that he was not in fault. First time despite of crash he got back into pit and was doing well.

"When second time again crash happened and he toppled twice. His perseverance is stronger and he comes out unscathed again to continue the race. Thanks for the all the prayers of concern and wishes. AK is all right," Chandra said.

Last month, the actor narrowly escaped unhurt after crashing his car during a practice session for the Dubai 24 Hours race. His team finished the event at the third spot.

Ajith was most recently seen in "Vidaamuyarchi", co-starring Trisha Krishnan. His next film is "Good Bad Ugly", which will be released in theatres in April. (PTI)



## 'Girls Will Be Girls' wins John Cassavetes Award at Independent Spirit Awards



**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal's debut film production "Girls Will Be Girls" has bagged the John Cassavetes Award at the 40th Independent Spirit Awards.

The Shuchi Talati-directed comedy-of-age drama won the award at a ceremony, held in Santa Monica, California, on Saturday.

The film was one of the five contenders for the John Cassavetes Award, which honours the creative team of the best films made with a budget under USD 1 million. "Big Boys", "Ghostlight", "Jazzy", and "The People's Joker" were the other nominees.

Produced by Chadha and Fazal's banner Pushing Buttons Studios, "Girls Will Be Girls" revolves around a 16-year-old girl called Mira (Preeti Panigrahi) whose rebellious awakening is intertwined with her mother's (Kani Kusruti) unfulfilled coming-of-age experiences.

The film had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival where it received two

awards last year.

Winning an award for her debut production feels like a dream, said Chadha, adding that the movie represents not just a personal journey, but a collective effort of a team.

"To see it recognised on such a grand stage is humbling. As the first Indian actor and producer to win an Independent Spirit Award, I feel like this is not just my victory, but a victory for all of us working to make diverse, authentic stories," she said.

Fazal added, "This win is a momentous one for us, and for Indian cinema as a whole. The spirit of independent filmmaking is about taking risks and telling the truth, no matter how uncomfortable or challenging that may be. 'Girls Will Be Girls' does exactly that."

Shuchi Talati called "Girls Will Be Girls" a labour of love.

"This is more than just an award for me - it is a powerful affirmation of the story we set out to tell... to have it resonate with audiences and critics alike is beyond amazing," she said.

At the Independent Spirit Awards 2025, which supports independent filmmakers, Kusruti was also nominated in the best supporting performance category for her performance in the movie but lost out to Kieran Culkin of "A Real Pain".

In 2022, the Independent Spirit Awards replaced its four acting categories with two gender-neutral segment, merging best supporting male and female into best supporting performance.

"Anora" dominated the film categories with three wins -- best feature, best director for Sean Baker, and best lead performance for Mikey Madison.

For "A Real Pain", Jesse Eisenberg won the best screenplay trophy and Maisy Stella received best breakthrough performance for "My Old Ass".

"Didi" secured best first feature and best first screenplay for Sean Wang. "Flow" was named best international film, and "No Other Land" won best documentary. (PTI)

# OLMO HELP BARCA GRIND OUT WIN AT LAS PALMAS AND KEEP LA LIGA LEAGUE



**BARCELONA, Feb 23:** Dani Olmo scored after coming off the bench to help Barcelona win 2-0 at Las Palmas on Saturday and stay top of the Spanish league.

Lamine Yamal linked up with Olmo to find a seam in the hosts' defense in the 62nd minute. Olmo took Yamal's threaded pass, shifted the ball to his left foot to open an angle around a defender, and fired the ball in off the underside of the bar.

While Olmo went on at halftime, Ferran Torres only played the final minutes and drilled in a second goal from angle in stoppage time.

"Las Palmas is a team that defends well and closes down the interior passing lanes so we had to remain patient," Olmo said. "In the second half the spaces opened up and we were able to score and take the three points." Barcelona avenged a shock home loss to the Ca-

nary Islands club in November as it ensured it will spend another week atop the standings. The team coached by Hansi Flick is one point ahead of Atletico Madrid, which won 3-0 at Valencia earlier on Saturday. Real Madrid is three points back before facing Girona on Sunday without the suspended Jude Bellingham.

Barcelona plays the first leg of its Copa del Rey semi-final against Atletico on

Tuesday.

Julián Álvarez scored twice to lead Atletico to a comfortable win at Mestalla Stadium.

Antoine Griezmann played a part in both of Álvarez's first-half goals with a pair of finely placed lobbs inside Valencia's box.

Álvarez finished off a move in the 12th inside Valencia's area that started with a lifted pass from Griezmann that Samuel Lino volleyed

off the bar. Guiliano Simeone was first to the rebound and tapped it to Álvarez to ram into the net.

Griezmann was again left with space and time to think inside the area before he landed a perfectly placed pass between Valencia's center backs for Álvarez to gently nod off the turf and inside the post on the half-hour mark.

Ángel Correa completed the scoring with four minutes remaining.

"We are still in the fight," Álvarez said.

Valencia remained in the relegation zone.

Villarreal striker Ayoze Pérez netted his 11th league goal of the campaign in a 1-0 victory at 10-man Rayo Vallecano.

The result kept Villarreal in fifth place and challenging for a Champions League berth that go to the top four finishers. Athletic Bilbao is fourth and just one point ahead.

Rayo played with 10 men after Jorge de Frutos saw a red card for a studs-first foul just before halftime. The Madrid-based club also lost top midfielder Isi Palazón early in the game to an apparent leg injury. Pérez scored in the 66th.

Espanyol won its first away game of the season thanks to a header by Fernando Calero and the goalkeeping of Joan García to beat Alaves 1-0 on the road.

The loss left Alaves coach Eduardo Couet under added pressure with his team in danger of the drop. (AP)

## India hope to carry Ireland success forward in Pro League match against England



**BHUBANESWAR, Feb 23:** Back-to-back victories against Ireland would have given India the confidence to go into the FIH men's Pro League contest against higher-ranked England on Monday with renewed vigour, after having started the home leg on a topsy-turvy note.

India are currently placed fourth in the table with 12 points from six games and would be desperately looking for some more success before the home leg of the tournament concludes.

England, on the other hand, are third on the table with 13 points from six games and would be looking to overcome the humiliating 1-4 defeat at the hands of Spain.

Paris Olympic Games bronze medalists India haven't had a great start to the new season with the team having mixed luck against Spain and Germany at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium.

The team suffered a shocking 1-3 defeat to Spain, the side they had beaten to clinch the bronze in Paris, before coming back strongly in the second fixture to win 2-0. Their patchy form and frailties with penalty-corner conversion were on show again in the 1-4 loss to Germany.

However, Harmanpreet Singh's return to the side in the second game infused confi-

dence and the home team avenged the loss with a solitary-goal win.

The two emphatic wins against Ireland, placed last in the nine-team table, would certainly have boosted their morale going into the contest against the third-ranked team in the world.

The likes of Mandeep Singh, Jarnanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Nilam Xess, Abhishek, and Shamsheer Singh finding their rhythm in the 3-1 and 4-0 victories against Ireland bodes well for the fifth-ranked Indian side.

England have been stung by the 1-4 loss to Spain after the shootout victory and would be itching to get back to winning ways.

In search of a much-needed win, England will bank on their ace goal-scorer Sam Ward, who has nine hits to his name and is ranked second among the highest goal-scorers in the League.

It's no surprise that Ward's heroics have seen England score the second-most goals in the competition so far (20). However, their attack won't have it easy against a resolute Indian defence.

India's back-line has been the most effective in the Pro League 2024-25 season so far as they have conceded just eight goals, which is the least among the nine teams. (PTI)

## Uttarakhand's Man Singh and Bhagirathi win men's and women's titles in New Delhi Marathon

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Uttarakhand's Man Singh and Bhagirathi Bisht respectively won the men's and women's titles at the Apollo Tyres New Delhi Marathon race on Sunday.

The 35-year-old Singh, the 2024 Asian Marathon Championship winner, clocked an impressive time of 2:15:24s to emerge winner in a competitive men's elite field.

Pardeep Chaudhary (2:15:29s) and Akshay Saini (2:15:34s) were right on his heels, but finished second and third respectively.

Bhagirathi, also from Uttarakhand, claimed the top spot among elite women with a time of 02:48:59s. Thakor Bharatjee (02:49:16) and Ashwini Jadhav (02:50:48) won the silver and bronze respectively.

A marathon race covers a distance of 42.195km.

National badminton team chief coach Pullela Gopichand and former Indian cricket captain Ajinkya Rahane flagged off the races. The organisers claimed that the event (including marathon, half marathon and 10K races) featured over 25,000 runners and fitness enthusiasts from different parts of the country.

"I congratulate the organisers, the sponsors and of course each and every athlete for making the New Delhi Marathon a success," Gopichand said while interacting with the media.

Rajesh Dahiya, Vice-president of Apollo Tyres, said the race lived up to its billing as the certified national marathon of the country, with India's top runners lining up with an eye on the coveted title.

The marathon featured an inclusive run, with over 33 children from underprivileged backgrounds participating alongside the elite athletes. A team of visually impaired runners also took part in the 10K race assisted by volunteers from Guide Runners India. This initiative highlighted the event's commitment to community inclusion and social responsibility.

Results:  
Full Marathon: Elite Men: 1. Man Singh (2:15:24s); 2. Pardeep Chaudhary (2:15:29s); 3. Akshay Saini (2:15:34s).

Full Marathon: Elite Women: 1. Bhagirathi Bisht (02:48:59s); 2. Thakor Bharatjee (02:49:16s); 3. Ashwini Jadhav (02:50:48s).

Half-marathon: Men: 1. Harmanjot Singh (01:04:36s); 2. Shubham Baliyan (01:05:32s); 3. Abhishek (01:06:12s). (PTI)

## Guirassy scores 4 goals for Dortmund, first to do so since Haaland in 2020

**DORTMUND (GERMANY), Feb 23:** Serhou Guirassy became the first player since Erling Haaland to score four goals for Borussia Dortmund in a 6-0 rout of Union Berlin on Saturday in the Bundesliga.

"Four goals, victory, amazing fans," Guirassy told broadcaster Sky after the game. "The first time in my life, I think. Four goals is such a great thing. I'm happy of course, but always, the most important is the team and the victory."

Haaland scored his four in a 5-2 win at Hertha Berlin in November 2020.

"World class," Dortmund coach Niko Kovac said of Guirassy's performance.

"There's nothing else to say."

Kovac also praised midfielder Pascal Gross for setting up four goals.

Guirassy had only scored nine in 19 league games prior to Union's visit, far from reaching the 28 goals he scored in 28 Bundesliga appearances for Stuttgart last season.

Altogether he scored 44 goals



in 58 games over two seasons at Stuttgart after joining the German club from French team Rennes in 2022.

The Guinea star was the second player after Germany defender Waldemar Anton to join Dortmund from Bundesliga runner-up Stuttgart last summer,

but both struggled to impress as Dortmund made a faltering start to the season.

The club finally fired Nuri Sahin as coach in January, appointing Kovac, the former Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayern Munich coach, in his place. But Kovac also labored to get the

team going as Dortmund lost both of his first two Bundesliga games in charge.

Performances in the Champions League suggested the team was capable of more. Dortmund won 3-0 at Sporting Lisbon, then drew 0-0 against the Portuguese team on Wednesday to seal progress to the last 16.

Guirassy scored one goal and set up another in Lisbon. He has 10 goals and five assists in the Champions League this season.

At Stuttgart, Guirassy thrived in a strike partnership with German forward Deniz Undav. At Dortmund he has been more isolated. He benefited from Gio Reyna being given a rare start on Saturday as Kovac gave the young American just his second league start this season.

Dortmund next faces French team Lille in the Champions League and is confident — thanks in part to Guirassy's impact — of reaching the quarter-finals.

"You always have to begin one day, and today was a great day," Guirassy said. "I hope we can build on this." (AP)

## Virat and Rohit should be allowed to decide their future, says Sarfaraz

**DUBAI, Feb 23:** Indian superstars Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma should be allowed to continue playing and decide their future in international cricket, believes former Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed.

Questions loomed over the future of India's captain Rohit and senior batter Kohli after consecutive Test series loss to New Zealand and Australia, where both struggled to get going. "People should not even talk about Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. Their performances have been outstanding for India," Ahmed told reporters here on Sunday.

"Virat Kohli has won those matches for India, and I have seen it with my own eyes, you can't imagine, the kind of performances he has produced for India."

"The same goes for Rohit Sharma. The way he is leading the team. He led the team outstandingly in the 2023 (ODI) World Cup and won the T20 World Cup."

Ahmed said Virat and Rohit will say their goodbyes to cricket when they think it is the

right time but until then, India should make their teams "around them".

"Let them play and let them decide what they want to do. You should make your team around them. The way they bid adieu to T20Is, they will do it for other formats when they will feel it is time. You should not make a team by removing them, you should make teams by including them," he said.

Similarly, Ahmed feels Pakistan should also make a team with Babar Azam at its centre. The former captain and ace batter, though, fell for a mere 23 in the big game against India.

"Babar Azam is a different player. I think they should set up the (Pakistan) team in a way that Babar Azam can play full 50 overs like Virat Kohli does for India. He takes time in the beginning and then runs the game," he said.

"His (Babar's) goal should be to play the full 50 overs at one-down or whatever number he bats and there should be (other) batters around him who can take on the game and Babar can take care of the other end," he added.



Ahmed said the Indian players, who have not travelled to Pakistan and are playing all their matches in Dubai, would receive a lot of love and admiration from people in Pakistan.

"I will tell you the general view of the Pakistani people — they want to see the Indian team in Pakistan," he said.

"The people of Pakistan love India and their cricketers a lot and they respect them a lot. The way international cricket has re-

turned to Pakistan in the last 7-8 years. Steve Smith, Kane Williamson, Pat Cummins and other top stars of world cricket have played in Pakistan."

"The Pakistani people want the Indian team to come to Pakistan and they will get a lot of love there. They should come, everything is (going) very good. The whole tournament (Champions Trophy) is being organised well and everything is being held safely," he said. (PTI)

## Chappell calls curtains on his five-decade-long journalistic career

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Legendary cricketer Ian Chappell's insightful writings, critical reviews and anecdotes from his playing days will be missed after the Australian icon called curtains on his more than five-decade-long journalistic career, penning his last piece on Sunday.

The 81-year-old fondly recalled some of the best moments he has written about, including the legendary battle between Sachin Tendulkar and the late spin wizard Shane Warne in the 1998 Chennai Test, as well as VVS Laxman's iconic 281 against Australia in Kolkata, in his last column for 'ESP-Nerinfo'. "There have been many pleasures from writing, notably Sachin Tendulkar combating Shane Warne in Chennai. Other highlights included writing about the genius of Brian Lara, Ricky Ponting's aggression, and VVS Laxman's classic 281 in Kolkata," Chappell wrote.

However, he felt the time was right for him to "put down the pen and pack away the computer", adding that retirement from journalism was as emotional as stepping away from cricket.

"I've been writing for more than 50 years, but the time has come and this will be my last column. Retirement from journalism is similar to cricket - I knew the time was right," said the former top-order batter, who played 75 Tests, scoring 5,345 runs.

"In my playing days I asked former Australia captain Richie Benaud if retirement was a difficult decision. 'No Ian,' Benaud replied wisely. 'It's easy. You'll know the right time!'"

Chappell said he would miss writing columns and shared an anecdote about how alcohol cannot enhance the quality of a piece, giving his example as a test case.

Chappell added his columns has a "substantial influence" of American sports writer Walter Wellesley

"Red" Smith.

"The influence of Pulitzer-winning writer 'Red' Smith was substantial. He always strove for the right descriptive word, and in the days of the typewriter stated, 'You haven't got a column until you're knee deep in opening pars.' Smith also added, 'No column is enhanced by alcohol.'"

"I observed that rule almost exclusively, but having just retired from cricket, I forgot it once in my early days of journalism. I met a few mates in the bar as the game was interrupted by rain. After having a few beers I suddenly realised the game might be called off but I still had to file a column."

"With a copy-taker exhorting me to hurry, I finally finished the column despite my fingers missing the correct key a number of times. I read it the next morning and it was absolute codswallop, so I decided never to drink again before finishing my column," Chappell wrote.

"The Australian said he was a stickler for deadlines and despite coming close to busting them a few times, he managed to avoid the embarrassment."

"Despite that stumble, I never missed a deadline - came close a couple of times, but was never late. My wife Barbara-Ann has been a positive influence both as an excellent sub-editor and also by telling me."

"However, the time has come to close the writing section of my computer. I wish each and every one who has helped and befriended me along the way all the best in their future endeavours."

"I will miss filing a column, as writing has been a favoured task. A writing career spanning more than 50 years means I surpassed my journey both as a cricketer and a broadcaster. A justifiable part of writing is, it's all your own work - it might be rubbish but at least it's your rubbish." (PTI)

# Confident New Zealand aim for semifinal spot; Bangladesh fight for survival

**RAWALPINDI, Feb 23:** A confident New Zealand side will be eager to seal their semifinal spot when they take on Bangladesh, who will be fighting for survival, in their Champions Trophy Group A match here on Monday.

The Black Caps started their campaign in dominant fashion, defeating hosts Pakistan by 60 runs. This emphatic victory placed them at the top of Group A with a healthy net run rate of 1.200. A win on Monday will put them within touching distance of a semifinal berth.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, suffered a six-wicket loss to India and currently sit third in the group with a net run rate of -0.408. They must secure a victory to stay in contention for the knockout stage.

New Zealand looked clinical in their opening match, and their recent triumph in the tri-series has further helped them adapt to the conditions in Pakistan.

However, they now face a selection dilemma with the potential



return of Rachin Ravindra from a head injury.

In his absence, Devon Conway and Will Young opened the innings. Initially, Young was expected to make way for Ravindra, but the right-hander's century against Pakistan has complicated the decision — in a positive way. Moreover, Young has consistently

proven his ability to handle spin bowling effectively. Dropping him would also disrupt the left-hand-right-hand combination at the top, which could be crucial for New Zealand's batting strategy.

Meanwhile, Conway appears to be regaining his best form. Apart from this selection call, New

Zealand look well-settled and are unlikely to make further changes to their playing XI.

Bangladesh, however, face an uphill task and must regroup quickly after their disappointing defeat against neighbours India.

The pressure will be on their top order to deliver, as their batting struggles were evident in the previous match.

If not for the 154-run sixth-wicket partnership between Jaker Ali and Towhid Hridoy, Bangladesh would have struggled to even reach 100.

Despite winning a crucial toss, the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side failed to capitalise on the advantage and got off to a poor start.

Their bowlers performed well but lacked the runs to defend.

Adding to their woes, sloppy fielding cost them valuable opportunities, and they will need a significant improvement in that area if they hope to challenge a quality side like New Zealand.

Bangladesh, however, can take

inspiration from their previous Champions Trophy clash against New Zealand, where they knocked the Black Caps out of the tournament.

They will be hoping for a similar upset to keep their semifinal hopes alive.

**Teams:**  
**New Zealand:** Mitchell Santner (c), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Will O'Rourke, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Nathan Smith, Kane Williamson, Will Young, Jacob Duffy.

**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)

## India beat Pakistan by six wickets, set to enter Champions Trophy semifinals



**DUBAI, Feb 23:** India beat Pakistan by six wickets in a one-sided Champions Trophy clash here on Sunday to all but seal a spot in the semifinals.

India dismissed Pakistan for 241 after Saud Shakeel struck 62 off 76 balls while skipper Mohammad Rizwan made a laborious 46 from 77 deliveries.

Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav (3/40) picked up three wickets and all-rounder Hardik Pandya (2/31) removed Babar Azam (23) and Shakeel.

India completed the chase in 42.3 overs thanks to Virat Kohli (100 not out off 111), Shubman Gill (46 off 52) and Shreyas Iyer (56 off 67).

Skipper Rohit Sharma (20 off 15) too played a few audacious strokes before falling to a beauty from Shaheen Afridi.

With two wins in as many games, India are all but through to the semifinals. Pakistan, on the other hand, are on the brink of elimination after losing their first two group games.

**Brief scores:**  
**Pakistan:** 241 all out in 49.4 overs (Saud Shakeel 62, Mohammad Rizwan 46, Khushdil Shah 38; Hardik Pandya 2/31, Kuldeep Yadav 3/40) vs **India:** 244/4 in 42.3 overs (Virat Kohli 100 not out, Shubman Gill 46, Shreyas Iyer 56; Abrar Ahmed 1/28). (PTI)

## Bumrah receives his ICC awards for 2024 during India-Pakistan match in Champions Trophy

ICC honours include the Men's Cricketer of the Year and Men's Test Cricketer of the Year



**DUBAI, Feb 23:** India pacer Jasprit Bumrah on Sunday received his ICC honours, including the Men's Cricketer of the Year and Men's Test Cricketer of the Year awards, before the start of the Champions Trophy match between India and Pakistan here.

Bumrah is not playing in the Champions Trophy as he has been sidelined with a back issue.

The 31-year-old was present here to collect the awards, which also includes a place in the Men's Test and T20I Teams for 2024.

The ICC posted photographs of Bumrah with each of his four awards — including two caps — and wrote on X, "Jasprit Bumrah receives his #ICC Awards and Team Of The Year caps for a stellar 2024."

Bumrah had also met his India teammates on Sunday during their warm-up drills before the match against Pakistan.

Bumrah had an outstanding Test season last year, taking 71 wickets

in 13 matches with the second-best effort coming from England's Gus Atkinson who claimed 52 wickets in 11 matches.

Bumrah averaged 14.92 in Tests in 2024 and ended the year with a strike rate of 30.1. He also became only the fourth Indian bowler to take 70 or more wickets in the conventional format in a calendar year after Kapil Dev, Anil Kumble and R. Ashwin.

He had successful outings against England at home, taking 19 wickets in the five-Test series in the first half of 2024, and finished the year with 32 wickets in another five-Test affair in Australia.

Bumrah also reached the 200-wicket milestone in Tests during India's tour of Australia. Apart from his unmatched exploits with the red ball, Bumrah also played a pivotal role in India's title triumph in the T20 World Cup in the Americas.

He was at the forefront of India's attack, grabbing 15 wickets in the global competition. (PTI)

## RCB's in-form skipper Mandhana, home-crowd support could make things difficult for UP Warriorz

**BENGALURU, Feb 23:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru's sturdy middle-order, in-form skipper Smriti Mandhana and a partisan home crowd will be the major challenges UP Warriorz will have to face when the two teams clash in their Women's Premier League match here on Monday.

India vice-captain Mandhana has been in red-hot form, smashing five half-centuries and a ton in the last 10 matches she has played for the country and her franchise.

But the top-order batter would not like to take Deepti Sharma's side, who just picked their maiden win of the season, lightly, knowing well that

Australia pace all-rounder Tahlia McGrath's power-hitting could turn tables around anytime in the contest. However, after having made a confident start with back-to-back victories, and chasing down a 200-plus score against Gujarat Giants with plenty of deliveries to spare, Mandhana would have oodles of confidence in her side

going into the contest.

Though RCB suffered a setback in their previous outing against Harmanpreet Kaur's side Mumbai Indians, it was more on account of the Bengaluru team's middle-order having an off day, though Elyse Perry stood rock-solid with a fine 81. Overall RCB have performed remarkably well so far this season, one of the reasons they are leading the table with four points from three games and maintaining a healthy net run rate (NRR) of +0.835.

UP Warriorz, on the other hand, have not enjoyed a great start which is evident as they are placed fourth with two points from three games in the five-team league. It's partly because of the team dishing out below-par performance despite having ace India spinner Deepti, McGrath and England stalwart Sophie Ecclestone in the side. After consecutive losses to Gujarat Giants and Delhi Capitals, they did manage to defeat the Delhi

franchise in the return match at Bengaluru but it was more on account of individual efforts from the young right-arm pacer Kranti Goud (4/25) and Australian veteran spinner Grace Harris (4/15).

**Teams (From):**  
**Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** Smriti Mandhana (c), Kanika Ahuja, Ekta Bisht, Charlie Dean, Kim Garth, Richa Ghosh (wk), Heather Graham, VJ Joshitha, Sabhineni Meghana, Nzhat Parveen, Jagravi Pawar, Elyse Perry, Raghvi Bist, Sneha Rana, Prema Rawat, Renuka Singh, Georgia Wareham, Danni Wyatt-Hodge.

**UP Warriorz:** Deepti Sharma (c), Anjali Sarvani, Chamari Athapaththu, Uma Chetry, Sophie Ecclestone, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Arushi Goel, Kranti Goud, Grace Harris, Chinelle Henry, Poonam Khemnar, Alana King, Tahlia McGrath, Kiran Navgire, Shweta Sehrawat, Gouher Sultana, Saima Thakor, Dinesh Vrinna. (PTI)

## 70th Bordoloi Trophy: Tinsukia Barekuri FC beat 19th APNB Dibrugarh in final

**SIVASAGAR, Feb 23:** In the tense summit clash of the Sivasagar Cluster of the on going 70th Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi Trophy Football Tournament, Tinsukia Barekuri FC defeated 19th APNB Dibrugarh by a solitary goal in the final played at Peoli Phukan Stadium on Sunday.

The all-important goal was scored by Mayukh Gogoi in the 30th minute through a beautiful solo dribbling down the right flank. The police team made an all out attempt for the equaliser which was not there due to solid defence of the Barekuri team. Both the teams squandered a dozen of opportunities to score in both halves. Ripunath Gogoi was the referee in the final match.

Shining Sangma of the APNB team was adjudged the Player of the Tournament.

The trophies were handed over by Naser Gul Khan, cricket secretary of Guwahati Sports Association, PK Das, GM, Drilling, ONGC, Punarnam Mili, president, Sivasagar Sports, and match referee Muktabud Hussain.

The runners up team got ₹ 75 thousand.

Earlier, Naser Gul Khan, general secretary, Guwahati Sports Association, Cricket Secretary, inaugurated the tournament and thanked Sivasagar Sports Association for holding the Cluster 1 matches smoothly.

Both the teams will participate in the final lap of the tournament in Guwahati from March.

## Sports Minister Mandaviya leads 'Fit India Sundays on Cycle' in Delhi during event's ninth week

**NEW DELHI, Feb 23:** Sports Minister Manuskh Mandaviya led the 'Fit India Sundays on Cycle' campaign here, with Olympic rower Arjun Lal Jat among a host of other participants. Drawing from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to fight obesity by reducing oil consumption by 10 per cent, exercising and eating right, Mandaviya dedicated the initiative to nation's fight against obesity.

Speaking at the event, the Sports Minister said, "In our fight against obesity, which the Honourable PM has initiated, we must come together to include daily fitness activities in our life. "Cycling is the easiest exercise and it has a very positive impact on the environment as well. It reduces carbon footprints and is a solution for pollution." The Fit India Sundays on Cycle invites a special set of people every week. The army personnel, postmen,

and wellness experts have been invited as guests in the past.

In this week's event, corporate India stepped forward to support the campaign and participate. Representatives of industry bodies FICCI and CII as well as members from fitness brand Decathlon, Yoga Bharat and My Bharat participated.

Olympian Arjun Lal Jat said, "As an athlete I am happy to see that so many people have stepped out on a Sunday

morning and have dedicated time to fitness. Staying fit is not an option, it is compulsory for everyone and the Fit India Sundays on Cycle initiative is a wonderful motivation for people to start their fitness journey." In Guwahati, doctors from the Indian Medical Association joined the Fit India Sundays on Cycle celebration at the SAI National Centre of Excellence. More than 300 members rode to spread the message of fitness. (PTI)

# Disappointing that India are not playing in Pakistan: PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi

**KARACHI, Feb 23:** PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi has reiterated his disappointment over India's decision to play their Champions Trophy matches at a neutral venue but remains confident that Pakistan's first ICC event in 29 years will leave a lasting legacy for the sport in the country.

While PCB has the hosting rights of the event, India are playing all their games in Dubai due to security concerns in Pakistan.

"We are focussed on delivering a world class event but it is undoubtedly disappointing that India is not playing in Pakistan," Naqvi told PTI before leaving for Dubai to watch the Pakistan and India match on Sunday.

"It is disappointing- not just for the PCB, but also for cricket fans worldwide, the ICC, its commercial partners and the other participating countries that India is not playing in Pakistan," he said.

Naqvi reminded that Pakistan has consistently upheld the principle of keeping sports and politics separate.

"Our team has toured India mul-



iple times, including in 2011, 2012, 2016 and most recently in 2023. Naturally, we had hoped that India would reciprocate by participating in the Champions Trophy in Pakistan. Unfortunately, that has not materialised," he said.

Having said that, the BCCI, PCB and ICC have agreed on a hybrid model for the marquee clash for all world events till 2027. Due to the tense relations between the two nations, India and Pakistan only play each other in ICC events

and Asia Cup.

Naqvi, who is also the federal interior minister, said that the PCB, along with the Pakistan government, had provided comprehensive assurances regarding security, hospitality and logistical arrangements for the Indian team.

"We engaged constructively with the ICC and conveyed our willingness to facilitate every possible measure to ensure a smooth and secure visit. Despite these efforts, India has chosen not to

travel." He said the absence of India from playing Pakistan is a loss for spectators, broadcasters, media and the tournament itself.

"I think it is also a missed opportunity for Indian players to experience the warmth, love and hospitality that Pakistan has always extended to visiting teams. Pakistani fans would show their hospitality to the Indian team."

"Nonetheless, we remain focused on delivering a world-class event, ensuring that cricket takes center stage."

He pointed out that the crowds for the Afghanistan and South Africa and England and Australia matches underscored the permanent passion Pakistani people had for cricket.

"We last hosted an ICC event in 1996. Since then, despite a decade-long absence of international cricket on our soil - through no fault of our own - we have continued to excel, winning the ICC T20 World Cup in 2009, the ICC Test Championship mace in 2016 and the ICC Champions Trophy in 2017."

He said given the long isolation Pakistan faced from top teams, staging the Champions Trophy in the country is a milestone moment.

"It is an opportunity to reaffirm Pakistan's status as one of the most passionate and influential cricketing nations, fully capable of staging multi-nation tournaments at the highest level.

"Beyond that, it is our chance to showcase world-class infrastructure, passionate crowds and a cricket culture that deserves more major ICC events in the next cycle."

He expressed confidence that the tournament will also serve as a catalyst for the growth and development of cricket in Pakistan. He said PCB invested heavily in upgrading its test venues to ensure a top-tier experience for players and fans alike.

"This investment will leave a lasting legacy for Pakistan cricket." He also made it clear that Pakistan has taken every measure to ensure best security for all teams playing in Pakistan. (PTI)

## Achievement



Hemari Kro, S/o Lt. Langming Kro mother of Lt. Kawe Hansepi serving at present as Head Assistant & Superintendent incharge Higher Education of the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle, Diphu has been awarded Honorary Doctorate (Honoris Causa) in the field of **EDUCATION & SOCIAL WELFARE**. This topic has been approved by the Advisory Selection Board of the Bharat Virtual Open Education University vide approval letter No. BVOEU/CONV/0037/2025 dated 12/01/2025 is affiliated and collaborated with Central Christian University, MALAWAI EAST AFRICA Head Office Patel Nagar Delhi-110008.

He has been completed B.A., B.Ed. from Assam University Silchar and Post Graduate from Gauhati University.