

6 WORLD

- Hamas releases 3 more Israeli hostages for dozens of Palestinian prisoners
- Trump says he's ending Biden's classified intelligence briefings in payback move

8 NATION

- INDIA bloc loses steam as BJP in driver's seat after Delhi poll results
- Party leadership will decide next CM of Delhi: Parvesh Verma

Kejriwal, Sisodia, Somnath Bharti bite the dust ● Cong draws blank ● Modi terms victory 'historic'

BJP's Capital gain shows the 'door to AAP-da'



NEW DELHI, Feb 8: The BJP on Saturday returned to power in Delhi after more than 26 years to sweep away the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party with a two-thirds majority on the back of a hyper-localised campaign and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'AAP-da' (disaster) blitzkrieg.

Adding to the ignominy of the AAP that was battling 10 years of anti-incumbency was the shocking defeat of former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal himself and other top leaders including his close aide and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, Somnath Bharti and Saurabh Bhardwaj. Chief Minister Atishi, an academic and unlikely politician, weathered the storm to retain Kalkaji seat.

The BJP won 48 of the 70 seats at stake and the AAP was way behind with 22, according to the Election Commission website. The elections were largely seen as a bipolar contest between the AAP, which made a determined bid for a fourth term, and the BJP. While the AAP had 62 members in the outgoing house, the saffron party had just eight legislators.

The Congress, which had ruled for 15 consecutive years under Sheila Dikshit

from 1998, came a cropper in the Assembly elections failing to get even a single seat for the third straight time. Its candidates suffered crushing defeats with a majority of them even losing their deposits.

With Delhi now in its kitty after a battle of prestige given its symbolic importance as the country's capital, the BJP has extended its footprint, the victories helping it put behind some of the reverses of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections where it bagged 240 seats, short of the 272 majority mark.

Hailing the BJP's victory as "historic", Prime Minister Modi said people of Delhi have shown the door to 'AAP-da' and now a 'double-engine' government will ensure development at a double speed.

Modi, whose popularity among voters has been reinforced after the Delhi win, said Delhiites are celebrating BJP's victory and respite from 'AAP-da', the Hindi term meaning disaster that he used throughout the campaign to criticise the AAP's 10-year rule.

"People of Delhi today have enthusiasm and satisfaction. There is relief of liberating Delhi from 'AAP-da'. I thank all Delhiites for entrusting their faith in 'Modi ki guarantee'," Modi said in his address from BJP

headquarters in the evening.

He launched a stinging attack on the AAP and the Congress, saying the country needs a serious political transformation and not politics of "dhoort-ta (deceit) and moorkhta (foolishness)".

He said people of Delhi have short-circuited the politics of short-cuts and asserted that the mandate has made it clear that there's no space for corruption and lies in politics.

Earlier in the day, Modi said that development and good governance have won. "Development, good governance have won; we will leave no stone unturned for Delhi's all-round development," Modi said on the splendid showing by the BJP that came just months after the saffron party's wins in Haryana as well as Maharashtra where it is part of the Mahayuti alliance.

Coming days after the Union budget which gave crucial tax concessions to the middle class, the BJP's winning Lok Sabha streak in Delhi continues after it won all seven seats last year. But the premise this time was different.

Ground level issues such as water, drainage and garbage went up against volatile campaigns (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP's win in Delhi due to leadership of PM: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 8: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said that the BJP's victory in the Delhi assembly polls was due to the successful leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the hard work of party workers.

The BJP has secured a majority in the Delhi Assembly elections, winning 38 out of the total 70 seats till 4.30 pm. The saffron party is also leading in 10 seats, while the ruling AAP has won a total of 17 seats and is leading in five more, according to the EC. "Modi's Delhi. This immense blessing of the people was received due to the successful leadership of the respected Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji and the hard work of our workers," Sarma posted on X.

"Now, with the guidance and direction of respected Modi ji, the double engine government will make the country's capital one of the best cities in the world," he added.

The BJP is set to return to power in Delhi after 28 years. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has ruled it for two terms since 2015 and the Congress before that since 1998. (PTI)

'Delhi poll result was referendum on Kejriwal, not Modi's policies'

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: After another rout in Delhi Assembly polls, the Congress on Saturday said it humbly accepts the decision of the people and asserted that the election result is not a vindication of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies but a referendum on Arvind Kejriwal and AAP.

The party said it fought against all odds in public interest and prepared the groundwork to oust the AAP government but did not get the expected mandate. It vowed to bounce back and form a government in the national capital in 2030.

The BJP returned to power in Delhi on Saturday after more than 26 years, sweeping away the AAP from the national capital in another big win to extend its saffron footprint in the country. The Congress has drawn a blank in the polls once again after 2015 and 2020.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the party will continue to raise the issues of pollution, Yamuna cleaning, electricity, roads, water and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta meets top industrialists in Mumbai ahead of Advantage Assam 2.0

GUWAHATI, Feb 8: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday met the leading industrialists in Mumbai and invited them to Advantage Assam 2.0.

"As a part of a series of initiatives of making the forthcoming Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit a success with meaningful presence of leading industrialists and investors from across the country and outside, Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma today met Chairman JSW Group Sajjan Jindal in Mumbai and invited him to the summit," said an official statement.

During the meeting with Jindal, Sarma spoke on issues especially on the scope and potential of partnering together, particularly in infrastructure and energy sectors. The chief minister apprised him of the Assam government intention to encourage increased investment in creating a host of opportunities.

"He also (Sarma) said that his government has already initiated steps to strengthen the ecosystem for major investment as well as startups, paving the way for a prosperous future," the statement added.

Sarma further informed that the JSW chairman that his government recently has approved the Assam Startup and Innovation Policy to provide various fiscal and non-fiscal incentives to encourage entrepreneurs as the government aims to support 5,000 startups and create one lakh job opportunities in the next five years.

Further drawing attention to Assam's green energy revolution, the chief minister stated that from Floating



Solar and Bio-CNG to Green Hydrogen and ATJ fuel, new investment opportunities are emerging very fast and thick in Assam. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Central govt doing everything to weaken Constitution, democracy in India: Priyanka

WAYANAD (KERALA), Feb 8: Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday claimed that the country was going through a period where the government at the Centre was doing everything "to weaken the Constitution and democracy in India".

Priyanka, the Wayanad MP, was speaking at a booth level leaders meeting at Mananthavady assembly constituency here where she said that till date victims of the landslides that hit the high range district are facing housing troubles and have not received adequate compensation.

The Congress leader said that the central government "at least" declared the Wayanad landslides as "a

HT BRIEFS

Novel unveiled

TEZPUR: A novel titled 'Barnamoi Gabharu' based on the life of Assam, particularly of the last three decades of the 20th Century, in the coastal region of the Gabharu river including Borati, Borkpukhuri No.2, Jahamari, Kawaimari, Balikhuti and Gerua region near Tezpur penned by Biren Chandra Nath was launched on Saturday at a function held at Baliram Lahkar conference hall of heritage Asomiya Club, Tezpur here. The book was launched by retired Superintendent of Jail Nripendra Kumar Borah during a meeting presided over by retired professor, noted orator and educationist Purneswar Nath. Author Nripendra Kumar Borah lauded the effort of the author. Distinguished author Dr Bhupen Saikia, taking part in the meeting as the guest of honour delivered an insightful speech shading light on the history of the novel and its impact on human mind and society.

NTPC inks deal for infrastructure development in Kokrajhar jail

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 8: NTPC Bongaigaon plant has joined hands with local authorities for developing infrastructure in Kokrajhar district jail, an official statement said on Saturday.

Under this initiative, NTPC Bongaigaon has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the District Administration, Kokrajhar, and PWD, Kokrajhar & Chirang District Territorial Division for the development of a kitchen and multi-purpose hall at Kokrajhar District Jail on Friday. The initiative is expected to enhance infrastructure within the jail premises, ensuring improved facilities for inmates and supporting their rehabilitation, the statement said.

Under this initiative, NTPC Bongaigaon has committed over ₹ 32.82 lakh for infrastructure development in the jail.

The project is expected to be completed within 16 months, with execution and monitoring by the Kokrajhar district administration and Public Works Department (PWD), Kokrajhar and Chirang District Territorial Division.

The MoA was signed by AGM (HR), NTPC, Onkar Nath, executive engineer, PWD-Kokrajhar and Chirang District Territorial Division, Ajit Kumar Narzary, and additional district commissioner, Kokrajhar, Kabita Deka.

The agreement was formally exchanged between Masanda M Perin, Kokrajhar district commissioner, and Arnab Mitra, business unit head, NTPC Bongaigaon.

United Naga Council

SENAPATI: The United Naga Council (UNC) has clarified on Saturday that it did not hold a meeting with the Manipur State unit of the Naga People's Front (NPF) on the "unfolding political situation" of Manipur as reported in Imphal based English newspaper in on Saturday's edition. "Apropos to the news item published in The Sangai Express dated February 8, 2025 circulating in the media outlets regarding the alleged meeting with NPF, Manipur state unit, on the simmering political crisis in the state is unfounded and uncalled for," the UNC said in a statement. The UNC put on the record straight that there was no such meeting as reported with NPF legislators on the same matter "as UNC has nothing to do with the ongoing leadership crisis in the state".

Sri Lankan filmmaker criticises Trump's border policies

GUWAHATI, Feb 8: Sri Lankan filmmaker Prasanna Vithanage on Saturday criticised US President Donald Trump for his border policies and the growing trend of global isolationism.

There is a need for artistic and cultural connections in an increasingly divided world, Vithanage said during an interaction at the first edition of the Guwahati Asian Film Festival.

"The tagline of the Guwahati Asian Film Festival is Cinema Beyond Borders. It means a lot to all of us. At a time when US President Donald Trump is building borders, it is our duty to connect people through cinema," he said.

Vithanage pointed out that cinema has the

power to bridge differences and bring people together, countering political efforts to build barriers.

Known for directing movies like 'Flowers of the Sky' and 'With you, without you', he also emphasised the power of film as a unifying force and highlighted the importance of fostering artistic connections across borders.

Vithanage, on his fourth visit to the state, said he feels a sense of "duty towards Assam", having been honoured with the prestigious Biswaratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika International Solidarity Award in 2017 by the Assam Sahitya Sabha.

"I am proud to have received an award in the

name of Bhupen Hazarika. It makes me feel that I have a special responsibility towards Assam," he said.

Vithanage spoke highly of Assam's cinematic talent, sharing his encounters with prominent Assamese filmmakers across the globe.

"I have met Assamese filmmakers everywhere - Rima Das in Busan, Shiladitya Bora - and I continue to be inspired by the works of legends like Jahnur Barua", he added.

The three-day Guwahati Asian Film Festival, with its commitment to fostering artistic dialogue and global storytelling, will screen 25 films from various Asian countries. (PTI)

FIR lodged against Rahul Gandhi in Odisha for making 'anti-national' statement

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 8: An FIR has been registered against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Odisha's Jharsuguda district for allegedly making an "anti-national" statement, a senior police officer said on Saturday.

The FIR was registered on Friday based on a complaint lodged by members of BJP, its youth wing, RSS, Bajrang Dal, of Jharsuguda district against Gandhi to IGP Northern Range, Himanshu Lal on February 5, the officer said.

An FIR has been registered against Gandhi, the leader of opposition in Lok Sabha, at Jharsuguda police station (case No 31) under section 152 (criminalizes acts that threaten India's sovereignty, unity, and integrity), 197(1) (d) (for making or publishing false or misleading information that threatens India's unity, sovereignty, integrity, or security) of BNS, the officer said.

The complaint alleged that Gandhi has been deliberately making anti-national statements which hurt each and every Indian individ-



ual. The IGP forwarded the complaint to Jharsuguda SP Parmar Smit Parshottamas for inquiry and necessary legal action.

As per the direction of the SP, an FIR has been registered against Gandhi at Jharsuguda police station (case No 31).

"I do not know the nature of the allegation against Rahul Gandhi, let me see it first. The Congress as a political party has been fighting against the ideology of BJP and RSS," former Union Minister and senior Congress leader Srikant Jena told PTI. (PTI)

'Understanding these disparities is crucial for countries and global progresses'

Environment, carbon emission neglected on route to sustainable development: Study

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: Environment, carbon emission, biodiversity and malnutrition are among the issues that remain neglected by certain groups of countries, according to a recent study that analysed the trajectories of 166 nations towards attaining sustainable development.

In 2015, member states of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Aimed at achieving human progress, economic prosperity, and planetary health, the framework outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), including no poverty, zero hunger, quality education and gender equality.

Questions, however, remain as to how different nations navigate their own paths toward these goals, said an international team of researchers from different countries, including Australia, China and Israel.

Their study, published in the journal Nature Communications, found a "polarised global landscape" with systematically neglected SDG tar-



gets, potentially leaving behind millions of people.

"Our results reveal a polarised global landscape within the SDG space, with countries clustering into distinct groups, each specialising in different development targets," the authors wrote. Asaf Tzachor, a lead author from Reichman University's School of Sustainability, Israel, said, "We found shifting national priorities over the past 20 years, as well as areas of chronic neglect, where action is urgently needed. Using network analysis, we further identified each country's comparative advantages and disadvantages across the main pillars of sustainable development."

Using official and unofficial data

collected between 2000 and 2022, the team calculated an SDG score for each country for 2000, 2015 and 2022. Countries with high SDG scores were found to specialise in reducing poverty and improving access to clean energy, air and water, along with good health, innovation and governance.

On the other hand, countries with low SDG scores were noted to have relative advantages in the aspects of "overnutrition, embodied social and environmental impacts in international trade, and resource use, waste and emissions".

However, the team found a set of "orphaned" SDG indicators that remain neglected by certain groups of countries -- or "areas where certain country groups remain under-specialised".

These gaps, primarily related to environmental quality, carbon emissions, biodiversity loss, or the impacts of malnutrition, represent urgent areas where targeted action is needed, the authors said.

For instance, nations like Ethiopia and India need to focus on basic sanitation and biodiversity respectively while countries like China and the US face challenges related to greenhouse gas emissions and overnutrition, they explained.

The study provides a detailed understanding of what holds countries back and where they might redouble their efforts to achieve balanced and inclusive progress, the team said.

"Understanding these disparities is crucial for (a) country's and global progress. By identifying where countries are underperforming, we can tailor development policies to address these gaps effectively," Tzachor said.

With the 2030 deadline approaching, the team also stressed on a comprehensive review of the SDG framework, calling for international cooperation in ensuring that no region or community is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development. (PTI)

No level for rupee in mind, market forces decides forex rate: RBI Gov

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Saturday said that the market forces decide the value of rupee with respect to the US dollar and the central bank is not worried about day-to-day movement of the currency value.

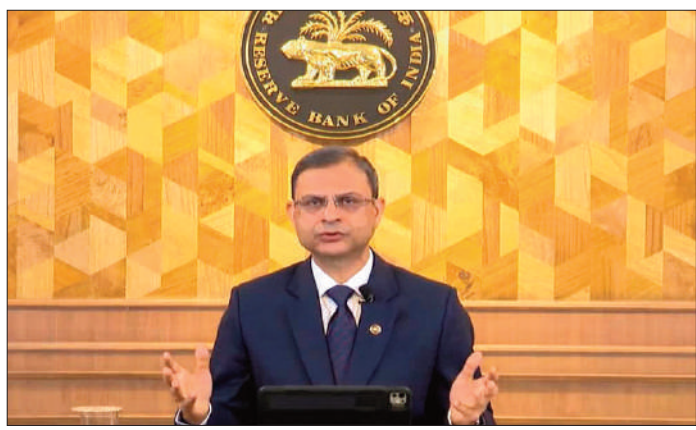
Addressing the media after the meeting of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with the Reserve Bank board, Malhotra said that the central bank focuses on the value of the rupee in the medium to long term.

"There is no change in RBI's approach. It does not look at any price level or band. It is our endeavour to curb excessive volatility. We should not be looking at daily movement or exchange rate," he said in reply to a query on the rupee depreciation.

On the impact of the depreciation of the rupee against the US dollar on price rise, he said 5 per cent depreciation impacts domestic inflation to the extent of 30-35 bps.

He further said that RBI took on board the current rupee-dollar rate while working out the growth and inflation projections for the next financial year.

The rupee recovered 9 paise from its all-time low level to close at 87.50 against the US dollar on Friday after the Reserve Bank of India reduced the key policy rate by 25 basis points in line with street expectations.



The Governor also said most of the depreciation in the Indian currency is driven by the uncertainties which have come up because the global issues and especially, the tariff-related announcements by US President Donald Trump.

"...hopefully that should settle down and that should help us in the downward movement of inflation," he said.

Malhotra also sought to assure that the RBI will be "nimble and agile" to provide adequate liquidity in the banking system.

"We have a number of instruments at our hands to control and manage liquidity and we will use them. We have OMO, we have buy-sell swaps of forex, we have various other tools, we have the LAF, we have the VRR and we are using all of these measures to pro-

vide sufficient liquid. We need not be worried on that account," the Governor said.

On a question related to cryptocurrencies, the Governor said a working group has been set up by the government to look into issues related to crypto assets and a discussion paper on crypto will also be issued.

Meanwhile, an RBI statement said that the Central Board of Directors reviewed the global and domestic economic situation and outlook, including the challenges posed by geopolitical developments and global financial market volatility.

The Board, at its 613th meeting, also passed a condolence resolution in memory of Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister, former Union Finance Minister and

former Governor of the Bank. In her address, Sitharaman outlined the vision of the Union Budget 2025-26, its key focus areas and the expectations from the financial sector.

The Finance Minister also underscored Budget's commitment to prudent fiscal management and policies designed to foster growth, with the overarching goal of achieving 'Viksit Bharat'. The Directors commended the Finance Minister on the Budget and shared their insights.

She was accompanied by Pankaj Chaudhary, Minister of State for Finance; Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Finance Secretary and Secretary, Department of Revenue; Manoj Govil, Secretary, Department of Expenditure; Arunish Chawla, Secretary, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management; and V Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Advisor.

Directors of the Central Board Satish K Marathe, S Gurumurthy, Revathy Iyer, Sachin Chaturvedi, Venu Srinivasan, Pankaj Ramnabhai Patel and Ravindra H Dholakia attended the meeting.

Deputy Governors M Rajeshwar Rao, T Rabi Sankar, and Swaminathan J also attended the meeting. Ajay Seth, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, and Nagaraju Maddirala, Secretary, Department of Financial Services, were also present in the meeting. (PTI)

Tata Motors launches vehicle scrapping facility in Guwahati

MUMBAI, Feb 8: Tata Motors on Saturday announced the launch of its registered vehicle scrapping facility (RVSF) in Guwahati with a capacity to dismantle up to 15,000 end-of-life vehicles annually.

Operated by Tata Motors' partner Axom Platinum Scrappers, the facility is equipped to scrap both passenger and commercial vehicles of all brands.

With this, the home-grown auto major now has seven such facilities, including in Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Surat, Chandigarh, the Delhi-NCR, and Pune, the company said.

"Today, with the launch of the Northeast's first Re.Wi.Re facility in Guwahati, Tata Motors takes a significant step in advancing responsible vehicle scrapping in the region. Committed to the principles of a circular economy, we are driving practices that support sustainability," Tata Motors Executive Director Girish Wagh said at the inauguration ceremony.

The event was also attended by Jogen Mohan and Ashok Singhal -- ministers in the Assam government -- as well as Sanjive Narain, Director, Axom Automobiles.

With a network of RVSFs across seven states, Tata Motors can now dismantle over 100,000 end-of-life vehicles annually, Wagh added.

"The launch of this advanced vehicle recycling facility will create valuable employment opportunities and support economic growth of our state and communities. In addition, it will also ensure safe disposal of end-of-life vehicles, reduce carbon emissions, and contribute to a cleaner environment," said Mohan.

Equipped with cell-type and line-type dismantling for both commercial and passenger vehicles, there are dedicated stations for the safe dismantling of various components, including tyres, batteries, fuel, oils, liquids, and gases, Tata Motors said.

"The inauguration of Tata Motors' Re.Wi.Re facility in Guwahati is a key step toward a cleaner, greener Assam. This modern facility will foster a sustainable vehicle disposal ecosystem while benefiting both the environment and people of Assam," said Singhal. (PTI)

Hope to introduce new income tax bill in Lok Sabha next week: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said she is likely to introduce the new income tax bill, which will replace the six-decade-old I-T Act, in the Lok Sabha in the coming week.

After introduction in the Upper House, the bill will be sent to a parliamentary standing committee for scrutiny.

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the bill on Friday. "Yesterday, the Cabinet cleared the New Income Tax proposal. I hope to have it introduced in the Lok Sabha in the coming week. Post that it will go to a committee," Sitharaman said at a media briefing after addressing the post-Budget customary meeting with the central board of directors of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The bill will again go to the Cabinet after the parliamentary committee gives its recommendations on it. After Cabinet approval, it will again be introduced in Parliament.

"I still have three critical stages to pass through," Sitharaman said to the query regarding rollout of the new income tax law.

Sitharaman had first announced a comprehensive review of the Income-Tax Act, 1961 in the July 2024 Budget.

The CBDT had set up an internal committee to oversee the review and make the Act concise, clear, and easy to understand, which will reduce



disputes, litigations, and provide greater tax certainty to taxpayers.

Also, 22 specialised subcommittees have been established to review the various aspects of the Income Tax Act.

To another question, the Finance Minister said the last week's Budget announcement on customs duty rationalisation is a work that has been on since the last two years.

"So we had rationalised some even two years ago. We also set certain norms saying evergreening is not going to happen on anti-dumping duties, which had played a big role in giving some kind of a protection for India's own manufacturing capabilities," she said.

Sitharaman further said with every such expiry date getting closer, the government will review it thoroughly, and only in exceptional cases duties will be extended, but most often they should be concluded so that the protection

does not become a perpetual protection.

"So, this is an ongoing process. We want to make India a lot more investor-friendly, trade friendly, and at the same time, balance it with Aatmanirbhar Bharat where we need to have production, particularly through the MSMEs. We will provide the tariff protection as required by the industry," the Finance Minister, who presented her eighth straight Budget on February 1, said. In her Budget speech, Sitharaman had announced rationalisation of customs tariff structure for industrial goods.

As part of comprehensive review of customs rate structure announced in July 2024 Budget, on February 1, 2025 she proposed to remove seven tariff rates. This was over and above the seven tariff rates removed in the 2023-24 Budget.

There will be now only eight remaining tariff rates, including 'zero' rate. (PTI)

Pharma exports to touch \$65 bn mark by 2030, \$350 bn by 2047: Report

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: India's pharma exports are expected to double to \$65 billion by 2030 and touch \$350 billion in value terms by 2047, moving to top five position globally by diversifying its product basket, according to a report.

While India is the largest supplier of generic drugs globally, accounting for one in five generic drugs sold worldwide, the nation ranks 11th in terms of export value. As per the Bain & Company's report, 'Healing the World: Roadmap for Making India a Global Pharma Exports Hub', India can potentially secure a position among the top five nations in export value by 2047 by innovating and diversifying its export basket to include specialty generics, biosimilars, and innovative products.

The findings in the report were formulated in collaboration with Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA), Indian Drugs Manufacturers' Association (IDMA), and Pharmexcil.

"The transition from volume-based to value-led growth is essential for Indian pharma to secure its rightful place in the global market. Innovation, including the shift towards specialty generics, biosimilars, and novel products, will be the key to India's pharmaceutical future," Sriram Shrinivasan, Partner, Bain & Company, said.

With the right focus on quality, regulation, access to global markets, talent, and entrepreneurial innovation, India can rise to be among the top-five pharma exporters globally by 2047, he added.

Indian Drug Manufacturers' Association (IDMA) National President Viranchi Shah highlighted that India can become one of the leaders in pharma exports, but needs strategic interventions.

Bulk drug parks are key to API export growth -- India must scale efforts to revive and strengthen its API industry while improving energy supply, waste treatment, and road connectivity, he added. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

BJP's Capital gain shows the

by both parties with voters grimly evaluating their quality of life in a polluted city. The BJP also pushed ahead and made 'sheesh mahal' an oft recalled buzzword for the lavish chief minister's residence following the renovations by Kejriwal and allegations of corruption in the Delhi excise policy. It clearly hit home. While Modi and other party leaders repeated the need for a 'double engine' government, freebies offered by the AAP were countered by "Modi's guarantee," which appeared to find favour with voters.

The people of Delhi have dismantled the 'sheesh mahal' of lies, deceit and corruption and made the city "AAP-da free", said Union home minister Amit Shah.

The AAP, which saw its leaders Kejriwal and Sisodia jailed in the excise policy case, countered the BJP campaign with vigour to say Yamuna waters were poisoned and that it was just not being allowed to govern because every move was being stymied by the lieutenant governor. It didn't find the resonance it had hoped for.

"We fought a good election... We will play role of constructive opposition but will also be available to people of Delhi," Kejriwal said as he conceded defeat in an election he had hoped would propel him as a national leader. For the AAP national convenor, the face of the party launched on an anti-corruption plank in 2012, it was a tantalising seesaw ending in despair. He lost by 4,089 votes to BJP's Parvash Sahib Singh Verma, son of former Delhi chief minister Sahib Singh Verma.

"Who will be chief minister will be decided by the central leadership," said Verma, dubbed giant killer for defeating Kejriwal in New Delhi constituency. The BJP had not projected a CM face in the poll campaign.

As one more line was added to the Congress' epitaph, the AAP struggled with its own existential crisis. A loss in Delhi, which it ruled for 10 successive years from 2015, signals an end to its national ambitions with now only Punjab in its pocket. Chief Minister Atishi, who took over after Kejriwal stepped down last year when he was jailed, won by 3,521 votes against BJP's Ramesh Bidhuri.

"I have won my seat but this is not a time for celebration -- this is the time to fight. The battle against BJP's authoritarianism will continue," she said. It was a dramatic downside for the AAP, which won 67 of the 70 seats in 2015 when it established its dominance by wiping out both the Congress and the BJP and 62 in 2020. The promise of mohalla clinics, model schools, free water and electricity seemed to have lost their sheen.

At BJP offices, there were drumbeats of victory and euphoria, party workers waving flags, holding lotus cutouts, dancing and smearing colours of celebration on each other. And Modi was the mantra.

The Congress headquarters wore a desolate look and workers at the AAP office shell-shocked, their leaders huddled in conference as they pondered the future. The BJP ruled Delhi between 1993 and 1998 when the party had three chief ministers--Madan Lal Khurana, Sahib Singh Verma and Sushma Swaraj.

The BJP's vote share has steadily grown from over 32 per cent in 2015 to 38.5 per cent in 2020 against the AAP's over 54 per cent and 53.5 per cent respectively. This time the BJP's share jumped to 45.56 per cent, while the AAP's fell to 43.57 per cent. And as political analysts debated the future of the opposition INDIA bloc and the benefits of joining hands to combat a resurgent BJP, National Conference leader Omar Abdullah, an ally of the alliance, said in a caustic post on X, "Aur lado apas mein!! (Keep on fighting each other)."

In the run up to the Delhi elections, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) went all out to persuade voters elect an "effective and accountable" government for the progress of the national capital, contributing to the BJP's thumping victory. RSS volunteers carried out a silent voter awareness campaign and held "thousands of drawing room meetings" across Delhi to discuss "pressing" public issues like lack of required cleanliness, potable water supply, inadequate healthcare services, air pollution and cleaning of Yamuna river, according to sources. Union ministers, chief ministers of BJP-ruled states, and NDA partners showered praise on Modi's leadership and home minister Shah's strategies for BJP's victory. "BJP's landslide victory in Delhi is a victory of faith in the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the policies of the BJP," defence minister Rajnath Singh said. The AAP came to power in Delhi for the first time in 2013 on the back of the promise to sweep away corruption. But its minority government propped up by Congress lasted only 49 days after Kejriwal resigned following which Delhi came under a spell of President's rule. (PTI)

Himanta meets top industrialists

"Moreover, backed by investors' friendly policies Assam is ready for a sustainable future," Sarma added. The Chief Minister during his visit also held a meeting with the chairman, Welspun World BK Goenka where they held talks on sectors like textile, energy, water treatment and infrastructure.

Sarma also invited him to Advantage Assam 2.0 Summit and assured him that the state government is keen to forge enabling landscape for Welspun World Group to reap business dividends from its investment in Assam.

"Advantage Assam 2.0 will be the right platform to turn its business proposals into action," the chief minister said. He also met vice chairman Essar Group Ravi Ruia and discussed prospective collaboration with the group in manufacturing electric trucks in Assam and projects in the renewable energy sector.

He also invited the Essar Group vice chairman to Advantage Assam 2.0.

Central govt doing everything

the work they need to do and also find new types of solutions for the problem," she said. The Wayanad MP said that she will also continue to address the other issues, like the needs of the tribals, lack of medical college in Mananthavady, night travel restrictions and boosting tourism in the district.

She also praised and thanked the booth-level leaders and workers for helping her win in the LS bypoll and urged them to be available for the people everyday and not just during elections.

Later, she held booth-level meetings at Sulthan Bathery and Kalpetta assembly constituencies.

In the evening, she attended the festival at the Lourde Matha Church at Pallikkunnu in Kalpetta, party sources said. She lit a candle and prayed before leaving the church.

Priyanka had visited the church during her Lok Sabha bypoll campaign and at that time the church vicar had invited her to the festival, the sources said. Priyanka arrived at Kannur airport in the morning and travelled to Wayanad by road. On Sunday, she will hold meetings with booth-level leaders in Ernad and Thiruvambadi assembly constituencies. On Monday, she will hold meetings with booth-level leaders at Wandoor and Nilambur assembly constituencies and will also visit families of a few victims of wild animal attacks, the sources said.

This is her second visit to Wayanad after she won the Lok Sabha bypoll from there.

Earlier, on January 28, Priyanka visited the high range district to meet the family of a woman who was killed by a tiger on January 24 when she was out collecting coffee beans at the Priyadarshini Estate in Mananthavady village in Wayanad. She also visited the family of N M Vijayan, former district office-bearer of the party, who, along with his son, died by suicide in December last year. (PTI)

'Delhi poll result was referendum

development in Delhi and will remain connected with the public. "In the Delhi Assembly elections, the Congress party created an atmosphere against the government in public interest, but the people did not give us the mandate we expected. We accept the decision of the people," Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

"Every Congress leader and worker worked unitedly under adverse circumstances, but more hard work and struggle is still required," he said. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said he humbly accepts the mandate of Delhi as he thanked party workers and voters.

In a post on X, he said the fight for the progress of Delhi and against pollution, price rise and corruption will continue. "We humbly accept the mandate of Delhi. Heartfelt thanks to all the Congress workers of the state for their dedication and all the voters for their support," he said in his post in Hindi.

"This fight for the progress of Delhi and the rights of Delhiites, against pollution, price rise and corruption will continue," Gandhi said. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jai Ram Ramesh said the assembly election results reflected nothing more than a referendum on Kejriwal and AAP.

"After all, at the height of the prime minister's popularity in 2015 and 2020, AAP had won decisively in Delhi. This shows rather than being a vindication of the policies of the prime minister, this vote is a rejection of Arvind Kejriwal's politics of deceit, deception, and vastly exaggerated claims of achievement," he said in a post on X.

The Congress took the lead in highlighting the various scams that occurred under Kejriwal and the voters pronounced their judgement on his 12 years of "misrule", he said.

"The Congress was expecting to do better. It has, however, increased its vote share. The campaign of the Congress was vigorous. It may not be in the assembly but it is definitely a presence in Delhi, a presence that will be expanded electorally with the sustained efforts of lakhs of Congress workers," Ramesh said.

"There will be a Congress government once again in Delhi in 2030," he asserted. On the criticism over not joining hands with AAP in the assembly election, Congress media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said the "meltdown" of a section is completely bizarre and asserted that the Congress is the "real champion of liberal values". "They didn't give these lectures on opposition unity to AAP when the party went to Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, etc to fight elections and weaken anti-communal, secular vote. Delhi election result is a rejection of the Trojan horse that attempted to damage the liberal cause across the country," he said.

"Majority of liberals are rightly cheering the fall of the facade so that the real champion of liberal values - the Indian National Congress - can emerge stronger to take the BJP on and defeat it," Khera said on X.

The Congress faced a third consecutive session of electoral drought in Delhi, failing to open its account in the 70-member Assembly and suffering crushing defeats in key constituencies.

The party has not won any seat in the three consecutive assembly elections and as many Lok Sabha polls. (PTI)

Indplas'25: International plastics exhibition to be held in Kolkata

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 8: The 10th edition of the International Plastics Exhibition, Indplas'25, is set to take place in Kolkata from Feb 28 to March 3, 2025, said an official statement on Saturday.

Organised by the Indian Plastics Federation (IPF), the exhibition is expected to be the largest sector-specific B2B event for the plastics industry in Eastern India. Ashok Jajodia, chairman of Indplas'25, highlighted that this year's theme, "The Future is East", reflects the immense potential for growth in the plastics sector in Eastern and North Eastern India.

Speaking about the significance of the exhibition, Jajodia further stated that Indplas'25 will serve as a platform for business collaboration and investment in the region.

"This exhibition is a celebration of innovation and sustainability. We are bringing together some of the best minds in the industry to shape the future of plastics manufacturing. We encourage entrepreneurs from Assam and beyond to take advantage of this platform to engage with industry leaders, witness live demonstrations of machines, and attend specialized seminars and workshops," he added.

Lalit Agrawal, president of the Indian Plastics Federation, reiterated the Federation's commitment to advancing the plastics industry.

"Indplas'25 provides an excellent opportunity for manufacturers and suppliers to network, explore new technologies, and drive business growth. The event will play a crucial role in the overall development of the plastics industry in Eastern India." As per the statement, the exhibition aims to bring together stakeholders from



across the industry, including manufacturers, suppliers, and innovators, to explore new opportunities and advancements in plastics manufacturing, processing, and recycling technologies. The enthusiasm among exhibitors has been overwhelming, with all available space being booked within just 45 days of online registration opening. There has been a strong response from both Indian and international manufacturers of machinery, raw materials, ancillary services, additives, and masterbatches.

"Exhibitors from more than ten countries, including Taiwan, China, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Germany, and the USA, have already confirmed their participation, making Indplas'25 a truly global event," the statement said.

The exhibition comes at a crucial time when the plastics sector in Eastern and North Eastern India is poised for rapid growth, driven by low per capita consumption and the easy availability of raw materials. Major petrochemical producers such as Brahmaputra Gas & Cracker Ltd in Assam, Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd in West Bengal, and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd in Odisha are expected to play a key role in supplying raw materials to the industry. Indplas'25 will showcase the latest innovations and technologies in the plastics sector, with a particular focus on sustainability, business expansion, and investment opportunities. Over 400 exhibitors will be participating, and more than 1.5 lakh visitors are expected to attend during the four-day event.

Borgoyary accorded warm welcome by CEM Boro Former BTC deputy chief joins UPPL

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 8: Former deputy chief of BTC and BPF vice president, Kampa Borgoyary formally joined the UPPL party along with more than 400 of his supporters and well wishers at a programme held at Thaikhajhora playground in Chirang district on Saturday.

Senior BPF leader, Borgoyary, several BPF leaders including organising secretary Afjal Khan, ex BPF secretary Pranjit Basumatary accompanied Borgoyary in the grand joining ceremony in the presence of UPPL president and chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, senior UPPL party leaders.

CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro, accorded warm welcome and felicitated Borgoyary with traditional Aronai and bouquet amidst the presence of a well attended gathering.

The joining programme was organised by the Chirang district committee of UPPL party, and graced by the founding president



of UPPL, and cabinet minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma, MPs Rwingwra Narzary, Joyanta Basumatary, deputy CEM of BTR, Gabinda Chandra Basumatary, party general secretaries Raju Kumar Narzary, Madhab Chandra Chetry, and several dignitaries.

UPPL party leaders felt that the party has gained popularity amongst the citizens across the Bodoland region.

CEM Pramod Boro said that the UPPL has been gaining mass popularity as the party has been ren-

dering relentless services towards the welfare and development of the society.

He said that the UPPL party's strength continued to soar, while BPF's support faded as BPF party had failed to address the problem and issues of the peoples during its 17 year rule in Bodoland Territorial Council.

Boro said that the UPPL party was committed to work for all round development of the citizens, and subsequently extended humanitarian services across the region since

its inception in the region.

He stated that people in the Bodoland region has witnessed peace and tranquility, and subsequently sustainable development activities have been gaining momentum up in all sectors while building up of quality educational environment.

"I'm much delighted to welcome senior most BPF leader Shri Kampa Borgoyary into the United People's Party Liberal at the grand joining ceremony in Chirang today. With him, thousands of block, primary & booth level BPF supporters have placed their trust in UPPL's vision, and have joined hands with us to help build a better BTR. I welcome them all in our collective journey of peace & progress", Boro said.

He also said that many people cutting across the communities were expressing consent to join the UPPL party in days to come.

Borgoyary, after joining the UPPL party, stated that he and his supporters and well-wishers have formally joined the UPPL party on their own willingness.

National Kritagyata Evam Jagrookta held at Nagaon Dakshinpat

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 8: A programme related to the 'National Kritagyata Evam Jagrookta Yojana' was organised at Dakshinpat Higher Secondary School on Friday.

The programme was organised by the District Sainik Welfare Office, Nagaon, in collaboration with the Directorate of Soldier Welfare, Guwahati.

During the event, District Sainik Welfare Officer Bijen Kumar Sinha and professor Bhupal Kalita from Nowong College provided a detailed explanation of all the topics covered under the 'National Kritagyata Evam Jagrookta Yojana' to the students of the school. The head mistress of Dakshinpat Higher Secondary School, Anita Lakhar along with the school's teachers, officials and staff from the District Sainik Welfare Office and a large number of students were present.

KAAC CEM public interaction continues



HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Feb 8: KAAC CEM Tuliram Ronghang held a public interaction programme at Semson Sing Ingri High School playground at Dhoulukja in Howraghat. The interactive session was part of multiple such programmes to know about public grievances.

Addressing the meeting with the theme "CHINGRUM NANG, CHETHAN NANG, CHINGTHUR NANG" or "Let's unite, let's interact, let's develop," the chief executive member (CEM) of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang said that he was here to know the problems and grievances of the people of Howraghat Member of Autonomous Council (MAC).

CEM Ronghang said, "This for the first time in history that KAAC is holding an official meeting here. This is not a public meeting but the whole of KAAC is here to look into your problems and grievances. The principal secretary, secretary and officers of KAAC are present here. All your memorandums and your views will be acted upon after the interaction programme is over. Issues on sub-division, roads and others will be discussed at KAAC meeting."

He further said, "In Howraghat constituency, all communities are living in harmony. Karbi, Bodo, Assamese, Adivasi, Gurkha and

others, I thank you for maintaining harmony. There is no tension, no clashes, people of all religion are here."

The CEM also enumerated the welfare schemes of the BJP government like distribution of ration cards, free medical expenses up to ₹ 5 lakh and PMAY houses. He also mentioned that due to the good work, the BJP has come back to power in Delhi after 27 years.

Criticising the opposition he said that chaos prevailed during their rule and that during the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) regime, violence and killings engulfed the region and during the Congress people were affected by communal clashes and insurgencies. He stated that BJP has brought peace in the region.

CEM said, "There should be good road communication, there should be harmony and poverty should be eliminated where no one goes hungry. The KAAC does not only consist of the MP, MLAs and MACs but it's the people. KAAC is working very hard for which it needs the people's blessing."

Local MLA, Darsing Ronghang; MLA Bidyasing Englung; KAAC chairman, Raju Tisso and BJP, East Karbi Anglong district committee, president, Roland Killing were also present in the public interaction programme.

Sibsagar Girls' College platinum jubilee begins today

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 8: The three-day closing ceremony of the Sibsagar Girls' College Platinum Jubilee will begin on Sunday. Addressing the media on Wednesday in this connection, Protim Sharma, principal of the College said that the three-day programme will begin after formal hoisting of the flags by him and the president of the college governing body Dr Jyesh Borah in the morning. It will be followed by smriti tarpan and the alumni meet which will be inaugurated by Dr Asna Chetia.

Prasanta Rajguru, the editor-in-chief, of the Prag News, will deliver the Biren Borkotoky Memorial Lecture on "Contemporary Assam, Asomiya and Our Future" on day two.

The "Ananya Bota", an award for a distinguished woman entrepreneur, will be presented to Anjali Mohan Chetia. The evening cultural programme will be inaugurated by Samiran Phukan, general secretary, AASU.

The open session on Feb 11 will be inaugurated by minister Jogen Mohan. The souvenir will be released by Asom Sahitya Sabha president Basanta Goswami and education minister Ranaj Pegu will grace the occasion as the chief guest. Pabitra Margherita, the Union minister of state, and Jiten Hazarika, the vice chancellor of the Dibrugarh University will attend the function as special guests. Noted singer Tarali Sharma will be the main attraction of the musical night in the evening.

Silk processing unit and mini library inaugurated

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 8: Kache Rongpippi, Executive Member (EM) for the Sericulture department of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), inaugurated the Silk Processing Unit and mini library at the assistant director of sericulture office in Diphu on Saturday.

EM Rongpippi expressed her happiness while inaugurating the silk processing unit, stating that local people would benefit from the yarn-spinning machine introduced by the department.

"Since time immemorial, we have been closely associated with silk rearing, which we did for consumption and yarn production," Rongpippi emphasised that sericulture was a rural economy that can uplift society, but it should be commercialized to develop the rural economy.

Meanwhile, Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) of KAAC, Avijit Kro stated that the sericulture department has always supported the people and will provide training on modern silkworm rearing.

Kro highlighted the benefits of using machines for yarn production, which can produce more yarn than manual method, especially when yarn prices are high.

He encouraged unemployed youth to adopt modern silkworm rearing practices.

Opening the new silk processing unit in the district is a significant task, Kro said. "In villages, women make yarn, but much of it goes to waste. With modern machinery, silkworm rearing can be developed."

Longki Timung, Assistant Director of Sericulture, expressed his gratitude to former EM in-charge Sericulture, Lunsing Teron, for initiating the silk processing unit. Timung informed that the department is now ready to buy eri cocoons from farmers, regardless of grade, at prices ranging from ₹ 600 to ₹ 1000 per kg.

The inauguration program was attended by officials from the Sericulture department.

NNPGs consecrate its new working committee convener, working conveners

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 8: The working committee (WC) of Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs), based at Camp Khehoi, consecrated its new convener MB Neokpao Konyak, who is also the president of GPRN/NSCN (U), and two working conveners P Tikhak Naga and Isak Sumi at a solemn installation ceremony at Hotel Saramati here on Saturday in presence of the leaders and members of various Naga political groups, civil society and student community representatives.

Addressing the ceremony, Konyak, who has been involved in the Naga political struggle for more than 51 years, expressed concern over emergence of many Naga factions, which, he said, is a matter of shame for the Nagas and happiness for the Government of India.

Expressing happiness on being entrusted with the responsibility of the convener of the working committee, he vowed to move forward unitedly. Konyak appealed to the civil society organisations, student bodies and Naga public to help and pray for the NNPGs to move ahead together.

In his address, Naga asserted that they would be able to overcome their shortcomings and succeed in their objectives, apparently referring to the two divisions among the NNPGs. He stressed that it is important to retrospect where "we have gone wrong so that corrective measures can be taken". Echoing Konyak, Naga said the Nagas are at a crossroads today, he said, "We have to work hard and believe in ourselves to come together to resolve the matter once and for all."

Addressing the gathering, Sumi said though it has been more than seven decades since the Naga movement, many are working without any clarity. He said, "Let us not spread lies and deception."

Sumi added that it is important to realise how much one can sacrifice and give instead of only thinking for "ourselves".

In his words of gratitude, NSCN/GPRN (R) president Wangtin Naga said as one of the leaders of the NNPGs, he underlined the importance of understanding the "Agreed Position" signed between the WC of NNPGs and the government of India and standing together even as he expressed dismay that the NNPGs split into two.

Advantage Assam 2.0 workshop held

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 8: A workshop related to Advantage Assam 2.0 was held at the Bodoland Administrative Staff College, Chandamari in Kokrajhar on Saturday.

The event focused on boosting investment and entrepreneurship across the five districts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)—Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur and Udalguri.

Assam cabinet minister and Kokrajhar Guardian minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma graced the event and emphasised the immense investment potential in BTR. Addressing the gathering, Brahma described Advantage Assam 2.0 as a golden opportunity for entrepreneurs to register and take advantage of government schemes supporting both new and expanding businesses.

Minister Brahma urged entre-



preneurs to actively participate in the upcoming Advantage Assam 2.0 event, scheduled for February 25 and 26, to explore new avenues for industrial growth. He highlighted that such initiatives will further strengthen Assam's position as India's Emerging Growth Engine.

Expressing gratitude to chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for

his leadership in driving transformative industrial growth in Assam, Brahma reiterated the government's commitment to foster an investor-friendly environment in BTR and the state as a whole.

District commissioner, Kokrajhar Masanda Magdalin Pertin, senior government officials were also present on the occasion.

Achievement



Mumpi Das has been awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by KKHSOU for her thesis entitled "Sustainable Livelihood Generation of Local Communities with Special Reference to Hospitality Industry in Select Tourist Destinations of Assam." She carried out her research under the supervision of Devajeet Goswami, assistant professor, KKHSOU. She is the daughter of Gopi Kanta Das and Saudamini Das. She is the daughter-in-law of Kabindra Paul and Bithika Paul and wife of Hillol Paul.

Srimanta Sankardev Sangha conference attracts devotees from state's every corner

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 8: The third day of the 94th annual conference of Srimanta Sankardev Sangha being held at Eraltoli Pathar, Mohandaha in the western outskirts here witnessed mammoth presence of devotees and visitors.

The rush of people which began to the venue - Sonaram Chutia Samannay Kshetra, since morning to witness the hoisting of Dharma dhwaaja of the socio-religious and cultural body, continued to increase as the day progressed.

The newly elected padhadikar Bhabendranath Deka hoisted the flag amidst the chanting of naam. Thereafter another key event of the four days conference was taking out of a colourful cultural procession (Bhagwat Bhraman) from the venue to covering a few kilometres and return.

Thousands of devotees of all walks of life on foot and vehicles

including tableaux depicting different components of Vaishnavite culture and also the one horned rhino of the state flooded the road amidst rendition of devotional songs.

Later, addressing the open session of the conference, the Assam Agriculture and other departments minister Atul Bora said he was amazed by the sea of humanity immersed in this spiritual and social events.

Showering praises on Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev, he said that the preachings and teachings of the Sankardev kept all sections of greater Assamese society united irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Bora lauded the Sangha for its role in propagating the ideals of Srimanta Sankardev and keeping alive cultural and literary treasures of Srimanta Sankardev.

Bora said that though the chief

minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was supposed to come to attend the session, he could not be present due to his involvement in the preparations for the upcoming mega business summit Assam Advantage 2.0.

Pointing out the various initiatives taken by the government to spread the philosophy and teachings of the great saint and social reformer, he spoke about the restoration and beautification of Batadrava Satra, the birthplace of Sankardev, and schemes for development and restoration of Xatras and freeing encroachment of satra land.

At the session presided over by the Padadhikar Bhabendranath Saikia, Union minister of state for textiles and External Affairs Pabitra Margherita, while releasing two books at the session, announced giving ₹ 15 lakhs to the Sangha.

'I gain renewed strength and determination to serve' 'Devotion Brings Strength and Peace': Sarbananda Sonowal

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 8: The Union minister of ports, shipping & waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal participated in the 12-day Krishna 'Guru Akhand Kirtan' at Krishna Guru Sevashram here on Saturday, an event dedicated to world peace.

Upon Sonowal's arrival at the ashram, the minister offered prayers to Paramguru Krishna Guru Ishwar by chanting hymns at the Suvarna Kur. Sonowal then joined Guru Krishna Premananda Prabhu, Bhakti Matri Kuntala Patowary Goswami, and other devotees in the ongoing 'Akhand Kirtan'.

Speaking at the spiritual discourse, Sonowal addressed thousands of devotees, saying, "Every time I visit this sacred site, enriched by the legacy of Paramguru Krishna Guru Ishwar, I gain renewed strength and determination to serve. The presence of such devoted followers at Krishna Guru Sevashram fills me with gratitude. Paramguru Krishna Guru Ishwar spearheaded a spiritual and cultural transformation that continues to inspire society today. His teachings promote reform through spirituality, education, and cultural values. We must take inspiration from his blessings to build a better



society, state, and nation. By following his ideals, we can strengthen human values and communal harmony. Spirituality and devotion fortify society, lighting the path toward a resilient and self-reliant India. Assam, the Northeast, and the entire nation are witnessing a resurgence in spiritual consciousness, reviving the ancient Indian traditions of knowledge, service, and humanity. Our great sages have left behind a legacy of wisdom and unity, and their teachings will always guide us in creating a just and harmonious society. Krishna Guru's teachings remind us to purify our hearts, minds, and

souls through devotion."

Reaffirming his commitment to spirituality and social harmony, Sarbananda Sonowal added, "Krishna Guru's Akhand Kirtan is a profound blend of spirituality, devotion, and unity. True strength, peace, and harmony lie in devotion. It inspires us to cultivate a positive and righteous mindset, guiding us to serve society selflessly. With unwavering faith and a spirit of service, we must work towards fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of making India a self-reliant, prosperous, and globally respected nation."

Digital literacy must in today's era: Ranaj Pegu

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 8: "The earlier concept of literacy has been changed with the passage of time. We must have to acquire the 21st century digital skills to be literate in the present day digital and AI era" this was observed by Dr Ranaj Pegu, the state education minister while addressing the get-together session of the second day of the closing ceremony of the diamond jubilee celebration of THB College here on Saturday as a chief guest.

He made a humble appeal to the colleges to undertake initiatives to introduce PG courses in their respective colleges following the guidelines of the universities.

"We are living in a transitional period where three separate periods separated and segregated from each other. First one is our separation from our age-old thinking and beliefs, rituals to a new dimension moving from stagnation to mobility, second one traditional education system to new education system and the third one is technologically we have entered into a digital era. Now we are living in an 'App' dependent society. We are not certain about our future. We are not aware of where the AI will take us in the near future," Pegu said.

He added, "Now we have adopted New Education Policy 2020 (NEP). But the education sys-



tem introduced by the Britishers was knowledge based education which gave importance only on degrees and marks. But the NEP never focuses on producing job seekers and degree holders rather it tries to produce employers. The NEP integrated knowledge based education with a skill based education system." He briefly explained about the broad prospects of the present day education system.

The education minister explained about the Semiconductor project, Advantage Assam, Innovation-Incubation and Start-Up, industrialization of jobs and other government initiatives. He briefly stated about various changes that the NEP will bring into our education system. He also talked about the Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) through which aspiring students could undertake online courses from universities abroad. Sotea MLA Padma Hazarika cum president of the diamond jubilee celebration committee attended the sessions and addressed it.

Editor's pick

Budget 2025: Echoes of Trump's economic playbook

By: Kumardeep Banerjee

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently set a new record by presenting India's budget for the eighth consecutive term. This year's budget primarily aims to provide tax relief to the Indian middle class while boosting domestic consumption and investment. Additionally, it takes into account the evolving geopolitical landscape, particularly the policies of US President Donald Trump, who has returned to office. The Modi government's first full Union Budget in its third term has drawn comparisons to some of Trump's economic strategies. While the economic environments of India and the US differ significantly, echoes of Trump's first-term policies—especially in trade, taxation and economic positioning—are evident in several aspects of the budget.

Trump, in line with his campaign promises, has announced new tariffs on countries with whom the US has trade deficits, targeting China, Mexico and Canada. However, the latter two have been granted a temporary reprieve due to ongoing negotiations. India has been cautiously observing these developments, especially as Modi prepares for a visit to Washington later this month. This year's budget takes a strategic approach, addressing some key concerns regarding US exports to India while reinforcing India's domestic economic agenda. One of the most significant aspects of the budget is its focus on taxation and incentives for domestic industries. Trump's economic policies in the US emphasised corporate tax cuts and encouraging American companies to repatriate jobs and manufacturing.

Similarly, India's budget introduces corporate tax reforms and personal income tax reductions to create a more competitive domestic business environment. The aim is to attract multinational corporations to manufacture in India rather than outsourcing jobs overseas. The budget also underscores economic nationalism by promoting self-reliance through the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative. This aligns with Trump's "America First" policy, emphasising domestic production, particularly in defence, technology and energy sectors, to reduce reliance on imports and generate employment. However, with Trump threatening tariffs on foreign companies that do not relocate manufacturing to the US, India's domestic industrial policies could face challenges. Additionally, the budget introduces tariffs and duties on select imported goods, aiming to shield domestic industries from external competition.

This protectionist approach mirrors Trump's trade strategies and represents India's broader ambition to establish itself as a global manufacturing hub to rival economic powerhouses like China and the US. Another notable parallel is the focus on infrastructure investment as a means of economic stimulation and job creation. Trump's administration prioritised infrastructure spending to spur growth and India's budget follows a similar path.

Significant funds have been allocated to highways, railways and ports, aiming to accelerate development and generate employment, particularly in rural areas. However, unlike Trump's isolationist trade stance, India remains committed to fostering strong international relations. The budget reflects a careful balancing act—pursuing economic self-reliance while maintaining global trade and diplomatic ties, especially with the US. While India's 2025-26 budget is not a direct replica of Trump's policies, it reflects global trends toward self-sufficiency and economic protectionism. The challenge ahead lies in leveraging these strategies effectively while navigating the complexities of a globalised economy. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Donald Trump's Gaza fantasy is pure loco!



By Matein Khalid

Trump's vision of Gaza as a "riviera of the Middle East" at his press conference with Netanyahu, whose IDF warplanes, drones and tanks just butchered 45,000 Gazans is as deranged as it is surreal. Trump views Gaza as a New York real estate development opportunity as if he was gentrifying Spanish Harlem or the Bronx. I can imagine his zest at the idea of Trump Towers and Trump branded golf courses sprouting up all over the Med waterfront with construction financed by GCC petrodollars, security provided by the US Marines and branding royalties to enrich the Big Guy.

It is politically impossible for Congress to authorize battalions of American troops to a land haunted by 75 years of war, military occupation, terrorism and intense anti-US hatred since almost all the bombs and shells that turned Gaza into rubble were manufactured in the land of the brave and the home of the free - the US of A.

The messiah of MAGA must surely know that sending troops to the Middle East violates a core political conviction of his political base. The same anti-war revulsion that he himself voiced when George W. Bush went to war in Iraq and Obama escalated the "forever war" in Afghanistan. I now begin to wonder if cognitive decay in the Oval Office was a Biden affliction alone. Hopefully, Trump's Gaza proposal was just an "art of the deal" ploy to unnerve Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Ayatollahs before Tariff Man goes kinetic on Israel's enemies.

Who knows? Trump might even

award Steve Witkoff, a New York property developer, the rights to build condos and launch offplan projects in Gaza. Diplomats and politicians have only gifted tragedy and horror to Gaza, so why not give a real estate developer a chance to forge peace? There is only one problem, the 2-million traumatized and badly abused Palestinians who still live in Gaza and who know that if they leave the enclave, Israel will never allow them to return.

It is unrealistic to expect President Sisi of Egypt to accept millions of Palestinian refugees since Hamas has a de facto Ikhwan DNA. King Abdullah of Jordan, whose education, health and human welfare budget was just gutted by Trump's diktat to freeze US aid/UNRWA funds cannot welcome 2-million Gazans into his embattled kingdom.

In fact, the US brokered peace treaty with Israel expressly forbids mass population transfers to Jordan, the dream of ultra right-wing Zionist zealots from Jabotinsky to Ben-Gvir. These are the same nut cases who believe that God gifted Palestine to the Jews 2-millennia ago, just as He gifted London to the Romans since the legions and centuries of Emperor Claudius built Londinium on the River Thames. This Zionist claim is laughable, pure geopolitical chutzpah since Palestine was never a land without people for a people without land, with all due respect to Theodor Herzl and Lord Arthur Balfour.

If Trump ever wins a Nobel Peace Prize, it will not be for a Gaza Riviera. Try Beirut! (IPA Service)

Why Indian Farmers' Unions criticizing the Central Budget?

Raising that the announcements made for the farmers in the Budget 2025-26 tabled in the Parliament on the very first day of February by the Union Minister for Finance, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that this budget will lay the foundation for a new revolution in the agricultural sector and the entire rural economy. PM Modi highlighted that under the PM Dhan-Dhanya Krishi Yojana, irrigation and infrastructure development will take place in 100 districts. He emphasized that increasing the limit of the Kisan Credit Card from ₹3 lakh to ₹5 lakh will provide greater assistance to farmers.

Nirmala Sitharaman, the finance minister, said that this program aims to enhance agricultural productivity; adopt crop diversification and sustainable agriculture practices; augment post-harvest storage at the panchayat and block level; improve irrigation facilities and facilitate availability of long-term and short-term credit. This program is likely to help 1.7 crore farmers.

Announcing the 'Mission for Cotton Productivity', Smt. Sitharaman highlighted that the five-year mission will facilitate significant improvements in productivity and sustainability of cotton farming, and promote extra-long staple cotton varieties. She said the mission will benefit lakhs of cotton growing farmers as the best of science & technology support will be provided to farmers. Here arises the question, if PM Modi's statement - 'This budget will lay the foundation for a new revolution in the agricultural sector and the entire rural economy', is the indicative of the farmers' welfare budget, then why the farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Majdoor Morcha (KMM) are agitating even after the budget at Punjab-Haryana border at two places since February 13, 2024 and the farmer leader Dalwail is still continuing his hunger strike started from November 26? Shouldn't they step back after this so much miraculous budget?

What the Farmers' leaders say? Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) leader and National Vice-President of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), Dr Inderjeet Singh says that the union budget has totally belied the hopes and expectations of farmers as the announcements pertaining to the farm sector are disappointing.

"Farmers were expecting reduction in input cost, debt relief by way of loan waiver, MSP legal guarantee on the basis of C-2+50%, farm implements exempted from GST and withdrawal of National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing etc. out of which none has materialized."

Dr. Singh adds that there is a decrease in allocations on food security, irrigation, MGNREGA, PM Fasal Bima Yojana etc. Kisan Samman Nidhi amount has also not been enhanced. Reacting over the enhancement in credit

limit, Dr. Inderjeet states that as far as increase in amount of loan on credit card is concerned it is itself admission of the extent of indebtedness. Apart from this there is no provision for a large number of tenant farmers who cultivate lands on lease and have no supportive mechanisms.

Commenting on 'Mission for Cotton Productivity', announced in the budget, Dr. Inderjeet Singh says, "Purported emphasis on crop diversification by giving emphasis to cotton and pulses is a hoax as area under cotton cultivation is depleting fast due to spurious seeds sold by private companies that is prone to insect infestation. Similarly pulse producing farmers are not being given MSP and they had to make distress sale of Moong and other pulses."

National spokesperson of Bhattiya Kisan Union, Chaudhary Rakesh Tikait said that there is nothing for villages, poor, farmers, tribals in the budget released by the central government of the country. They are seen in the figures of the government but are miles away from the basic structure. Tikait states, "The government is forcing the farmers to take loans but not paying the price of crops. When this loan keeps on increasing, the land will be handed over to the corporates. From today's budget, it appears that the farmers of the country who are demanding MSP guarantee law and C2 + 50 formula have got only loans in the budget. This is the budget of corporate capitalists. This budget is just a sham for farmers and laborers. The farmers of the country reject this budget outright. The government has once again betrayed the trust of the farmers."

Basis of criticism by the farmers' unions

All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), the largest wing of Samyukta Kisan Morcha, gives facts and figures in support of its reactionary criticism of the budget.

AIKS states that the contribution of agriculture and allied sectors to the GDP has increased to 16 per cent of the budget allocation for agriculture and allied activities is lower than the Revised Estimates of 2024-25. While the Revised Estimates of 2024-25 was ₹ 376720.41crores the 2025-26 allocation is only ₹ 371687.35 crores. When inflation is accounted for, this is a huge cut in allocation. Real expenditures for agriculture and allied activities have steadily fallen since 2020-21; farmers are clearly not the priority of the BJP-led NDA Government. There is nothing in the budget to ensure legal guarantee of MSP, expand procurement or free farmers from indebtedness. Even the Parliamentary Standing Committee recommendation to ensure remunerative prices has been

thrown to the winds.

The increased share of the agriculture sector in employment rising from 44.1 per cent in 2017-18 to 46.1 per cent in 2023-24 indicates a reverse migration from urban areas as there are no employment opportunities. In an extremely insensitive manner, the budget allocation for the MGNREGA has been kept at just ₹ 86,000 crores. There is no emphasis for generation of employment in the countryside. The Government is stopping all funds to the National Institute for Rural Development and there is zero allocation in the budget for it; this also is a

of Arhar/Tur and are incentivizing farmers in Mozambique and other countries. In 2024 imports of pulses almost doubled to 60 lakh tons (between January and November). There is also nothing new in the claim that NAFED and NCCF will procure pulses for the next 4 years to ensure price stability; it only exposes the fact that the private sector will not be willing to buy at MSP. A Dhan Dhan Krishi Yojana has been announced claiming that it will cover 100 districts with low yields and benefit 1.7 crore farmers but there is no separate allocation for it. It only is a reshaping of existing programs. No allocation has been made for the Price Stabilization Fund for Rubber or for mitigation of the Wild Animal Menace.

Will the government consider the Farmers' concerns?

As the farmers are the backbone of the Indian economy and still, they run into losses despite their day and night laborious task. Their major and foremost demand is to ensure legal guarantee for their produce, but the central government is adamant even to hear their grievances. It is pertinent to mention here that even the Indian Vice-President, Jagdeep Dhankhar himself has also expressed his rage over the inaction of the government for neglecting the demands of the farmers. On

December 3, 2024, addressing at the Centenary Foundation Day of Indian Council of Agricultural Research -Central Institute for Research on Cotton Technology (ICAR-CIRCOT), Mumbai, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar supported the MSP demand of the farmers and said, "We are not practical, our policy making is not on the right track. Farmers need a law that guarantees MSP. Look with an open mind, think with an open mind, and evaluate. And it pains me that the well-wishers of the farmers are silent today, they shy away from speaking. No power in the country can stifle the voice of the farmers. A nation will pay a huge price, if it tries the patience of a farmer."

Will the central government heed towards the inner voice of the worthy Vice-President, if the voice of the farmers strikes feebly into the ears of the government.

But the farmers' leaders do not expect much from the government in the present scenario, they think that only the stir path can bow down the adamant government.

AIKS National Vice-President, Dr. Inderjeet Singh warns that there is no other way for the farmers to fight for the reversal of anti-farmer and pro-corporate policies being followed by the Modi government. (The author is a Senior Journalist, columnist & Political Analyst. He can be reached at +918557033198 or thaken.journalist@gmail.com)



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Jag Mohan Thaken

telling reflection on the BJP-led NDA Government's apathy towards rural development and the rural poor. Food subsidy is lower than the allocation made in 2024-25. The allocation for distribution of pulses to State/Union Territories for Welfare Schemes is zero, while the last Budget had allocated ₹ 300 crores. The much-hyped exemption of income tax up to ₹ 12 lakh is aimed at quick electoral gains; increasing prices, high levels of indirect taxation, increasing food, health, education, travel expenses will all bring to naught if at all any benefit is accrued through this exemption.

The allocation to the Flagship Program of the Government, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana for crop insurance has seen a drastic cut from ₹ 15,864 crores to ₹ 12,242.27 crores. There has been no increase in allocation to the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi and the Scheme has had no adjustment even for inflation since 2019 when it was first initiated.

AIKS adds that the Fertilizer subsidy has been cut from ₹ 171298.50 crores to ₹ 167887.20 crores, a cut of ₹ 3,411.30 crores. The hollow claim of a Six-Year Initiative of Atmanirbharata Mission for Pulses is exposed when the total allocation for the Mission is merely ₹ 1000 crores. This claim ironically comes from a Government that just 10 days ago extended duty-free imports

The Siang Upper Multipurpose Project: A relevant study

By: Kanchan Basu

From the vantage point, the greyish-green Siang River and the hills it snakes between are serene. The Siang, which unleashes its fury in the monsoons, is almost languid in the winter. The fields on either side are lush with crops grown by farmers from the surrounding villages - paddy, millets, greens and vegetables - and trees laden with the region's famous oranges.

While a large section of residents from the Adi tribe from villages in the state's Upper Siang and Siang districts fear the loss of their farmlands and homes to the proposed project, they are now facing increasing pressure from the government to let the work begin. Earlier December, 2024, the state requisitioned the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) to tackle any resistance to the project.

The government's stand is that the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) is not "just any hydropower project", but an effort essential to "save" the river by countering the effects of China's dam building activities further upstream in Tibet. As reported by news agencies, China has approved the construction of what will be the world's largest hydropower dam, kicking off the long-talked about project on the eastern rim of the Tibetan plateau, close to Arunachal Pradesh, that has the potential to affect millions downstream in India and Bangladesh.

As authorities press for a Pre-Feasibility Report (PFR), a preliminary analysis to assess the probable cost of a project and its feasibility in a given area, this belt has become a hotspot of activity and deepening fault lines. While the state is pushing to begin the surveys this winter, the affected villages are witnessing demonstrations, meeting and mobilisation drives against this almost every day.

Dependence on agriculture:

SUMP has faced opposition since it was first proposed by the NITI Aayog in 2017. But the push for it - and the opposition against it - increased in the year of 2024. While government functionaries say the precise scale of the project will only be ascertained after feasibility surveys, a preliminary report submitted by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) in December 2022 to the Central Electrical Authority was for an 11,000MW project with a reservoir capacity of 9 billion cubic metres. This makes the project several times larger in scale than other projects currently in the works in the country.

The three sites earmarked for SUMP are Parong and Dite Dime in Siang district, and Ueng in Upper Siang District. The Siang Indigenous Farmers' Forum (SIFF), which is leading the protests and comprises farmers from the affected region, estimates that 13 villages are at risk of being completely submerged, while farmlands could be submerged at 27 others.

The Adi residents here revere the Siang as a provider, referring to it as Aane (mother) Siang. Cultivation on its banks was encouraged and facilitated by the state after Independence to move away from shifting cultivation in the hills. So while settled agriculture along the river - or 'panikheti' as locals call it - is 60 years old among the farmers of this belt, they are now completely dependent on it.

The residents are especially worried over the state's decision the month of December, 2024 to deploy nine companies of the CAPF and additional police forces at the proposed project sites and NHPC offices. The forces have not yet arrived but news of the decision spread panic and suspicion and have lent greater urgency to those opposing

the project, spurring demonstrations in different villages. Their fear has a precedent - in 2016, two anti-dam activists were gunned down by the police in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang. OpakGao, 57 years old lady is one of the women from Parong who were, until recently, keeping a vigil near the survey site to prevent the entry of officials. With harvest season picking up pace, the women have halted their vigil for the time being.

A defunct school in their village has been picked as one of the places to accommodate the forces, and the district administration has issued instructions for it to be prepared for their arrival. The night after a water connection to the school was set up, some unidentified protesters broke and removed the pipe.

In the face of swelling discontent, Chief Minister PemaKhandu travelled to Boleng, the district headquarters of Siang district, last week to make an appeal to the locals.

Chief Minister visit and 'waterbomb':

The Siang originates near Mount Kailash in Tibet, where it is known as the Yarlung Tsangpo. It traverses over 1,000 km eastward before forming a horseshoe bend around the towering NamchaBarwa peak and entering Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang. Further downstream, in Assam, it joins tributaries like the Dibang and Lohit to become the Brahmaputra.

On SUMP being touted as a counter to concerns over China planning the world's largest dam at reportedly 60,000-MW capacity on Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet's Medog county, officials say the Siang project and its reservoir could counter water diversion from the Tsangpo to water-scarce parts of China and the possibility of sudden release of water from such a dam.

In his speech to the locals in Boleng, PemaKhandu said such a dam in Tibet - and not the damming of the Siang - was the real existential threat to the Adi community.

"It is not just the Siang area and the Adi people who will be affected. The effects will go down to the Brahmaputra in Assam and all the way to Bangladesh. The Adi community and the Siang are tied together since their origins. Do you want that in the winter, you'll be able to walk on foot from the river's east bank to its west? ... China will make its dam there for sure. It is just a matter of time. If they one day release the water, have you ever imagined the extent of damage it will do from Tuting to Pasighat? The impact will be so horrible that water will flow 15 meters over the town of Pasighat. Guwahati will also be submerged.... This is not hydropower dam. This is for the future of the Adi community, of the Siang River," the Chief Minister had said.

The term "water bomb" is one that is frequently used by government functionaries to warn residents about the possible effects of such a dam, even while the locals opposing the project remain sceptical, wondering if the claims are exaggerated.

Chants on a bridge:

On 23 December, 2024, dozens of villagers from Riew, who are opposed to the project gathered on the Dite Dime Bridge over the Siang. With chants led by the elders among them, they held a ritual praying for their land to be protected from the project.

"We will become refugees like Chamas and Hajongs. There is no question of compensation. We have been on this land for hundreds of years," says a villager, one of those who joined the rituals. He was speaking of the roughly one lakh Chakmas and Hajongs from the Chittagong Hill Tracts,

then in East Pakistan and in present-day Bangladesh, who had fled to Arunachal Pradesh since the 1960s after their land was submerged by the 'Kaptai Dam Project'.

Unlike many other more strident local voices against the dam, another resident of Riew at the ritual says he could have been on board "if the system was good". "They have to look after our basics before talking about national issues. We cannot be treated like 'bali ka bakra (sacrificial lambs)'. Whatever they are doing, they are doing by force. They want to send forces here instead of coming to our village and talking to us. There was only one public meeting in our village on this issue in September, which was organised by the All Riew Students' Union instead of by them," he says.

The other such meeting in the year of 2024, addressed by local MLAs and SIFF leaders, was held in October, 2024 in Yingkiang, the Upper Siang district headquarters. This too was organised by the All Upper Siang District Students' Union. An attempt at a public meeting by the Siang District Collector in Parong in October, 2024, was boycotted by most residents who say they want conversations with 'decision makers' in the government instead.

Meanwhile, state government representatives insist that they want dialogue. Arunachal Cabinet Minister OjingTasing, the MLA from the Pangin constituency in Siang, claims that attempts at dialogue are being stonewalled by those opposed to the project. Tasing, who was incidentally one of the biggest leaders of the anti-dam movement in the same region against projects on the Siang in the 2010s, says, "When a representative goes to a village, activists don't let people meet them. When I went to the meeting in Riew, they did not allow us to make our presentation. The government is clear it wants to talk, but the people are being misled."

OjingTasing says the Central and state governments are looking to offer "India's best compensation" to those affected, "but they need to come to the table to discuss it."

Despite the resistance on the ground, the government says it is confident of starting the surveys soon. "To be frank, there is a lot of push from both the Centre and the state government to move ahead with this project, given its importance, but there is a lot of objection from the SIFF. Naturally, there are objections to every dam project. We are working on how to win the confidence of the people, whether it takes 10 days or 10 months," says NinongEring, West Pasighat MLA and advisor to the Minister for Hydro Power Development.

Local NHPC officials said the "campaign" for outreach to villagers will now be conducted by members of village-level sub-committees, the SUMP Development Committee, constituted by the state, which villagers in favour of survey have been called to join.

"We want to explain to people that the survey is a very preliminary step. Based on this survey, one of the three sites will be selected. After that, there will be extensive investigation, the environmental impact assessment will be done and the compensation related data will be collected. Public hearings will be conducted before the DPR (Detailed Project Report) is sent for approval. Without public approval, no funds will be allotted to the project," said the official.

But GegongJijong, president of Yingkiang-based SIFF, says the resistance to this first step will continue. "If the PFR (Primary Frequency Response) finds the feasible, there will be no turning back. Such a big dam has never been built anywhere in this country, that too right among human settlements."

Sonaram Chutia And Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Sonaram Chutia's life is a tale of remarkable dedication to social reform and religious revival, deeply connected to his association with the Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha. His involvement with the Sangha was not merely an engagement with a religious organization but a mission to transform society through the values and teachings of Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva. The Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha, founded to spread the ideals of these great Vaishnavite saints, became the foundation for Sonaram's lifelong commitment to building a just and harmonious society.

The Sangha played a pivotal role in promoting equality, devotion, and social harmony. It was established at a time when society was grappling with caste-based discrimination and rigid orthodoxy. For Sonaram Chutia, the Sangha represented a beacon of hope and an opportunity to bring about meaningful change. His association with the Sangha began in 1946, and it soon became a driving force in his life. Deeply inspired by the inclusive and egalitarian philosophy of Srimanta Sankardeva, Sonaram dedicated himself to spreading these ideals, working tirelessly to create an equitable society where all individuals could thrive.

A significant turning point in Sonaram's life occurred during his early years when a profound experience at the Dakshinpat Satra shaped his spiritual outlook. His family had long been associated with the Satra, but an incident during his initiation altered his beliefs. This event marked the beginning of a transformation in his religious views. Later, his meeting with Sri Pitambar Devgoswami, the Satradhikar of Garamur Satra, inspired him to study the Vedas and Upanishads. This exposure to ancient spiritual texts en-

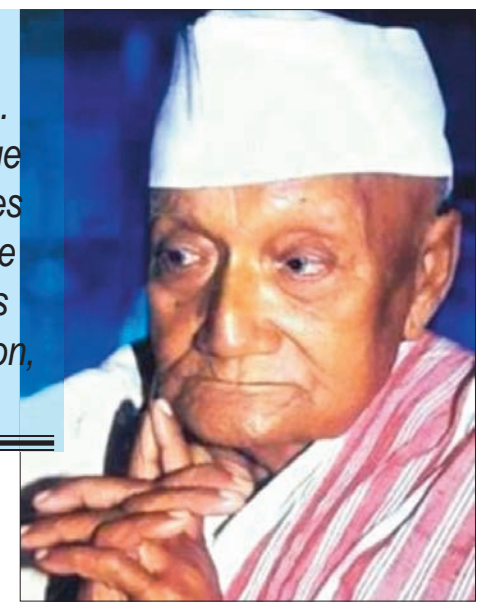
riched his understanding of religion and deepened his connection with the philosophy of Srimanta Sankardeva. Consequently, Sonaram abandoned his earlier decision to convert to another faith and committed himself fully to Vaishnavism.

His involvement with the Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha provided the perfect platform for his social and religious mission. Sonaram quickly rose to prominence within the Sangha, holding key positions for five terms. His scholarly life and profound knowledge made him a respected leader and a voice of reason and reform. He was deeply committed to preserving the purity of Mahapurushiya religious traditions, fiercely opposing any attempts to distort or tarnish their values. His dedication to the Sangha was driven by an unwavering belief in the transformative power of Vaishnavism as a force for social good.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Sonaram's work was his ability to combine spiritual philosophy with practical action. He believed that faith should be reflected in deeds and that true devotion meant working for the welfare of society. His speeches and writings became powerful tools for spreading the message of the Sangha. Traveling across Assam, he inspired countless people to embrace Vaishnavism and its principles of compassion, equality, and community service. His eloquence and deep understanding of religious philosophy made him a highly influential figure within the Sangha and the wider community.

Under Sonaram's leadership, the Sangha flourished as a center for both spiritual growth and social development. He was instrumental in organizing workshops and training programs aimed at empowering rural communities. His emphasis on education and moral values resonated with the people, encourag-

One of the most remarkable aspects of Sonaram's work was his ability to combine spiritual philosophy with practical action. He believed that faith should be reflected in deeds and that true devotion meant working for the welfare of society. His speeches and writings became powerful tools for spreading the message of the Sangha. Traveling across Assam, he inspired countless people to embrace Vaishnavism and its principles of compassion, equality, and community service



ing them to work toward self-reliance and social progress. Sonaram's efforts helped bridge the gap between spiritual ideals and everyday life, making the teachings of Srimanta Sankardeva more accessible and relevant to contemporary society.

Despite his many achievements, Sonaram's journey with the Sangha was not without its challenges. He faced opposition from conservative elements who were resistant to change. Yet his strong faith in Vaishnavism and his belief in the power of reform helped him overcome these obstacles. He remained steadfast in his mission, earning immense respect for his resilience and dedication. His unwavering commitment to justice and equality made him a beacon of hope and an inspiration to all who sought to build a better society.

In addition to his organizational work, Sonaram Chutia was a prolific writer and thinker. His literary contributions enriched Assamese spiritual literature and furthered the cause of the Sangha. His works, including Mahapurushiya Dharma Jijnasa and Na-

madharma Prakash, reflect his deep understanding of Vaishnavite philosophy and his desire to make its teachings available to a wider audience. His writings continue to serve as a valuable resource for those seeking spiritual guidance and knowledge, bridging the gap between ancient philosophy and modern life.

Throughout his life, Sonaram remained a devoted practitioner of Mahapurushiya Dharma, embodying the core values of humility, compassion, and service. His deep connection with the Sangha allowed him to live these values fully and promote them in society. He believed that the true essence of Vaishnavism lay in its ability to bring people together, fostering a sense of belonging and unity. His tireless efforts to spread these ideals transformed countless lives and left a lasting impact on Assamese society.

Even after retiring from public service, Sonaram continued to offer his wisdom and guidance to the Sangha. He became a mentor and role model for young leaders, inspiring them to carry forward the mission of

social reform and spiritual revival. His life stands as a testament to the power of faith in action and the importance of living in alignment with one's beliefs.

Sonaram Chutia's legacy within the Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha is both profound and enduring. His contributions helped shape the Sangha into a vibrant movement that continues to play a crucial role in Assam's cultural and social landscape. His life is a reminder that true spirituality lies in serving others and working for the betterment of society. Sonaram's journey with the Sangha will forever inspire future generations, illuminating the path of reform, unity, and devotion. *(The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK and can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

Lets revisit the world of Moby Dick The spiritual revolution of Sankardev

By: Sankalpajit Saikia

Moby Dick book was written by Herman Melville in 1851. It was the sailor Ishmail's narrative of the menial quest of captain Ahab, captain of the whaling ship Pequod. The book was commercially failed at that time but after the death of the author it was recognised as one of the finest books written in English literature. Melville began writing Moby Dick in February 1850 after 18 months of he had anticipated. European critique Somersett Maughm wrote a brilliant book named 'Ten Greatest novelists and their novels.' In that particular book, William Somersett Maugham had signified ten greatest novels of world literature and he placed Moby Dick also in that list.

As said earlier Ishmail is the narrator of the great story. Ishmail travels from Manhattan to New Bedford, Massachusetts, with plans to sign up in some recognised ships. He found Queequeg there and shared bed in a hotel. Both of them signed up as a sailor in Pequod ship. The owners of Pequod are Peleg and Bildad. Later Ishmail described about the interesting captain Ahab. He also depicted about three chief mates of captain Ahab, they are Starbuck (a 30 years old man from Nantucket), Stubb (a happy and cheerful person from Cape Cod), Flask (from Martha's Vineyard). Queequeg, Tashtego and Dago were three harpooners from Pequod ship. Finally Ahab came to the ship and he announced that he was going to take revenge on the white whale (Moby Dick) which took one leg from Ahab and left him legless.

From here the final story of Moby Dick has began. Ahab appears as a complicated character for his teams. When Ahab first time appears in the quarterdeck of the ship the teamates of his ship burst in joy and enthusiasm because of the entry of Ahab. They are delighted to meet and see him for the first time. In his first meeting Ahab gathered all his teammates and narrated them the scary story of Captain Ahab and giant Moby Dick. Ahab announced his revenge against Moby Dick. He had a terrible story against the white whale. The giant whale which took one leg from the knee down and left him with a prosthesis fashioned from a whale's jawbone. For Ahab the killing of Moby Dick was the biggest mission of his life. He sought help and support from his teammates. Interestingly all the sailors promised Ahab to provide support to him and work for fulfilling the revenge of their boss against the white giant. Ahab took oath that he would give the first man to sight Moby Dick a doubloon, a gold coin. Ironically only Starbuck who can be considered as a Assistant captain objected against Ahab signifying his passion as a foolish thing. Ahab's first mate recognizes his problem and is the only one throughout the novel to voice his disapproval of Ahab's increasingly obsessive behaviour. But Ahab was adamant of his passion and revenge. Thus the story went on.

Captain Ahab was an intelligent person as well as an experienced captain. Generally the duty of a ship captain was to hunt various sperm whales or other important whales for collection of oil. The duty of Pequod was also the same. The owners of the ship Captain Peleg and Captain Bildad wanted to get some profit from some oils and other minerals collected from sea and whales. But Captain Ahab did not pay attention towards these things. Instead he wanted to kill the white giant Moby Dick in order to take revenge. In the story, we have seen Ahab using his knowledge and skills during his voyage only to find out the white whale and kill him. He was an experienced captain in geography. He used to keep maps with him and monitored the compass. Once the compass of the Pequod failed to work then Ahab had showed his skill and made the compass okay by using a stone. Basically when a ship meets with the another ship then it is called as 'Gam'. Pequod also met several ships during its mission. Some of the several sea encounters of Pequod with other ships are taken place.

Near South east of cape of good hope Pequod made its first gam with Goney. Ahab communicated with them only to know about wheather they had seen the Moby Dick or not. In the second gam off the cape of good hope, with the Town-Ho, a Nantucket Whaler, the concealed story of a "judgment of God" is revealed, but only to the crew: a defiant sailor who struck an oppressive officer is flogged, and when that officer led the chase for Moby Dick, he fell from the boat and was killed by the whale.

After the long voyage of the Pequod the final encounter between Ahab and Moby Dick took place. The author depicted three days of fierce battle between the two big power. Captain Ahab was ready with his skillful team and harpooners. On the first day the special sailors of Pequod tried their best to attack Moby Dick but they seemed to be playing toy in front of the white whale. The white whale destroyed the waterboats of the ship by showing its immense power. Ahab did not want to give up. On the second day, Ahab again tried to attack the whale but he failed to harm him. On the third day of their fierce encounter the final battle took place. Ahab tried to throw harpoons at Moby Dick and

became succeeded. This made the whale angry and it retaliated by ramming the Pequod itself, causing it to begin sinking. Ahab was frustrated with sadness and anger. He again tried to throw harpoons to the whale but becomes entangled in the line, getting dragged into the sea to his death by the whale. Ishmail was the only man to survive in the entire story. When the big ship Pequod started sinking Ishmail was also there. He found the coffin of Queequeg in the sea and entered into it. Thereafter he was eventually rescued by the ship Rachel, which had been searching for its own missing crew. If we see to the style of prose of Moby Dick we will find the book's literary influences include Shakespeare, Miltonic, Cetological, Alliterative, Fanciful, Colloquial, Archaic and unceasingly Alunaive." Literary critic Newton Arvin recognizes as if the English vocabulary were to be limited for the complex things to express.

Moby Dick signifies the of passion and hunger for victory within the human blood. Ernest Hemingway said, "Man can be destroyed but man can not be defeated." Genius Captain Ahab fought till end but ended up losing his life against the white whale. It is also signified the victory of nature above the human power. Ahab, in his early life wanted to kill Moby Dick but despite loosing his one leg. It is natural process. The white whale attacked Ahab to his own life. It is the victory of nature. Ahab had power, passion, money but he had to be defeated against Moby Dick. According to Thomas Pynchon's role model Homer Simpson the lesson of Moby Dick is to "be yourself". Man should be s obsessed with their persistence. Over persistence like Captain Ahab can lead human to lose their life. The character of Ahab seems to be a character of a fighter. On the other hand the character of Ahab's first mate Starbuck seems to be depicted as a ideal and wise man. He went against his captain to save the lives of the sailors of Pequod. In this book the story of Ishmail-Queequeg friendship is quite mesmerizing. Ishmail's luck resembles God's power. If God wanted to save someone's life his life will be saved no matter what the situation is. The story also contains relevance about passion, courage, enthusiasm etc. To conclude we can summarize that the dramatic and tragic ending of the story underscores the themes of obsession, the sublime power of nature and the futility of human vengeance. *(The author is a 4th semester, Political science dept. Nowgong college (Autonomous). He can be reached at sankalp-saikia006@gmail.com)*



By: Satyabrata Borah

Sankardev was a 15th-century saint, scholar, poet, playwright, and social-religious reformer. He is one of the most revered figures in Assamese history. His vision of Vaishnav Dharma, rooted in devotion (bhakti) and equality, revolutionized Assamese society, culture, literature, and religion. Sankardev's teachings emphasized a form of Vaishnavism that was inclusive, accessible, and deeply spiritual, breaking away from the rigid hierarchies and rituals of traditional Brahminical Hinduism. His contributions not only shaped the religious landscape of Assam but also left an indelible mark on its cultural and literary heritage, fostering a sense of unity and identity among the Assamese people.

Sankardev's vision of Vaishnav Dharma was centered on the worship of Lord Krishna, particularly in his form as Vishnu or Narayana. He propagated the idea of "ekasarana nama dharna", which translates to "the religion of taking refuge in one God." This philosophy emphasized devotion to a single deity, rejecting the polytheistic practices prevalent at the time. Sankardev's teachings were deeply influenced by the Bhagavata Purana, which he considered the ultimate scripture for spiritual guidance. He believed that salvation could be achieved through pure devotion (bhakti), chanting the names of God (nama), and living a life of righteousness and humility. This approach made spirituality accessible to all, regardless of caste, creed, or social status, challenging the dominance of Brahminical orthodoxy and its exclusionary practices.

One of Sankardev's most significant contributions was his effort to democratize religion. At a time when access to religious knowledge and practices was restricted to the upper castes, Sankardev opened the doors of spirituality to everyone, including women and marginalized communities. He established "satras" (monastic institutions) that served as centers of learning, worship, and cultural exchange. These satras became the backbone of Assamese Vaishnavism, promoting a way of life that combined spiritual devotion with social responsibility. The satras also played a crucial role in preserving and propagating Sankardev's teachings, ensuring their continuity across generations.

Sankardev's impact on Assamese literature is unparalleled. He is often regarded as the father of Assamese literature, having composed numerous works in the Assamese language, which was then in its formative stages. His literary contributions include the "Kirtan Ghosha", a collection of devotional songs and prayers that remains a cornerstone of Assamese spiritual and cultural life. The "Kirtan Ghosha" is not only a religious text but also a literary masterpiece, written in simple yet profound language that resonates with people of all backgrounds. Sankardev's other notable works include the "Bhagavata Purana" translations, the "Gunamala", and the "Bhakti Ratnavali", all of which are revered for their spiritual depth and literary excellence.

In addition to his devotional writings, Sankardev was a pioneer in the field of Assamese drama and performing arts. He introduced "Ankiya Naat", a form of one-act play that combined religious themes with theatrical elements. These plays, often performed in the satras, were designed to convey spiritual messages in an engaging and accessible manner. Sankardev himself wrote several Ankiya Naats, including the famous "Chihna Yatra", which is considered the first Assamese drama. His plays were not only religious in nature but also incorporated elements of Assamese folklore, music, and dance, making them a unique blend of spirituality and culture. The use of "Borgeet" (devotional songs) in these performances further enriched the cultural



landscape of Assam, creating a tradition that continues to thrive today.

Sankardev's influence extended beyond religion and literature to the broader cultural fabric of Assam. He played a pivotal role in unifying the diverse communities of the region under a shared cultural and spiritual identity. His teachings emphasized the importance of community living, mutual respect, and social harmony, values that continue to define Assamese society. The satras he established became hubs of cultural activity, promoting not only religious practices but also art, music, dance, and education. This holistic approach to spirituality and culture helped to create a cohesive Assamese identity, transcending regional and ethnic differences.

The impact of Sankardev's teachings on Assamese society was profound and far-reaching. By challenging the caste system and advocating for social equality, he empowered marginalized communities and fostered a sense of dignity and self-worth among them. His emphasis on devotion and personal faith over ritualistic practices resonated deeply with the common people, making spirituality a more intimate and personal experience. This democratization of religion had a transformative effect on Assamese society, breaking down barriers and promoting a more inclusive and egalitarian way of life. Sankardev's legacy is also evident in the enduring traditions of Assamese Vaishnavism. The satras he established continue to be centers of spiritual and cultural life, preserving his teachings and practices for future generations. The annual "Raas Leela" festivals, which celebrate the life and deeds of Lord Krishna, are a testament to Sankardev's enduring influence. These festivals, marked by music, dance, and theatrical performances, are a vibrant expression of Assamese culture and devotion, drawing people from all walks of life.

In the realm of education, Sankardev's contributions were equally significant. He believed in the power of knowledge and education as tools for personal and societal transformation. The satras he established served as centers of learning, where students were taught not only religious texts but also literature, music, and the arts. This emphasis on education helped to elevate the intellectual and cultural standards of Assamese society, laying the foundation for a rich literary and artistic tradition.

Sankardev's vision of Vaishnav Dharma also had a profound impact on the moral and ethical values of the Assamese people. His teachings emphasized the importance of

honesty, compassion, humility, and service to others, values that continue to guide the lives of many in Assam. The concept of "nama-dharma", or the practice of chanting the names of God, became a central tenet of Assamese spirituality, offering a simple yet powerful means of connecting with the divine. This practice, deeply rooted in Sankardev's teachings, remains a vital part of Assamese religious life.

Sankardev's vision of Vaishnav Dharma and his contributions to Assamese society, literature, culture, and religion have left an indelible mark on the history and identity of Assam. His teachings of devotion, equality, and social harmony revolutionized the religious landscape of the region, making spirituality accessible to all. His literary and artistic contributions enriched Assamese culture, creating a legacy that continues to inspire and uplift. Sankardev's impact on Assamese society is a testament to the enduring power of his vision and the timeless relevance of his message. Through his life and work, Sankardev not only transformed the spiritual and cultural fabric of Assam but also laid the foundation for a more inclusive and compassionate society. His legacy remains a beacon of hope and inspiration, guiding the Assamese people toward a future rooted in faith, unity, and cultural pride.

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Hamas releases 3 more Israeli hostages for dozens of Palestinian

DERI AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), Feb 8: Hamas-led militants released three gaunt, frail-looking Israeli civilian men they held for the past 16 months on Saturday, and Israel was freeing dozens of Palestinian prisoners as part of a fragile agreement that has paused the war in the Gaza Strip.

Before a crowd of hundreds, armed Hamas fighters led Eli Sharabi, 52, Ohad Ben Ami, 56, and Or Levy, 34, onto a stage, where they were forced to make a public statement before being handed over to the Red Cross.

The three were among about 250 people abducted during the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, that sparked the war. They appeared to be in much poorer physical condition than any of the 18 other hostages released so far during the ceasefire that began January 19.

Hostages' condition sparks concern

The hostages' emaciated condition and the stage-managed ceremony a departure from previous hostage releases where the captives were not made to speak sparked outrage in Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said we will not accept the shocking scenes that played out. The statement did not lay out punitive measures.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid said the difficult scenes were reason to extend the truce with Hamas and bring home the dozens of remaining hostages.



In an apparent response to concerns over the released hostages' health, Hamas' military wing, the Qassam Brigades, claimed it had made efforts to preserve their lives despite the (Israeli) bombardment.

Many Palestinians released from Israeli jails during the ceasefire have also appeared gaunt and pale, and have alleged abuses and mistreatment in Israeli custody.

The current phase of the truce, which runs until early March, does not appear to have been affected by US President Donald Trump's stunning proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of Gaza, and welcomed by Israel but vehemently rejected by the Palestinians and most of the international community.

But it could complicate talks over the second and more difficult phase, when Hamas is to release dozens more hostages in return for a lasting ceasefire.

Hamas may be reluctant to free

more captives and lose its main bargaining chip if it believes the US and Israel are serious about depopulating the territory, which rights groups say would violate international law.

This was the fifth swap of hostages for prisoners during the ceasefire. Before Saturday, 18 hostages and more than 550 Palestinian prisoners had been freed.

The gaunt appearance of the three hostages evoke the horrifying pictures from the liberation of the camps in 1945, the darkest chapter of our history, said the Hostages Families Forum, a group representing relatives of most of the captives. "We have to get all of the hostages out of hell. There can be no more delays.

The first phase of the ceasefire calls for the release of 33 hostages and nearly 2,000 prisoners, the return of Palestinians to northern Gaza and an increase in humanitarian aid to the devastated terri-

tory. Last week, wounded Palestinians were allowed to leave Gaza for Egypt for the first time since May.

Who was released on Saturday?

Sharabi and Ben Ami were both captured from Kibbutz Beeri, one of the hardest-hit farming communities, during the Hamas-led attack. Levy was abducted from the Nova music festival, where he was taking shelter in a safe room when the militants arrived.

Sharabi's wife and two teenage daughters were killed in the attack. His brother Yossi was also abducted and died in captivity. Levy's wife was killed during the attack and his now 3-year-old son has been cared for by relatives.

It is unclear whether either man knows about what happened to their families.

Ben Ami, a father of three, was kidnapped with his wife, Raz, who was released during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023.

Relatives of the hostages cheered, clapped and cried as they watched live footage of their loved ones being released.

Levy's brother, Michael, said his brother's young son, Almog, was already told his father was on his way.

Mogi, we found daddy, Michael Levy said he told the boy, using his nickname, in an interview with Israeli Channel 12. We haven't seen happiness like that in him for a long time."

The 183 Palestinian prisoners

being released by Israel on Saturday include 18 people serving life sentences for deadly attacks on Israelis, 54 serving long-term sentences and 111 Palestinians from Gaza who were detained after the October 7 attack but not tried for any crime. All are men aged between 20 and 61.

Virtually every Palestinian has a friend, relative or acquaintance who has been imprisoned.

More than 100 hostages were released during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023. More than 70 are still in Gaza, and Israel has said 34 of those are believed to be dead. Israel says Hamas has confirmed eight of the 33 to be released during the first phase of the truce are dead.

Ceasefire's next phase is uncertain

It is not clear whether Israel and Hamas have begun negotiating a second phase of the ceasefire, which calls for releasing the remaining hostages and extending the truce indefinitely. The war could resume in early March if no agreement is reached.

Israel says it is still committed to destroying Hamas, even after the militant group reasserted its rule over Gaza within hours of the ceasefire. A key far-right partner in Netanyahu's coalition is calling for the war to resume after the ceasefire's first phase.

Hamas says it won't release remaining hostages without an end to the war and a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. (AP)

Trump says he's ending Biden's classified intelligence briefings in payback move



PALM BEACH (US), Feb 8: President Donald Trump said Friday that he's revoking former President Joe Biden's access to government secrets and ending the daily intelligence briefings he's receiving in payback for Biden doing the same to him in 2021.

Trump announced his decision in a post on his social media platform shortly after he arrived at his Mar-a-Lago home and private club in Palm Beach for the weekend.

"There is no need for Joe Biden to continue receiving access to classified information. Therefore, we are immediately revoking Joe Biden's Security Clearances, and stopping his daily Intelligence Briefings," Trump wrote. "He set this precedent in 2021, when he instructed the Intelligence Community (IC) to stop the 45th President of the United States (ME!) from accessing details on National Security, a courtesy provided to former Presidents."

The move is the latest in a vengeance tour of Washington that Trump promised during his campaign. He has previously revoked security clearances from more than four dozen former intelligence officials who signed a 2020 letter saying that the Hunter Biden laptop saga bore the hallmarks of a "Russian information operation." He's also revoked security details assigned to protect former government officials who have criticized him, including his own former secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, who faces threats from Iran, and former infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Biden didn't immediately comment on the move.

Biden ended Trump's intelligence briefings after Trump helped spur efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election and incited the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. At the time, Biden said Trump's "erratic" behavior should prevent him from getting the intel briefings.

Asked in an interview with CBS

News what he feared if Trump continued to receive the briefings, Biden said he did not want to "speculate out loud" but made clear he did not want Trump to continue having access to such information.

"I just think that there is no need for him to have the intelligence briefings," Biden said. "What value is giving him an intelligence briefing? What impact does he have at all, other than the fact he might slip and say something?"

In 2022, federal agents searched Trump's Florida home and seized boxes of classified records. He was indicted on dozens of felony counts accusing him of illegally hoarding classified records and obstructing FBI efforts to get them back. He pleaded not guilty and denied wrongdoing. A judge dismissed the charges, ruling the special counsel who brought them was illegally appointed, and the Justice Department gave up appeals after Trump was elected in November.

In a related matter, Trump dismissed Colleen Shogan as the archivist of the United States, White House aide Sergio Gor posted on X Friday night.

Trump had said in early January that he would replace the head of the National Archives and Records Administration. The government agency drew his anger after it informed the Justice Department about issues with Trump's handling of classified documents. Shogan, the first woman in the post, wasn't the archivist of the United States at the time the issue emerged.

In his post on Biden, Trump cited the special counsel report last year into his handling of classified documents, saying, "The Hur Report revealed that Biden suffers from poor memory and, even in his prime, could not be trusted with sensitive information."

He ended his post by saying, "I will always protect our National Security — JOE, YOU'RE FIRED. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!" (AP)

Missing commuter plane found crashed on Alaska sea ice

JUNEAU, ALASKA, Feb 8: A small commuter plane that crashed in western Alaska on its way to the hub community of Nome was located Friday on sea ice and all 10 people on board died, authorities said.

Mike Salerno, a spokesperson for the U.S. Coast Guard, said rescuers were searching the aircraft's last known location by helicopter when they spotted the wreckage. They lowered two rescue swimmers to investigate. The Bering Air single-engine turboprop plane was traveling from Unalakleet on Thursday afternoon with nine passengers and a pilot, according to Alaska's Department of Public Safety.

The Cessna Caravan left Unalakleet at 2:37 p.m., and officials lost contact with it less than an hour later, David Olson, director of operations for Bering Air, has said. There was light snow and fog, with a temperature of 17 degrees (minus 8.3 Celsius), according to the National Weather Service.

Officials lost contact with the plane less than an hour later. The Coast Guard said the plane went missing about 30 miles (48 kilometers) southeast of Nome. The aircraft was 12 miles (19 kilometers) offshore, according to the Coast Guard said.

It was operating at its maximum passenger capacity, according to the airline's description of the plane.

Radar forensic data provided by the U.S. Civil Air Patrol indicated that about 3:18 p.m. Thursday, the plane had some kind of event which caused them to experience a rapid loss in elevation and a rapid loss in speed, Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Benjamin McIntyre-Coble said. What that event is, I can't speculate to.

McIntyre-Coble said he was unaware of any distress signals from the aircraft. Planes carry an emergency locating transmitter. If exposed to seawater, the device sends a signal to a satellite, which then re-

lays that message back to the Coast Guard to indicate an aircraft may be in distress. There have been no such messages received by the Coast Guard, he said.

All 10 people on board the plane were adults, and the flight was a regularly scheduled commuter trip, according to Lt. Ben Endres of the Alaska State Troopers.

The plane's disappearance marks the third major U.S. aviation mishap in eight days. A commercial jetliner and an Army helicopter collided near the nation's capital on January 29, killing 67 people. A medical transportation plane crashed in Philadelphia on January 31, killing the six people on board and another person on the ground.

Most Alaska communities are not connected to the state's main road system, and airplanes are often the only option for travel of any distance in rural areas, particularly in winter. The region is prone to sudden snow squalls and high winds in the winter, and residents were told not to form their own search parties because the weather was too dangerous.

Bering Air serves 32 villages in western Alaska from hubs in Nome, Kotzebue and Unalakleet. Most destinations receive twice-daily scheduled flights Monday through Saturday. Two Bering Air planes appeared to be searching in a grid pattern just off the coastline Friday morning, according to the flight tracking service FlightRadar24.

Local, state and federal agencies assisted in the search effort, flying over stretches of ice-dotted waters and scouring miles of frozen tundra.

The National Guard was approved to fly a helicopter Friday morning, and the Coast Guard and others also were taking part in aerial search efforts. The Coast Guard planned to drop a buoy to help track the movement of sea ice, and a ground crew on snowmobiles headed along the coast and farther inland. (AP)

Several PTI leaders arrested as party marks 'Black Day'

ISLAMABAD, Feb 8: Several Pakistani leaders of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) were arrested as the party on Saturday held rallies to mark February 8 as the 'Black Day' against the alleged rigging of general elections last year.

The PTI has planned its main rally in Swabi, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where the party is in power. It has also asked its workers and supporters to protest across the country.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said the 'Black Day' was being marked in protest against the "historic theft of the people's mandate".

"Black Day will be observed every year and this year a rally will be held in Swabi on February 8," Gandapur said, calling PTI supporters and workers to protest in

every city in Pakistan.

"Record your protest wherever you are," Gandapur said.

Addressing the government's alleged involvement in last year's November 26 and May 9, 2023, events, Gandapur claimed the ruling party was afraid to form a judicial commission to investigate these matters.

The government has responded by imposing Section 144 in Islamabad and other areas, which bans all political assemblies, gatherings, sit-ins, rallies, and other activities "to maintain law and order."

Section 144 has also been imposed across Punjab. A Home Department spokesperson said the decision was taken to maintain law and order and protect human lives and property. He maintained that "public processions and sit-ins can be soft targets for terrorists".

The spokesperson said the deci-

Judge blocks Trump from placing thousands of USAID workers on leave and giving them 30-day deadline

WASHINGTON, Feb 8: A federal judge on Friday dealt President Donald Trump and billionaire ally Elon Musk their first big setback in their dismantling of the US Agency for International Development, ordering a temporary halt to plans to pull thousands of agency staffers off the job.

US District Judge Carl Nichols, a Trump appointee, also agreed to block an order that would have given the thousands of overseas USAID workers the administration wanted to place on abrupt administrative leave just 30 days to move families and households back to the US on government expense.

Both moves would have exposed the US workers and their spouses and children to unwarranted risk and expense, the judge said.

Nichols pointed to accounts from workers abroad that the Trump administration, in its rush to shut down the agency and its programs abroad, had

cut some workers off from government emails and other communication systems they needed to reach the US government in case of a health or safety emergency.

The Associated Press reported earlier that USAID contractors in the Middle East and elsewhere had found even panic button apps wiped off their mobile phones or disabled when the administration abruptly furloughed them.

Administrative leave in Syria is not the same as administrative leave in Bethesda, the judge said in his order Friday night.

In agreeing to stop the 30-day deadline given USAID staffers to return home at government expense, Nichols cited statements from agency employees who had no home to go to in the US after decades abroad, who faced pulling children with special needs out of school midyear, and had other difficulties.

But the judge declined a request from two federal employee associations to grant a temporary block on a Trump administration funding freeze that has shut down the six-decade-old agency and its work, pending more hearings on the workers' lawsuit.

Nichols stressed in the hearing earlier Friday on the request to pause the Trump administration's actions that his order was not a decision on the employees' request to roll back the administration's swiftly moving destruction of the agency.

CLOSE IT DOWN. Trump said on social media of USAID before the judge's ruling.

The American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees argue that Trump lacks the authority to shut down the agency without approval from Congress. Democratic lawmakers have made the same argument. (AP)

Chemical weapons watchdog delegation meets with Syria's new leaders

BEIRUT, Feb 8: A delegation from the global chemical weapons watchdog arrived in Damascus Saturday to meet with Syria's new leaders for the first time since the fall of former President Bashar Assad.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons had found evidence of repeated use of chemical weapons by Assad's government during Syria's nearly 14-year civil war.

Syria joined the OPCW in 2013 to ward off the threat of airstrikes in response to a chemical attack on the outskirts of Damascus, and Assad denied using chemical weapons. Last year, the organisation also found the Islamic State group had used mustard gas against the town of Marea.

The delegation, which was set to meet with President Ahmed al-Sharaa and Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, includes technical experts who hope to make contact with their Syrian counterparts. Since the overthrow of the Assad government, the Qatari embassy in The Hague has acted as the intermediary between the new leadership and the OPCW.

The fate of the country's stockpile of toxic chemicals spurred an emergency meeting by the OPCW days after Assad was overthrown in a lightning rebel offensive in December. The organisation told Syria's new rulers that they must comply with rules to safeguard and destroy dangerous substances, such as chlorine gas. (AP)

Who are the hostages released by Hamas as part of ceasefire in Gaza?

JERUSALEM, Feb 8: Three men held hostage in the Gaza Strip for more than 16 months were freed Saturday, bringing to 21 the number of captives released by militants since the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas began January 19.

Those released were Eli Sharabi, Or Levy and Ohad Ben Ami — three Israeli civilians taken by Hamas militants from southern Israel in their shock attack on October 7, 2023.

In the first phase of the ceasefire, 33 Israeli hostages in Gaza will be released in exchange for almost 2,000 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

The ceasefire and release of hostages has sparked both hope and fear among Israelis. Many worry that the deal could collapse before all the hostages return, or that those released will arrive in poor health. Others worry that the number of captives who have died is higher than expected.

Hamas-led militants took 251 hostages during their October 7, 2023, attack that launched the war in Gaza. More than 70 hostages remain

in Gaza, although nearly half are believed to be dead. The others were released, rescued, or their bodies were recovered.

Israel's military campaign has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were fighters but says more than half were women or children.

Here's a look at the hostages released so far:

Eli Sharabi, 52

Eli Sharabi was taken captive by the militants from Kibbutz Beeri, a communal farm that was one of the hardest hit in the Hamas attack. His British-born wife, Lianne, and their teenage daughters, Noiya and Yahel, were killed by militants while hiding in their safe room. His brother, Yossi Sharabi, who lived next door, was killed in captivity. Hamas militants are holding his body, according to the group representing the families of the hostages.

Sharabi's home bore marks from the attack months later. Associated Press journalists saw bullet holes in the walls and the shattered oven and



TV screens. Nearby homes were torched by militants and their roofs blasted off during fighting on October 7.

Ohad Ben Ami, 56
Ohad Ben Ami, a father to three, was kidnapped with his wife, Raz, from Kibbutz Beeri, where he was an accountant. Raz Ben Ami was released during the weeklong ceasefire in November 2023. The group representing the families of the hostages described Ben Ami as a "passionate nature enthusiast" and the "cornerstone of his family."

Or Levy, 34
Or Levy was pulled out by the militants from a bomb shelter near the Nova music festival in southern Israel. His wife, Einav Levy, was killed during the attack. Their son Almog, now 3, has been in the care of relatives since the assault.

Levy was kidnapped alongside American-Israeli Hersh Goldberg-Polin as well as two other hostages — Eliya Cohen and Alon Ohel. Goldberg-Polin, whose parents staged a high-profile campaign for his release, was killed in Hamas cap-

tivity. Levy is from the city of Rishon LeZion, where he worked as a computer programmer for a startup.

Yarden Bibas, 35

The release of Yarden Bibas has dimmed hopes that his wife and children were still alive in Gaza.

Hamas has claimed that the three were killed in an Israeli airstrike. Israel has not confirmed that, but a military spokesperson said last week that the government was "extremely concerned" about their welfare.

Yarden Bibas was taken from Kibbutz Nir Oz on October 7, 2023. Photos from the abduction show him wounded, bleeding from the head.

One of his two boys, Kfir, the youngest hostage, has come to represent the helplessness and anger over the hostage crisis.

Keith Siegel, 65

Keith Siegel, from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was abducted with his wife, Aviva Siegel, from Kibbutz Kfar Aza, a communal farming village heavily damaged by the attack. She was freed during the November 2023 ceasefire deal, and has campaigned across the world for the release of her

husband and other hostages. Aviva Siegel said that she was held hostage with her husband during her 51 days in captivity. She said she took comfort from having her husband by her side as they were moved from tunnel to tunnel, the two given almost no food or water. Her parting words to him were, "Be strong for me." (AP)

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Party leadership will decide next CM of Delhi: Parvesh Verma



NEW DELHI, Feb 8: BJP's Parvesh Verma, who defeated former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal from the New Delhi constituency, said the party's leadership will decide the next chief minister of Delhi.

Parvesh Verma, former Delhi CM Sahib Singh Verma's son, also thanked people and called it "the victory of the people of the national capital".

"This is not just my victory, this is the victory of the people of Delhi, who chose truth over lies, governance over gimmicks, and development over deception. I humbly thank every voter who placed their trust in me.

"Under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and BJP national president JP Nadda, we

will work tirelessly to bring a real change in Delhi. This mandate is a clear message that people want honest, transparent, and development-driven politics. My commitment to serve with integrity and dedication remains unwavering," Verma said.

Verma, former MP of West Delhi constituency, further said that a "new chapter began for Delhi" and together, "we will build a brighter future."

Verma alleged that Kejriwal did not work in Delhi in last 11 years.

"All the work was on paper and advertisements. The people of Delhi have shown their faith in Modi. This is the win of Modi's work he has done in Delhi and country. I thank Nadda, Shah and the party leadership which brought a good manifesto. The priority would be cleaning the Yamuna river, pollution level in Delhi, giving employment, removing traffic congestion, work in villages as well as colonies etc.," he added.

AAP national convener Kejriwal lost the New Delhi seat to Verma by a margin of 4,089 votes. Kejriwal won this seat in 2013, 2015, and 2020. (PTI)

Delhi gov't, LG likely to have good relations now; will help service delivery



NEW DELHI, Feb 8: The BJP's return to power in Delhi after over 26 years is expected to pave the way for a government that will have cordial and cooperative relations with the Lt Governor's office.

Overall governance and public service delivery are likely to see major improvements, according to leaders of the BJP.

The 10-year rule of the outgoing Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi was marked by frequent run-ins with successive LGs - incumbent VK Saxena and his predecessors Anil Baijal and Najeeb Jung - leading to obstructions in administration and delivery of services.

The LG is appointed by the president on the advice of the central government.

Saxena, after taking over as Delhi LG in May 2022, had frequent confrontations with the AAP government on sanitation issues, Yamuna pollution levels, infrastructure and other matters related to policy and governance.

The strained relations between the two sides had a major impact on governance, with the LG, through his control over the services department and bureaucracy, kept the AAP dispensation on a tight leash. The AAP hit back defiantly, impeding even day-to-day functioning of the government.

The Lt Governor, being the head of the Delhi government, holds a position of authority, said a senior BJP leader.

"It means the elected dispensation in Delhi must work not only in cooperation with him but also at

tach requisite dignity to his constitutional office, a fact sorely neglected by the AAP," he said.

The BJP will rule both at the Centre and now in Delhi - the fine balancing act with the LG office will no longer be an issue, he asserted.

Solving persistent issues like Yamuna pollution, deteriorating civil infrastructure like roads, water supply, drainage and public transport are likely to receive a boost, besides a general upswing in overall governance and public service delivery, he added.

The recurring issue of jurisdictional authority between the LG and the elected government, which remained a major bone of contention when AAP was in power, is also likely to take a back seat now.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said that his party respects constitutional authorities and always aims to serve the people by ensuring coordination and cooperation with them.

"The LG has always worked to ensure the interests of the people of Delhi, which is also the aim of the BJP. Under his guidance, our government in Delhi will ensure providing good quality services and facilities to the people," Sachdeva said.

Taking everyone together, the BJP will now work to make Delhi a "developed capital" as per its poll manifesto, he asserted.

The BJP, which has been out of power in Delhi since 1998, has won the assembly polls in Delhi, dismantling the decade-long political dominance of the AAP.

According to the latest Election Commission figures, the BJP won 44 seats and is leading on four others. The AAP managed to bag 21 seats and is leading on one. The Congress failed to win a single seat in the Delhi assembly elections for the third time in a row. (PTI)

Bond with Ladakh will always remain strong: J-K CM Abdullah

'Maps may change, but changing maps will not affect our relationship with you'

JAMMU, Feb 8: Stressing the historical ties between Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday reaffirmed that administrative reorganisation would not alter the deep-rooted relationship between the two regions.

Ladakh was carved out as a separate Union Territory from Jammu and Kashmir on October 31, 2019, following abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the erstwhile state under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act in August, 2019.

"Maps may change, but changing maps will not affect our relationship with you. Our bond with Ladakh is centuries old, and it will remain strong," the chief minister said.

Abdullah chaired a high-level meeting here with a delegation from the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Kargil and senior officers of Jammu and Kashmir to discuss and resolve various concerns of students, patients and residents of Ladakh.

The meeting was attended by Deputy chief minister Surinder Choudhary, minister for Jal Shakti Javed Ahmed Rana, chief secretary Atul Dullo, additional chief secre-



tary Education Shatmanu, additional chief secretary to chief minister Dheeraj Gupta, and administrative secretaries from the departments of Social Welfare, Health and Medical Education, and Administrative Reforms, Inspections (ARI) and Trainings.

Representing LAHDC Kargil, the delegation was led by chairman and chief executive councillor Mohd Jaffer Akhoo, alongside Feroz Ahmad Khan and other councillors.

The delegation also included Member of Parliament Ladakh Haji Mohd Haneeefa Jan and senior National Conference leader and former minister Qamar Ali Akhoo, an official spokesperson said. Addressing the delegation,

Shakti assured the delegation that all their concerns related to roads, drinking water and other essential services would be addressed on priority.

Earlier, the Kargil delegation highlighted several pressing issues, including the appointment of nodal officers for patients referred to SKIMS Soura and other super-specialty hospitals in Srinagar.

They also raised concerns about the selection and training of paramedical students in J-K's paramedical training institutes, the extension of existing student hostels in Srinagar and Jammu, and the need for more admissions of Ladakh students in various colleges and universities of J-K, the officials said.

Additionally, they sought tourism promotion for Kargil and other areas of Ladakh UT through events organised in Srinagar.

Expressing their gratitude, the delegation thanked the chief minister for his patient hearing and proactive approach in addressing their concerns.

They appreciated the commitment of the J-K government towards ensuring better facilities and opportunities for the people of Ladakh, the officials said. (PTI)

INDIA bloc loses steam as BJP in driver's seat after Delhi poll results



but preventing the saffron party from getting a majority on its own was no mean feat.

The INDIA bloc parties had repeatedly insisted that the alliance was for national polls and later it would be on a state-by-state basis. However, it had not envisioned that the electoral fights in the states could get nasty, leading to cracks in the overall alliance. The Delhi polls have been a case in point.

The Congress, the largest constituent of the INDIA bloc, ran a high-decibel campaign against AAP, leading to a lot of bad blood between the two parties.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra launched a no-holds-barred attack on AAP and its convener Arvind Kejriwal with jibes like "ar-

chitect of the liquor scam" and "sheesh mahal" being a regular feature in their campaign speeches.

The INDIA bloc parties such as the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Trinamool Congress (TMC), though not having stakes in Delhi, threw their weight behind AAP on the grounds that it was best-suited to take on the BJP.

The distance between the Congress and smaller constituents of the INDIA bloc is growing as we saw in the Haryana polls when the Congress and AAP failed to strike an alliance and in Delhi where the two parties took on each other.

Though the INDIA bloc seems to be intact for the Bihar polls, the West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh elections in the coming years would test the alliance again as all constituents would find it difficult to come together.

The unease in the bloc and the consequences of bickering were being felt with many leaders voicing their disappointment with the

result.

Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah passed a snide remark on the opposition parties over the Delhi assembly polls.

"Aur lado aapas mein!!! (Keep on fighting each other)," Abdullah posted on X with a meme.

Expressing strong disappointment, the CPI(M) and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) said the differences in the INDIA bloc paved the way for the saffron party's good show in the national capital.

The Marxist party vehemently attacked the Congress and accused them of facilitating the victory of the BJP in Delhi.

The IUML, however, opted not to directly criticise the grand-old party but made it clear that if the partners of the INDIA bloc had fought the election unitedly, they could have successfully resisted the saffron party from coming to power. (PTI)

Delhi polls: Corruption allegations, poor infrastructure, governance issues haunt AAP

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: Allegations of corruption against its leaders, constant bickering with the lieutenant governor over governance issues and a spirited campaign conducted by the BJP were enough to ensure a rout of the AAP in the Delhi Assembly polls, the results of which were declared on Saturday.

What will be more hurtful for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is the fact that its top guns - Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain - suffered defeats in their constituencies, a major setback for the party that had come to power on the anti-corruption plank.

The party will have a lot to introspect in the coming days as it will be for the first time since its inception that it will be serving as the opposition in the national capital.

The AAP was confident of retaining power in Delhi but corruption allegations against its top leaders and a rampant campaign by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), tagging Kejriwal and other leaders as corrupt, dented its image.

The AAP that had won 67 and 62 seats in the 2015 and 2020 Assembly polls respectively was restricted to only 22 seats this time.

The "kattar imandaar" image of the party took a major beating due to the arrest of its senior leaders in various corruption cases.

The BJP's constant attacks on AAP supreme Kejriwal over the issue of renovation of the chief minister's residence, which it referred to as Sheesh Mahal, also paved the way for the party's loss in the keenly-contested polls.

Former Delhi chief minister Kejriwal, former deputy chief minister Sisodia and AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh were arrested in connection with the excise-policy case, while Jain was arrested in another money-laundering case by the ED.

Even though the party and its leaders called these arrests the results of a conspiracy and witch hunt by the BJP, the voters, it seems, were not convinced.

The arrests of Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain not only hit governance in Delhi but also put a spanner in the political affairs of the AAP.

Other top leaders of the party also lost their seats in close contests. Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, who was the party's go-to person for firefighting and talking about the hindrances in governance, lost the Greater Kailash seat.

The defeats of Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain mean that the AAP cannot even claim moral victory in the polls that have seen the BJP returning to power in Delhi after a gap of more than 26 years.

Another factor that might have tilted the scales in favour of the BJP was the AAP government's constant tussle with Delhi LG V K Saxena over governance issues.

Right from the cleaning of drains to stopping schemes like the doorstep delivery of services, the AAP government would always lay the blame on the LG or the BJP-led Centre for creating obstacles in governance.

The arrests of Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain brought governance to a standstill in the capital. Kejriwal did not resign from the chief minister's post after he was arrested by the ED in March last year, with the party saying that he did not cover before the Centre's witch hunt.

After being released from prison on bail, Kejriwal stepped down as the chief minister, saying he will return to the post only if people give him a "certificate of honesty".

Following Saturday's defeat, Kejriwal said the AAP accepts the mandate with humility and stressed that it will not only play the role of a constructive opposition but will also be available to people in times of need.

"We accept the people's mandate with humility. I congratulate the BJP for its victory and also hope that it will fulfil the expectations of the people of Delhi," he said.

Reflecting on the work done by the AAP in Delhi in the last 10 years, the former chief minister said, "We have done a lot of work in education, water, electricity, infrastructure to provide relief to Delhiites."

While the BJP said people chose to make Delhi "AAP-da" (disaster) free, the Congress called the results a referendum on Kejriwal and his party. (PTI)

Modi govt spent ₹ 11 lakh crore on infrastructure development in one year: Scindia

GWALIOR (MP), Feb 8: Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday said the Modi government has spent ₹ 11 lakh crore on infrastructure development in the last one year, while the Congress-led UPA dispensation used to spend only ₹ 2 lakh crore on this front annually.

Addressing a press conference to highlight various provisions made in the recently-presented Union Budget, he said the budget will make India self-reliant and aims to establish it as a 'Vishwaguru' (world leader) by 2047.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always said that he considers poor, farmers, women and youth as the only four castes in our country, and this budget focuses on these four categories," he said.

"In the last one year, ₹ 11 lakh crore have been spent on infrastructure. The UPA used to spend only ₹ 2 lakh crore on this front," the minister of Communications said.

According to him, railway lines of 2,031 km were laid and 6,000 km-long national highways were constructed in the past one year.

In the telecom sector, towers have been in-

stalled across 10,700 villages to improve connectivity, he said.

"In the past, 90 per cent phones in India used to be imported. Now, 90 per cent phones are being manufactured in India and units of ₹ 1.28 lakh crore are being exported," he said.

The global growth rate is stuck at 3.2 per cent, while that of India is 6.5 per cent, Scindia added.

There was a burden of non-performing assets (NPA) on banks, which was left behind as a legacy by the Congress and the UPA government, he said.

"In 2014, the NPA was 11.5 per cent, which has now come down to 2.6 per cent," he said, adding that the NDA government has improved the financial condition of the country.

India's exports have gone up to USD 600 billion and the foreign exchange reserves are pegged at USD 705 billion. The country has the fourth largest foreign exchange reserves in the whole world, the minister said.

"There has been a 3.5 per cent growth in the agriculture sector and Madhya Pradesh has made the highest contribution, which has grown by 6.5 per cent," he said. (PTI)

AIMIM candidates in Okhla, Mustafabad emerge as 2nd runner up

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: The Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM, which contested only two seats in the Delhi Assembly elections - Okhla and Mustafabad - managed to make its presence felt, with both of its candidates emerging as second runners-up.

Both Shifa Ur Rehman Khan and Tahir Hussain, accused in the 2020 Delhi riots and currently in jail, cut into the BJP and AAP's vote share and performed better than Congress, which was relegated to fourth place.

According to the Election Commission, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate Amanatullah Khan won in Okhla with a margin of 23,639 votes, while BJP candidate Manish Chaudhary came second with 65,304 votes. Shifa Ur Rehman Khan, who is currently lodged in Tihar Jail, secured 39,558 votes.

Similarly, in Mustafabad, AIMIM candidate Tahir Hussain secured 35,474 votes and finished as the second runner-up in the Assembly race.

BJP candidate Mohan Singh Bisht won the Mustafabad seat, defeating AAP's Adeel Ahmad Khan by a margin of 17,578 votes.

In both constituencies, Congress trailed in fourth place, with the party's candidate Ali Mehdi receiving 11,763 votes in Mustafabad and Ariba Khan securing 12,739 votes in Okhla.

Over 50 people were killed and scores injured in the riots, which broke out in February 2020 following clashes between supporters and opponents of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF THE PROGRAMME OFFICER, DIVISIONAL ICDS CELL KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL DIPHU - 782460

No.PO(ICDS)KA/37/Esst./2024-25/1883 Dated: 07/02/2025

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

POSTPONEMENT OF WRITTEN TEST/EXAMINATION FOR GRADE-III POSTS STATISTICAL ASSISTANT UNDER JCDS IN KARBI ANGLONG

It is for general information to the concerned candidates that the Written Test/Examination for the posts of Statistical Assistant under ICDS which is scheduled to be held on 09/02/2025 is hereby postponed due to some unavoidable circumstances and re-scheduled on 23/02/2025 at the same venue from 9:30 AM to 1:30 PM. The written test for the post of Supervisor and LDA, will be held as per previous circular at the same venue and same time. All other terms & conditions will remain same.

Sd/
Programme Officer
Divisional ICDS cell, Diphu
Karbi Anglong

Memo No.PO(ICDS)KA/37/Esst./2024-25/ Dated: 07/02/2025

SUPPLY, INSTALLATION, COMMISSIONING, TESTING AND PROVIDING OF ADDITIONAL WATER FILLING ARRANGEMENT

E-TENDER NOTICE NO. GHY-CDO-RSP-WFA-24-25; dated: 05-02-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work:
Tender No. GHY-CDO-RSP-WFA-24-25. Name of work: Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Testing and Providing of additional water filling arrangement of 1100 coaches of NFR. **Advertised Value:** ₹2,08,99,989/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹2,54,500/-; **Bidding Start Date:** 12-02-2025; **E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 26-02-2025.** The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in.

Sr. CDO, Guwahati
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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ASSISTANCE TO MAINTENANCE OF WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/13 of 2025 Dated: 06-02-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of Item:** Assistance to maintenance of water supply system at Manderisa, Hatikhali, Dibolong, Langting, Dinakho, MPP, Malbang, Daotuhaja, (BG), Daotuhaja (Old), Phiding (BG), Phiding (Old), Mahur, Migrendisa, New Hailong, Mahur, Lumur, New Harangajao, Dikocherra, Damchura under jurisdiction of Sr. DEN/III/Lumding (For a period of 1 year). **Tender Value:** ₹1,02,02,480/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹2,01,000/-; **Date & Time of closing of Tender:** 15.00 hrs. of 28-02-2025 & will be opened at 15.00 hrs. of 29-02-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 28-02-2025. In website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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EMERGENCY TRAFFIC RESTORATION & PREVENTIVE PRE MONSOON MAINTENANCE WORKS

E-Tender Notice No. SCL-Engg-16-2025 Dated: 04-02-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of Item:** Emergency Traffic restoration & Preventive pre monsoon Maintenance works such as land slide, sinkage, slope failure, bank settlement, repairs/cleaning of catch water drain/Track side drains etc. by deploying machineries and miscellaneous related repairing works in Kumarghat Agartala & Agartala- Sabroom Section under jurisdiction of ADEN/Agartala for a period of 2 years. **Tender Value:** ₹3,58,16,071.42/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹3,29,100/-; **Date & Time of closing of Tender:** 15.00 hrs. of 03-03-2025 & will be opened at 15.00 hrs. of 04-03-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 03-03-2025. In website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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Rohit's lean run, Kohli's return in focus as India eye series win over England



CUTTACK, Feb 8: The barren run of skipper Rohit Sharma and the selection conundrum that Virat Kohli's position poses are the towering obstacles in India's quest for a series win against England in the second ODI

here on Sunday. India had taken a 1-0 lead after their four-wicket win at Nagpur, but Kohli getting rested owing to a "sore right knee" had raised concerns about his fitness ahead of the Champions Trophy later this month. However, vice-captain Shubman Gill had indicated that Kohli could be back for the second match, which will be played at a venue where the latter made a match-winning 85 against the West Indies in 2019. Kohli had also travelled to Cuttack along with his teammates and he looked relaxed. The Indian team will certainly welcome that sign, but it also raises a challenge in terms of selection. Shreyas Iyer, who came in for Kohli at the last minute by his own admission, made a rollicking 36-ball 59 that has made dropping him an almost unthinkable act. If the past norms are followed, then Kohli will walk in for Shreyas, but it is more likely that Yashasvi Jaiswal could be the one who will have to make for the batting icon. It means that Gill might rejoin Rohit at the top, and Jaiswal did not have a

blazing match either at Nagpur. It remains to be seen how the team think tank led by Gautam Gambhir, which has shown a penchant for left-right combination, navigates this situation. Combination questions apart, Koli too is in need of runs, and he will need a good outing here if he indeed makes a return. Kohli's form has been under scrutiny in recent months, especially after his struggles in Australia, where he repeatedly nicked deliveries to the slip cordon or wicketkeeper. His last competitive outing — for Delhi in the Ranji Trophy — too was a low-yielding one, managing just six before getting bowled by Railways pacer Himanshu Sangwan. But One-day cricket is Kohli's staple format, and the 36-year-old needs just 94 runs to become the third batter to reach 14,000 runs in the format after Sachin Tendulkar (18,426) and Kumar Sangakkara (14,234). Having played 283 ODI innings, Kohli can also become the fastest to this milestone ahead of Tendulkar (350 innings) and Sangakkara (378). Rohit's struggles continued as he per-

ished for just two in the first ODI, failing to shake off the disastrous run in the Test series against Australia. His dismissal -- a mis-timed lofted shot off Liam Livingstone that ballooned to midwicket -- reflected his desperation for runs. The Mumbai man has not scored a fifty in any format since August last year when he made 64 against Sri Lanka in Colombo in the third match. If Rohit fails to get going in these two ODIs against England, it could raise deeper concerns about his form and future. India's bowling attack looks settled with fit-again pacer Mohammed Shami gradually settling in following his international comeback. Having started off with a maiden, Shami slowly got into the scheme of things in Nagpur and dictated the terms in the middle overs, returning with a fine 1/38 from his eight overs. Debutant Harshit Rana was taken apart by Phil Salt initially, and the young pacer ended up as the most expensive bowler at Nagpur, but he made crucial strikes, dismissing Ben Duckett and Harry Brook in the same over to turn the momentum in India's

favour. With fitness concerns lingering over lead pacer Jasprit Bumrah, Rana has an outside chance to push for his case with another fruitful outing. For Jos Buttler's men this would be a make-or-break match as they might look to change their downright aggressive batting approach with a much more sensible one. England's success will depend on how their attacking template holds up against India's quality spinners, on a track here that could offer them appreciable help. **Teams:** **India:** Rohit Sharma (c), Shubman Gill (v-c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (WK), Rishabh Pant (WK), Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohd. Shami, Arshdeep Singh and Varun Chakaravathy. **England:** Jos Buttler (c), Harry Brook, Ben Duckett, Joe Root, Philip Salt, Jamie Smith, Jacob Bethell, Brydon Carse, Liam Livingstone, Jamie Overton, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Saqib Mahmood, Adil Rashid and Mark Wood. Match starts 1:30pm IST. (PTI)

District-level swimmers selection completed in Sualkuchi

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 8: As part of the Assam government's Khel Maharan 2 initiative, priority is being given to water sports, and district-level selection processes for swimming athletes have begun across all districts. In this regard, the Kamrup district swimming athlete selection was held on Saturday in Sualkuchi. The event commenced at 10 am, inaugurated by Mukuteswar Goswami, Publicity Secretary of the Assam Swimming Association and Secretary of Kamrup District Swimming Association. In his inaugural speech, Goswami praised Assam chief minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma for prioritizing the development of water sports. Dr. Kartik Medhi, Executive President of the Kamrup District Sports Association, extended his best wishes to the athletes and encouraged them to engage in rigorous training. Saturday's selection process was con-

ducted under the supervision of the District Sports Officer's office, led by Pankaj Bhargali, along with Assam Swimming Association representatives Mukuteswar Goswami and Aminesh Haloi. Hundreds of athletes from different parts of Kamrup district participated in the selection event. The selected athletes will now compete in the regional-level competition scheduled for January 10. Similarly, swimming competitions under Khel Maharan are being held across all districts, including Guwahati, under the initiative of the Assam Swimming Association. Bhaskar Das, Secretary of the Assam Swimming Association, expressed gratitude to the Chief Minister through the Sports Department for giving special priority to water sports. He also stated that in the coming days, hidden talents from Assam's interior regions will be able to compete in international events like the Olympics, bringing pride to the state.

KHEL MAHARAN 2.0

Wicketkeeper Alex Carey stars as Australia take control of the 2nd Test against Sri Lanka

GALLE (SRI LANKA), Feb 8: Australia was edging towards a 2-0 series sweep over Sri Lanka after Alex Carey's breathtaking century moved the visitors into a formidable position in the second Test on Saturday. On Day 3, the visitors racked up an imposing 414 before being bowled out just before lunch, securing a first-innings lead of 157 runs. Sri Lanka lost the first test by an innings and 242 runs, also in Galle — Sri Lanka's worst defeat in test cricket. Carey was in scintillating touch, showcasing his mastery of the sweep shot to counter Sri Lanka's spin-heavy attack. As the hosts attempted to stifle the scoring by crowding the leg-side, Carey responded with audacious reverse sweeps, keeping the bowlers on the back foot. In the process, the Australian wicketkeeper carved out a career-best 156, the highest score by an Australian glove

man in Asia, eclipsing Adam Gilchrist's 144. Steve Smith, too, made his presence felt with a well-compiled 131 — his second century of the series. However, unlike Carey's assured stroke play, Smith had a few nervous moments early on. Once settled, though, he dug in, contributing to a mammoth 259-run partnership for the fourth wicket — the highest stand at that position by a visiting team in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's Prabath Jayasuriya was once again the standout bowler, claiming a five-wicket haul — the 11th of his brief yet prolific test career. Remarkably, nine of those have come in Galle, where he continues to thrive. Jayasuriya struck early in the day, dismissing both overnight batsmen in quick succession. Smith fell first, caught behind for 131, and two balls later, Josh Inglis was clean bowled. (AP)

District-level competitions for Khel Maharan 2.0 kicks off in Sonitpur

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 8: The much-anticipated district-level competitions of Sonitpur district for Khel Maharan 2.0 commenced on Saturday with great enthusiasm at the playground in front of Tezpur Academy H.S. School. The event was inaugurated by the MLA of Tezpur LAC, Prithiraj Rava. District Commissioner Ankur Bharali delivered the welcome address, highlighting the invaluable platform provided by the Assam government through Khel Maharan to unearth hidden sporting talents from the grassroots level. He commended the successful organization of the Gaon Panchayat and LAC-level games and urged the participants to showcase their talents, encouraging them to excel and bring laurels to the district. The ceremonial torch of today's inauguration ceremony was lit by distinguished athletes Nikhamoni Bora, Assam's first certified female sailor and multi-medal winner in windsurfing and kiteboarding, alongside Tania Choudhury, an international lawn

bowler. Approximately 1,200 players are expected to participate in the district-level competitions scheduled from 8th to 10th February 2025. The opening ceremony featured a chorus rendition of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika's song "Ei Prithibi Ek Krirangan", a Pipe Band display by SSB FTR HQ, Tezpur, a yoga performance coordinated by the District Sports Office, an ethnic dance fusion organized by the District Cultural Office, and a March Past led by the 73 Assam Girls Indep. Coy NCC, Tezpur. Several esteemed dignitaries graced the occasion, including Tezpur Municipal Board Chairperson Ramen Tamuli, District Development Commissioner Lakhinandan Saharia, Co-District Commissioner of Naduar Raj Boraiah, and District Sports Officer Pranjal Dehingia. The event also witnessed the enthusiastic presence of sports enthusiasts, veteran sports-persons, members of sports associations, school students, and local officials, marking the beginning of an exciting sporting event aimed at fostering talent and sportsmanship.



GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
Department of Health & Family Welfare



NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION
एक ही मकसद है - स्वस्थता

Inauguration of Garubandha Model Hospital Missamari, Sonitpur





Inaugurated by
Shri Ashok Singhal
Minister, Health & Family Welfare etc., Assam

— In august presence of —
Shri Ganesh Kumar Limbu
MLA, Borchalla LAC

Date : 9 February 2025 | Venue : Missamari, Sonitpur

SALIENT FEATURES

<p>Project Amount : Rs.5.98 Crore</p> <p>1) Main Hospital Building:</p> <p>A) Provisions in Hospital:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Registration and Reception * 8 nos. OPD rooms * Family Welfare clinic * 2 bed Aseptic Labour room with baby corner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 3 bed (NSU) room * 1 bed Septic Delivery room * Main O.T. * Sterilization room * Pharmacy & Store * 4 bed Emergency ward * Minor O.T. * Examination & Treatment area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * X-Ray room * Ultrasound room, laboratory with sample collection room * 2 nos. Female General ward (Total= 12 bed) * 2 nos. Male General ward (Total= 12 bed) * 4 Nos. of Paying cabins * Kitchen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 2 bed isolation ward <p>2) Residential Accommodation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) 4 nos. Doctor's Quarter ii) 4 nos. Nurse's Quarter
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(NHM/D/2024-25/538)