

NOTICE

This is to inform our readers, hawkers and publishers that The Hills Times will remain closed on March 14 on the occasion of Holi.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude for your support, and wish you a very Happy and Safe Holi.

Editor
The Hills Times



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USTM chancellor produced in Tezpur court



GUWAHATI, March 13: The chancellor of Meghalaya's University of Science and Technology, Mahbubul Haque arrested for allegedly promising students to allow unfair means in exams, was Thursday produced before the Sonitpur chief judicial magistrate's Court at Tezpur, following his arrest by the district police.

CJM H J Kashyap heard the pleas of both Haque's lawyer and the public prosecutor, but was yet to announce his order.

The Gauhati High Court had on March 3 granted bail to Haque in connection with the first case registered in Sribhum, as well as the second one in the same district on Wednesday.

The high court also restrained his arrest in three other cases in Gossaigaon, Kokrajhar and Barpeta, but the Sonitpur police arrested him in connection with another case registered in the district.

Haque, along with five teachers of a school in Patharkandi of Sribhum district, were arrested on February 22 from Guwahati and sent to 14 days' judicial custody.

He was brought to Guwahati on February 28 from Sribhum at Dispur police station and later taken to his residence at Ghoramara area of the city.

The USTM chancellor, who

also heads the ERD Foundation, operates various educational institutions, including a school at Patharkandi, was later taken back to Sribhum.

Five teachers of the school were also arrested following allegations that students from other districts were appearing for their class 12 CBSE board exams there, following assurance of use of unfair means for them to score high marks.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had earlier remarked that the USTM Chancellor will be in jail for a long time.

Sarma had also alleged that Haque is a "big fraud, his entire background is fraud".

Haque was embroiled in a controversy last year, too, over his OBC certificate, which he had obtained "fraudulently" in Sribhum district in the 1990s.

Sarma had said in August that a police case would be registered against the USTM chancellor for allegedly fraudulently obtaining the OBC certificate, which was cancelled subsequently.

The CM had also held USTM and Haque responsible for "flood jihad" against Guwahati, claiming that the water flowing down from the varsity campus, which is located on a hill adjacent to the city, leads to massive flooding. (PTI)

Assam women SHG members to help geo-tag beneficiaries for PMAY-G houses: CM Preliminary survey to be conducted by 'Jeevika Sakhis'

GUWAHATI, March 13: The Assam government will involve women from self-help groups for geo-tagging beneficiaries for allotment of houses under the Prime Minister Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G). Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday.

"Assam will be the first state in the country to involve 'Jeevika Sakhis' in geo-tagging the locations of 'kutcha' houses. The data will then be uploaded for proper screening, ensuring that houses are allotted to the rightful beneficiaries," Sarma said at a press conference.

The CM clarified that geo-tagging will not be done initially by the Panchayat and Rural Development Department. Instead, Jeevika Sakhis from neighbouring villages — rather than the same village — will be responsible for the process, he added.

Additionally, individuals can self-geo-tag their homes by taking a photograph, adding their address, and submitting it for final verification by an employee from the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, he added.



"The preliminary survey will be conducted by 'Jeevika Sakhis' under the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLM) and uploaded on the Anvesha portal. This will help identify households that were left

out in previous surveys," the CM added.

Eligible beneficiaries under PMAY-G will include all homeless persons and households living in zero, one and two rooms with kutcha wall and kutcha/CGI sheets roof

while people living in houses with more than two rooms excluding kitchens, among other criterion, will be excluded from the list of beneficiaries, Sarma said.

In tea garden areas, all eligible beneficiaries will receive PMAY-G houses within the tea estates, regardless of their economic association with the tea garden authorities. This includes workers who have already been provided pucca quarters by garden management.

A gram sabha will be held in each village to sensitise potential beneficiaries about the survey. From March 17, Jeevika Sakhis will visit households to identify and verify potential beneficiaries, collect details in accordance with a provided questionnaire and upload the data along with a photograph of the potential beneficiary.

After the field survey, a second gram sabha will be held where the gram panchayat secretary will present an initial list of identified beneficiaries. The list will then be approved by the gram sabha and then displayed at the block development office and gram panchayats for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Four to Five satellites of ASSAMSAT to focus on different regions: Himanta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday confirmed that Assam's own satellite system, ASSAMSAT, announced in the recent state budget, will feature at least four to five satellites dedicated to different regions of the state.

In a social media post, the CM explained that ASSAMSAT will be an array of multiple satellites, with each focusing on a specific region of Assam. "Along with education and skill development, Assam's own satellite system will encourage greater private sector participation in the state," he added.

According to Sarma, the ASSAMSAT system will consist of four to five low Earth orbiting satellites. Each satellite will be assigned to regions like Barak Valley, Lower Assam, Upper Assam, and so on. The central command and



control center for ASSAMSAT will be based in Guwahati.

The chief minister outlined several benefits that ASSAMSAT will bring to the state. These include aiding disaster management and security by monitoring illegal infiltration and wildlife, as well as supporting developmental applications

such as agricultural land use tracking and road network monitoring.

In the recent state budget, Finance Minister Ajanta Neog announced the ambitious plan for Assam to have its own satellite system. To bolster technological advancement and scientific research in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP accuses Mamata of 'lying' over investment claims

NEW DELHI, March 13: The BJP on Thursday rejected as a "lie" West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's assertion that the state is a front-runner in receiving big industrial investment intentions, alleging that it ranks much lower in its share of actual investment.

Banerjee on Wednesday said the state has emerged as a front-runner in receiving concrete big industrial investment intentions.

Citing a report published by the central government's Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), the chief minister claimed Bengal has surpassed all the states in attracting (big) corporate industrial investment intentions in 2024.

BJP's co-incharge for the state, Amit Malviya, said in a post on X, "Stop lying Mamata Banerjee. Here is a fact check on West Bengal's Investment Intentions vs Ac-



tual Investment."

Citing official figures, he said West Bengal ranked fourth in investment intentions for January-November 2024, attracting proposals worth ₹ 39,133 crore (7.45 per cent of total investment intentions).

However, it saw a major gap in actual investments, ranking 14th in realised investments with only ₹ 3,735 crore (1.2 per cent of total investment) till November 2024, down from ₹ 4,930 crore in 2023, he added. He said the India Industrial Land (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Kuki-Zo Council lifts indefinite shutdown

IMPHAL/CHURACHANDPUR,

March 13: The Kuki-Zo Council in Manipur on Thursday lifted the indefinite shutdown in the hill areas imposed since March 9 midnight, but remains firm in opposing the free movement announced by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the council said in a statement.

"While the shutdown has been lifted from Thursday evening, it is imperative to clarify that the free movement, as announced by the Home Ministry, shall be vehemently opposed by the Kuki-Zo people, as it undermines and dilutes the justice process," the statement read.

On March 1, Shah had directed security forces to ensure free movement of people on all routes in Manipur from March 8 and also called for strict action against those creating obstructions. There has been an indefinite (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Partnerships orchestrated by PM to buy Trump goodwill: Cong

NEW DELHI, March 13: With both Airtel and Jio announcing partnerships with Starlink, the Congress on Thursday alleged that these have been orchestrated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi "to buy goodwill" with US President Donald Trump through Starlink's owner Elon Musk.

The opposition party also said many questions remain and the most important one relates to national security.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said **AIRTEL, JIO DEALS WITH STARLINK** a deal with that within literally 12 hours both Airtel and Jio have announced partnerships with Starlink, seemingly overcoming all their objections to its entry into India - which they have been voicing for quite some time.

"It is abundantly clear that these partnerships have been orchestrated by none other than the PM himself to buy goodwill with President Trump through Starlink's owner Mr. Elon Musk," Ramesh alleged.

"But many questions remain. Perhaps the most important one relates to national security. Who will have

the power to switch connectivity on or off when national security demands it? Will it be Starlink or its Indian partners? Will other satellite-based connectivity providers also be permitted and on what basis?" the Congress leader said on X.

And, of course, the much larger question of Tesla manufacturing in India remains, he added.

Is there some commitment to it now that Starlink's entry into India has been facilitated, Ramesh asked.

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Jio Platforms struck a deal with SpaceX, the aerospace company led by Musk, to bring Starlink's broadband internet services to India, a surprise move that follows months of bickering over how Musk's venture should be granted spectrum rights.

The deal with Musk - considered the right-hand man of US President Trump - came after telecom tycoon Sunil Bharti Mittal's Bharti Airtel signed a similar partnership deal with SpaceX.

Over the past few months, rivals Jio and Airtel had come together to demand an (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India ready to share experience of bridging gender divide via digital infrastructure: Union Minister

UNITED NATIONS, March 13: India has voiced its willingness to share with the world its experiences of using digital public infrastructure to bridge the gender digital divide, as top UN leaders lauded measures taken by the country towards scaling digital financial inclusion.

"India is moving ahead with women-led development, building a country where women lead the way as active architects by participating from conceptualisation to design, implementation and monitoring the measure that shapes India's development trajectory toward a developed nation," Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi said.

She was at the UN headquarters on Wednesday to attend an event organised on the sidelines of the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Devi addressed the Ministerial-level roundtable organised by India's Permanent Mission to the UN and UN Women on 'Digital & Financial Inclusion for women's empowerment' and 'Financing for Women empowerment - criticality of core resources'.

Underscoring the transformative power of digital public infrastructure to bridge the gender digital divide and build a resilient government system, Devi said "India is happy to share its experience with the world" and highlighted the critical need for resources to realise the vision of women-led development.

The Ministerial roundtable provided a platform to share experiences of Member States, especially from the Global South and hear their views on how UN Women can better leverage its mandate to provide effective and strategic support to Member States in delivering on their commitments on gender equality and women's rights and empowerment.

Devi is leading India's delegation at CSW, the world's largest annual conference focused on women's issues currently underway at the UN Headquarters. The 69th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women kicked off on March 10 and will run through March 21.

Devi highlighted that the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) developed in India has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NFR achieves 2nd position in train punctuality on single day

GUWAHATI, March 13: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) on Thursday said it has been ranked second in maintaining punctuality in running of trains in the country on a single day.

According to an official release, NFR secured the second-highest position in punctuality performance among all zones of the Indian Railways on Wednesday.

"Demonstrating its commitment towards timely operations, NFR operated 138 mail/express trains on the day, out of which 132 trains ran on time, achieving an impressive punctuality percentage of 95.65 per cent," it said.

A key factor behind this achievement is the successful implementation of the Control Office Application Integrated Data Logger system across almost all major stations within the NFR zone, its Chief Public Relations Officer Kapinjal Kishore Sharma said in the statement. "This system enables real-time tracking and analysis of train movements, facilitating (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Nutritionists are also being hired to help the students with diets IIT Guwahati unveils mental health initiatives to address student suicides

NEW DELHI, March 13: Ice-breaking sessions for freshers during their first week on campus, morning walks with faculty members, mandatory counselling sessions and comprehensive medical check-ups, and stress escape room workshops are part of IIT-Guwahati's plan to ensure students' mental wellbeing and prevent suicides.

The measures come after the institute faced massive protests last semester following back-to-back student suicides.



According to Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Guwahati Director Devendra Jalihal, the institute has chalked out a comprehensive plan to prevent suicides among students. "We have established a dedicated mental health and counselling system in the form of a Center for Holistic Wellbeing. SAATHI Coun-

sisting Club, a part of this centre consisting of student volunteers, supports fellow students in their mental and overall wellbeing with the help of professional counsellors," he told PTI.

"We are exploring roping in re-

tired army personnel as hostel special stewards who will routinely interact with the students to make them comfortable and share their observations with the counsellors. All of this will be done in a confidential manner and while ensuring

that the students do not feel intimidated or there is no violation of their privacy," Jalihal said.

Nutritionists are also being hired to help the students with diets that can help address anxiety and stress, he added. Faced by cases of student suicide, several IITs are taking different measures to address concerns over their mental health.

The alleged suicide of a third-year Computer Science student from Uttar Pradesh in September -- the fourth in 2024 -- had sparked protests by IIT-Guwahati students, demanding justice and proper mental health support for all.

Perumal Alagarsamy, the dean of student affairs at IIT-Guwahati, is spearheading the mental wellbeing initiatives on campus.

"We have decided that for the first week, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Creator of rupee symbol refuses to be drawn into controversy over new logo in TN

GUWAHATI, March 13: Hours after the Tamil Nadu government released a new rupee logo for the state budget, IIT Guwahati Professor D Udaya Kumar, who had designed the Indian rupee symbol, on Thursday refused to be drawn into the controversy over language and said it is a mere coincidence that his father was a DMK MLA.

The DMK government in the southern state has replaced the Devanagari rupee symbol with a Tamil letter in its logo for the budget 2025-26, which will be tabled in the Assembly on Friday. While the move drew the ire of the BJP, the ruling party wondered if any rule barred such a depiction.

"I don't have any reaction. It's the government which suddenly felt that there was a need for a change and they wanted to implement their own script. This is up to the state government. So, I don't have anything to say about that. It's entirely up to the government,"

Kumar told PTI.

Kumar's father N Dharmalingam was an MLA from the Rishivandiyam constituency in 1971 from the DMK party, which is in power in Tamil Nadu presently.

"My father was an MLA even before I was born. Now, he is old and living in my village, leading his life peacefully. It just happened to be a coincidence, probably I could have been somebody else as well," The professor said.

"It's just that he happened to be a DMK MLA and the DMK government changed the design. I do not see anything else beyond it as a pure coincidence which has happened," he said.

The logo for the state budget, released by the Tamil Nadu government on Thursday, carried 'ru', the first letter of the Tamil word 'Rubaa' which denotes the Indian currency in the vernacular language. The logo also had the caption "everything for all," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sensex falls for 5th session on selling in realty and auto shares

MUMBAI, March 13: Benchmark BSE Sensex reversed its early gains to close lower by 200 points on Thursday, marking its fifth straight session of losses due to selling in realty, IT and auto counters.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 200.85 points or 0.27 per cent to close at 73,828.91 with 22 of its constituents ending lower and eight with gains. The index opened higher and hit a high of 74,401.11 in the late morning session.

However, it failed to hold onto gains due to persistent selling in select bluechips and shed 259.17 points or 0.35 per cent to hit a low of 73,770.59 later.

The NSE Nifty fell 73.30 points or 0.33 per cent to settle at 22,397.20. In the session, the benchmark declined by 93.15 points or 0.41 per cent to hit an intraday low of 22,377.35.

Zomato, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance, Maruti Suzuki India, Adani Ports, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv, UltraTech Cement and Infosys were the major losers among Sensex shares.

In contrast, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel, NTPC, Tata Consultancy Services, PowerGrid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Sun Pharmaceuticals were the gainers.

"Shortened trading week and sell-off in the US short market are providing a hiccup to the global market. However, India is withstanding with resilience and healthy outperformance, by a narrow negative trend," Vinod Nair,



Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Ajit Mishra SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said, "On the weekly expiry day, markets remained range-bound and closed slightly lower. While positive global cues initially drove an uptick, selling pressure in heavy-weight stocks across sectors pulled the Nifty into the red."

In broader markets, the BSE smallcap gauge fell 0.62 per cent, while midcap index declined 0.77 per cent.

Among the sectoral indices, Realty, Auto, Consumer Discretionary, Metal, Services, Commodities, Consumer Durables, Teck, IT, Focussed IT, Energy were among the laggards.

Bankex and Power were the gainers. As many as 2,457 stocks declined while 1,518 advanced and 130 remained unchanged on the

BSE.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms declined by ₹ 1,71,623.67 crore to ₹ 3,91,12,994.41 crore (USD 4.49 trillion).

"The moderating inflation and uptick in GDP numbers failed to cheer investors, as markets ended weak in late selling pressure with mixed European and Asian cues coupled with FIH selling dominating the mood."

"Investors are nervous about the likely imposition of tariffs on Indian goods by the Trump administration and its overall impact going ahead, hence caution with a negative bias could prevail for some more time," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

According to Kotak Securities' VP-technical Research Amol Athawale, during the week, the

benchmark indices witnessed range-bound activity. After a roller-coaster week, the Nifty ended 0.69 percent lower, while the Sensex was down by 500 points.

Shares of PB Fintech, parent entity of Policybazaar, extended the losses for second straight session, by declining more than 5 per cent to close at ₹ 1,327.80, a day after the company proposed to infuse Rs 696 crore in its healthcare arm, a move that failed to cheer investors.

On the other hand, MTNL's stock rallied more than 12 per cent to close a ₹ 48.78 after the government said in the Parliament that state-owned telecom firm has earned ₹ 2,134.61 crore till January 2025 from monetisation of lands and buildings.

During the day, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (MTNL) scrip skyrocketed to more than 18 per cent to hit an intraday high of ₹ 51.30 apiece.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul settled lower. European markets were trading higher in the mid-session deals. US markets closed on a positive note on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent Crude traded 0.34 per cent lower at USD 70.71 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) sold equities worth ₹ 1,627.61 crore, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) purchased equities worth ₹ 1,510.35 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Stock and money markets will remain closed on Friday for the Holi festival. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Preliminary survey to be

community objections or claims. After the objection period, the legislative assembly constituency-level committee will review and validate the beneficiaries and finally the district-level committee will accord approval to potential beneficiaries and upload it on the AWAS+ app.

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, during a recent visit to Assam, announced that 7.6 lakh people in the state will benefit under PMAY-G and the first instalment will start from March 19 at Palasbari in Kamrup town.

People from areas under the Rabha Hasong Council will get allotment of houses after council polls are over in these areas, the CM said.

The process of allotment of houses to the remaining 3,80,000 will begin from April and the process is expected to be completed by May, he added. Overall, 30 lakh people in Assam require housing under PMAY-G.

"So far, 22 lakh people have either already benefited or have houses under construction," Sarma added. Referring to the Chief Minister's Mahila Udyamita Scheme, Sarma said the first instalment of ₹ 10,000 will be handed over to 23,000 women at Behali in April and every month the list of beneficiaries will be announced after selected women complete their three-month training.

"This is one of the biggest empowerment scheme for women in the state after Orunodoi. We have decided to give individual loans to women in SHGs with ₹ 10,000 in the first year, 25,000 in the second, which will include ₹ 12,500 from the government and the balance as bank loan, and ₹ 50,000 in the third year with the total amounting to ₹ 85,000", the CM said. (PTI)

BJP accuses Mamata of

Bank (IILB), a GIS-enabled database of industrial areas, launched in August 2020, has onboarded data for 2,884 industrial parks across 35 states and Union Territories except West Bengal. This exclusion signals the state's lack of commitment to Ease of Doing Business, he alleged. (PTI)

Four to Five satellites

the state, Neog emphasised that ASSAMSAT would play a crucial role in enhancing communication networks, disaster management capabilities, and supporting various developmental projects across Assam.

She further highlighted that the satellite system would significantly improve connectivity in remote areas, enabling better access to telecommunication services, e-governance platforms, and educational resources.

NFR achieves 2nd position

better coordination and swift decision-making to ensure punctual train operations," he said. With an aim to further enhance its performance, NFR is actively working towards upgrading to more advanced systems that will provide improved automation, predictive analytics and enhanced operational control, it said.

"These advancements will significantly contribute to better train scheduling, minimised delays and improved passenger convenience," the release added. (PTI)

India ready to share experience

transformed the system of routine transactions, completely digitalised the field of full data protection, with 87.35 million transactions growing 147% in terms of volume.

"This has transcended barriers of gender, urban, rural, rich and poor and women are increasingly taking ownership of digital payment interface," she said.

Devi stressed that nations have to be mindful of the fact that while promotion of digital inclusion of women is of paramount importance, at the same time, protection of security and privacy of data must be ensured.

"Hence, in today's technologically advanced world, there is a need for balancing regulation for the safe and responsible use of technology, especially in leveraging e-governance for social protection system. Digital public infrastructure should be a bridge, not a barrier," she said.

She added that the Indian government is seized of the fact that a safe digital environment is a must for ensuring women's dignity and participation in nation building.

She highlighted that in India, women are at the centre of cutting-edge technological innovations, leading from the forefront in fields varying from space exploration, artificial intelligence to renewable energy and piloting initiatives such as 'Drone Didi' in rural areas.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador P Harish emphasised how 'Aadhaar', India's unique foundational ID system and the Unified Payments Interface have benefited over 250 million Indian women through seamless transactions.

He also noted that during India's G20 presidency, the country established a Women's Empowerment Working Group to advance this important agenda.

UN Women executive director Sima Bahous lauded India's leadership in developing the India stack and unified payments interface.

"We must dismantle the barriers that keep women from the digital and financial systems that hold them back. That is where solutions must meet ambitions. Governments must invest in public digital infrastructure that puts women first," Bahous said.

"India's leadership in developing the India stack and unified payments interface (UPI) proves what is possible when inclusion is at the core of innovation," Bahous added.

The UN official further said that in India, "we have seen the power of digital financial inclusion through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act," adding that digital payments have increased women's employment and autonomy.

She stressed that it must be ensured that women's economic empowerment is at the centre of discussions on reforming the international financial architecture.

"This is not an optional agenda. This is the blueprint for a better world. Let us be bold. Let us be restless. Let us refuse to accept a world where half the population is held back. The future is digital. The future must be financially inclusive. And if we get this right, the future won't just promise equality, it will guarantee it," she said. (PTI)

Partnerships orchestrated by

auction for awarding spectrum for satellite services in India as they feared an administrative allocation would give Musk airwaves at a price lower than what they had paid via auctions in the past.

Jio will offer Starlink equipment in retail outlets and online stores and also support customer installation and activation on devices. Jio and SpaceX will also explore how they can boost each other's offerings.

Starlink is the world's largest low-earth-orbit (LEO) constellation operated by SpaceX.

On Tuesday, Bharti Airtel announced that it is entering into an agreement with SpaceX to bring Starlink's high-speed Internet service to India on a non-exclusive basis. Bharti already partners with Eutelsat OneWeb, the second-largest LEO constellation. (PTI)

Kuki-Zo Council lifts

shutdown in Kuki-Zo areas since Saturday after a youth died and over 40 were injured after protestors clashed with security forces in Kangpokpi district while trying to prevent the movement of a bus from Imphal through their zone.

Reaffirming its demand for a separate political administration, the council emphasised that this is essential to ensure justice, peace and progress for its people.

It also urged relevant authorities to recognise and respect their legitimate demands and work toward a peaceful resolution that upholds justice and security for the Kuki-Zo community.

The council also informed that the body of Lalgouthang Singit, who was killed during a protest by Kuki demonstrators at Gamghiphai in Kangpokpi district on March 8, was laid to rest at the Kuki-Zo Martyr Cemetery in Phaijang within the district. (PTI)

Creator of rupee symbol

indicating what the ruling DMK claims is its inclusive governance model. Recollecting his experience while designing the Indian rupee symbol, Kumar said, "The design I created was based on certain requirements that the government had asked for. It was a competition by the Government of India. I participated and my design got selected as the winner of the competition, and it was implemented then."

The Tamil Nadu government probably thought that it was the right time for them to change it with their own design, "and I don't have much to say on this", Kumar said.

According to the government portal 'www.knowindia.india.gov.in', the rupee symbol is an amalgam of Devanagari "Ra" and the Roman Capital "R" with two parallel horizontal stripes running at the top representing the national flag and also the "equal to" sign.

"The Indian Rupee sign was adopted by the Government of India on July 15 2010," it added. Udaya Kumar is a post-graduate in Design from the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. (PTI)

IIT Guwahati unveils

when the freshers arrive on campus, there will be no classes but an acclimatisation programme so they do not feel out of place. The students will be invited for morning walks with faculty members so they are able to build a rapport with each other before entering the classroom," Alagarsamy told PTI.

"The Peer Mentorship Programme aligns with this notion by assigning peer mentors to the new students. These mentors (will) play a pivotal role in providing relevant information, clearing doubts, and assisting with various challenges, serving as guiding lights for the newcomers when they feel lost," he added.

As soon as the freshers arrive on campus, an ice-breaking session will be conducted to establish a warm and inclusive atmosphere and facilitate connections, Alagarsamy explained.

"These sessions aim to raise awareness about mental health and overall wellbeing while acquainting the students with the resources and the support available through the Counselling Cell and the Center for Holistic Wellbeing," he said.

"These ice-breaking sessions will be conducted within each hostel to help expand the students' social networks, enabling them to connect with their peers through enjoyable games and activities," he added.

To help the students cope with the pressure of semester examinations, the SAATHI Counselling Club recently conducted a stress escape room workshop aimed at sharing knowledge on dealing with and manage stress and exploring entrepreneurship and career choices.

The institute has four full-time counsellors while Your Dost -- a start-up incubated at IIT-Guwahati -- has been roped in to provide round-the-clock access to the counsellors.

Mandatory interactions will be scheduled with the counsellors for all students so any early signs can be identified and mandatory comprehensive health checks conducted.

"The counselling schedule will be prepared in such a way that they do not coincide with the academic timetable. These mandatory interactions will help the students familiarise themselves with the counsellors and the counselling services available on campus," Alagarsamy said.

"This will also remove the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health concerns, emphasising that it is a perfectly acceptable and normal thing to do," he added. (PTI)

Airtel strengthens market leadership with robust subscriber growth



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 13: Bharti Airtel has reinforced its market leadership with significant subscriber growth in Assam, according to the latest TRAI Telecom Subscription Data (December 2024), an official statement informed on Thursday.

Airtel continues to disseminate Assam's telecom market, emerging as the top telecom operator in the state, it said. In December 2024, Airtel added 27,922 new subscribers, taking its total wireless subscriber base in Assam to 11,914,048.

Meanwhile, other operators saw a marginal addition in their subscribers. With its consistent investments in network expansion, customer-centric innovations, and high-speed data services, Airtel continues to be the preferred telecom choice for millions in Assam, the statement said.

India's total wireless subscriber base grew from 1,148.65 million in November 2024 to 1,150.66 million in December 2024, reflecting a monthly growth rate of 0.17%.

The country's wireless tele-density also increased from 81.59% to 81.67%, indicating a steady rise in mobile connectivity. Airtel's sustained subscriber growth reaffirms its commitment to enhancing digital connectivity across urban and rural India.

As India's telecom sector evolves, Airtel remains focused on empowering customers with seamless connectivity, cutting-edge digital solutions, and an unparalleled network experience, the statement concluded.

'Made in India, Made for India', Haier expands Greater Noida Plant

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 13: Haier Appliances India has announced a significant expansion of its manufacturing operations in Greater Noida, unveiling new air conditioner (AC) production and injection molding units as part of its ongoing commitment to the "Made in India, Made for India" initiative.

The company, which has held the title of the world's leading major appliances brand for 16 consecutive years, is investing over ₹1,000 crore between 2024 and 2028 to bolster its manufacturing footprint in the country.

The expansion was marked by a groundbreaking ceremony attended by Uttar Pradesh Chief Secretary Shri Manoj Kumar Singh, Haier India President NS Satish, Principal Secretary of IT & Electronics Anurag Yadav, and Greater Noida Authority CEO Ravi Kumar NG.

The investment is expected to

create employment for 3,500 people and contribute significantly to the state's economic development.

The new AC production facility will increase Haier's manufacturing capacity from 1.5 million to 4 million units per year, while the injection molding unit will enhance efficiency by enabling the in-house production of key components.

With 90% of its appliances already being manufactured locally, Haier aims to further reduce import dependency and streamline production to meet growing demand in India and neighboring markets.

Manoj Kumar Singh lauded Haier's investment, emphasising Uttar Pradesh's growing status as a manufacturing hub under the leadership of chief minister Yogi Adityanath.

He expressed confidence that the new facility would contribute to India's emergence as a global manufacturing powerhouse.

South Africa to host first G20 trade and investment meeting

JOHANNESBURG, March 13: South Africa will host the first G20 Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) meeting under its presidency from March 18 to March 20, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) announced here on Wednesday.

South Africa officially assumed the presidency of the G20 in December 2024 for the year 2025 under the theme "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability". The TIWG meeting, which will be held virtually, will bring together senior officials from G20 member countries as well as the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). The deputy director-general of trade at the DTIC, Ambassador Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter, said this would be the first of the four proposed meetings of the TIWG, which will culminate in the G20 trade ministers' meeting to be hosted by South Africa in October.

Mlumbi-Peter said the first session will also be attended by international organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the United Nations Trade and Development (UNTAD), the Organisation

for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and African regional communities.

"We have identified four focus areas for the TIWG. The first is trade and inclusive growth, with an outcome being principles to promote trade and inclusive growth that aim to address common or shared challenges resulting from distributive effects of trade with adverse outcomes for economically-vulnerable regions, both within and between countries," she said.

"The second focus area will be looking at the responsive trade and investment agenda to address the challenge of global commons, Mlumbi-Peters added. She said other critical areas of focus are the G20 framework on green industrialisation and investments, with a view to promoting value addition of critical minerals close to the source as well as the development of low-carbon manufacturing value chains to support global decarbonisation and industrial adaptation.

The WTO's reform and development will also come under the spotlight at the TIWG meeting. (PTI)

Patanjali Ayurved, DS Group to acquire Magma General Insurance from Poonawala's Sanoti Properties

NEW DELHI, March 13: Yoga Guru Ramdev-led Patanjali Ayurved and Rajnigandha maker Dharampal Satyapal Group (DS Group) will acquire Magma General Insurance from Sanoti Properties LLP at a valuation of ₹ 4,500 crore, a company statement said on Thursday.

This would mark the entry of Patanjali Ayurved, a manufacturer and marketer of herbal, nature-based products, medicines and other FMCG products, into the general insurance business following the regulatory approval.

Magma General Insurance is majority-owned by Sanoti Properties LLP, an entity jointly held by Adar Poonawalla and Rising Sun Holdings Pvt Ltd.

Adar Poonawalla-owned Sanoti Properties has approved the sale of its insurance subsidiary Magma General Insurance (erstwhile Magma HDI General Insurance Company), along with Celica Developers and Jaguar Advisory Services, as per the share purchase agreement with Patanjali Ayurved and DS Group, the statement said.

The deal is at a valuation of ₹ 4,500 crore and is subject to regulatory approvals, it added.

The company's board made this decision at



its meeting held on March 12, 2025.

Magma General Insurance (erstwhile Magma HDI General Insurance Company Ltd), with over 70 products across various categories, offers insurance to secure all major risks in the general insurance sphere.

The insurance company delivered a Gross Written Premium (GWP) of ₹ 3,295 crore in FY24 and is expected to deliver about ₹ 3,650-3,700 crores of GWP in FY25 with a Profit Before Tax of ₹ 20-25 crore.

"The sector is undergoing exciting regulatory reforms with 100 per cent FDI opening up. Structurally general insurance in India is significantly underpenetrated vis a vis developed countries and IRDAI vision for insurance for all by 2047 could go a long way in plugging the

gap," Patanjali Ayurved spokesperson said.

Magma General Insurance could benefit immensely from our ability to infuse growth capital, huge distribution strength including access to rural markets as Patanjali Ayurved products are available at 2,00,000 counters, national level chains including Reliance Retail, Hyper City, Star Bazaar and 250 Patanjali Mega Stores, the spokesperson added.

Speaking on the occasion, Adar Poonawalla Chairman, Serum Institute of India said, "We are proud that over the last few years, Magma General Insurance has built up its business carefully, both on the retail and corporate side, with over 18000 agents, more than 2000 corporates, 14 OEMs including all the large OEMs, and more than 80 players in the financial services business.

It has delivered a growth rate of 26 per cent over the last 5 years and will continue to make a strong contribution to the general insurance industry, under the new ownership of Patanjali Ayurved and the DS Group, he added.

Ambit Pvt. Ltd acted as exclusive financial advisor & Khaitan & Co and Wadia Gandhi & Co acted as legal advisors to selling shareholders, it added. (PTI)

More than 6000 delegates take part in the delegate session

57th ABSU Conference begins at Bodofa Fwthar in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 13: The 57th annual conference of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) began from Thursday with a four-day-long vibrant event at Bodofa Fwthar, Dotma, in Kokrajhar.

Assam cabinet minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma inaugurated the Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma memorial main pandal of the conference.

Gossaigaon MLA Jiron Basumatary inaugurated the main gate, while BTC executive member Ranjit Basumatary inaugurated the exhibition amidst a well attended gathering.

The four-day conference will witness a series of educational sessions, literary activities, cultural programs, and key discussions on various issues concerning the Bodo community.

A lighting of the lamp for peace and prosperity was organised on the occasion to mark the vibrant event.

Noted social worker and member of the central selection board



(CSB) of Bodoland Territorial Region government, Jiron Basumatary inaugurated the event in the august presence of ABSU president Dipen Boro, general secretary Khanindra Basumatary, Assam cabinet minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma, Lok Sabha MP, Joyanta Basumatary, MLA Lawrence Islary, and several other dignitaries.

A delegation session of the students union was held on the occa-

sion which was chaired by Abit Narzary, speaker of the ABSU.

More than 6000 delegates and observers representing different 22 district committees of the state and unit committees across the country are attending the event.

During the delegate session, the students union discussed at length on various issues including education, social integration among the citizens.

Union home minister, Amit

Shah will attend the Open Session as the chief guest on the concluding day on March 16.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, chief executive member of BTR, Pramod Boro, and several ministers and MLAs will also be present.

The session is expected to draw an estimated two lakh attendees across the state.

Union education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan will take part in an interactive session with students on March 14 addressing key educational concerns and policies.

The first day of the event saw a grand participation in all events being organised at the conference venue.

ABSU president Dipen Boro told that the conference has received a good response from all sections of the society across the state.

He said that people cutting across the communities are waiting to accord warm welcome the Union home minister, Amit Shah in the conference.

CEM Ronghang thanks CM Sarma over budget



HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 13: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang expressed his gratitude to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for allocating budget for the overall development of Karbi Anglong.

CEM Ronghang said this during a sideline programme of the Public interaction program for Amren constituency at Taskai, Rongnihat village in West Karbi Anglong on Wednesday.

Ronghang said, "This year, the Assam budget for the financial year 2025-26 has increased funds by 5%. Last year, we received ₹ 400 crore in the State Owned Priority Development (SOPD) fund, but this financial year, ₹ 421 crore has been allocated, representing a 5% increase. Additionally, a special fund of ₹ 200 crore has been added, bringing the total to ₹ 621 crore."

Notably, infrastructure projects have been included in the budget for the construction of an Agriculture college, Veterinary college, and Sainik School in Karbi Anglong, with estimated costs of ₹ 206 crore, ₹ 374 crore, and ₹ 375 crore, respectively.

Flood and storm preparedness meet held in Baksa

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 13: A review meeting of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Baksa, was held on Thursday at the District Commissioner's Conference Hall, Mushalpur, under the chairmanship of Baksa District Commissioner and chairperson of DDMA Gautam Das.

Chairing the meeting, DC Das instructed the officials to constantly coordinate with each other to monitor the any situation.

The meeting focused on assessing and strengthening disaster preparedness for the 2025-26 season, with a particular emphasis on mitigating the impact of floods and storms.

During the session, DC Das reviewed the readiness of resources. He also reviewed previous year's flood impact, including the implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) relief grants.

The discussions also covered the Multi-Hazard Dis-

aster Management Plan and the guidelines of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).

During the meeting, discussions related to flood damage assessment through the DRIMS portal also held.

Circle officers gave updates on vulnerable areas and designated relief camps. Teams from NDRF, SDRF, Police, and others took part in the review meeting.

For emergency purposes, citizens have been urged to contact in the toll free number 1077.

Officials from various departments and emergency response agencies actively contributed to the discussion, providing insights and recommendations to enhance disaster resilience across the district.

ADC cum CEO, DDMA, Baksa, Mustafa Salim Ahmed; ADC and SDO Salbari Nilutpal Pathak; Deputy Superintendent of Baksa Police (HQ) Badrul Islam Mazumder and circle officers, among others were present.

Governor celebrates Pre-Holi with Raj Bhavan fraternity

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 13: Governor, Lakshman Prasad Acharya, along with the First Lady Kumud Devi, celebrated the pre-Holi festivities with the officers and staff of Raj Bhavan at a programme held at the premises of Raj Bhavan here on Thursday, an official statement said.

Speaking on the occasion, Acharya highlighted the importance of the festival in strengthening social bonds and promoting harmony.

According to the statement, Governor Acharya said, "India, with its rich diversity, is a unique example of unity in diversity. Every state in the country celebrates Holi in its own traditional way, yet the feelings of enthusiasm, love, and collective joy remain the same everywhere."

He pointed out that Holi is not just only a festival of colours, it is a celebration of the confluence of diverse cultures, where different communities partake in the festivities with great joy, following their unique traditions, it added.

The Governor also acknowledged the spiritual roots of Holi in Assam, particularly its connection to the teachings of saints and spiritual gurus.

Sivasagar District BJP hails 2025-26 budget

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, March 13: Sivasagar District BJP thanked State Finance Minister Ajanta Neog through a press meet for presenting a pro-people budget 2025-26 in the Assembly with a massive support for women's development in which 30 lakhs rural and 2 lakh urban women will be benefited directly on Thursday.

Addressing the media, Bitupon Raidongia, president, District BJP, said that the women beneficiary under the CM' Udyamita scheme will get ₹ 10000 each and for the same ₹ 3038 crore has been allocated in the budget.

Under the Nijut Moina scheme, over 10 million students will be benefited, he said.

Every girl child, taking admission in HS 1st year will get ₹ 1000, while in Degree she will get ₹ 1250 and in post graduation she will get ₹ 2500 a month.

Raidongia also said that ₹ 25 crore has been kept aside under Jivan Prerona Scheme.

Under the scheme, the budget sanctions ₹ 2 lakh for every unemployed youth under the CM' s Atmanirbhor Asom Scheme which will be ₹ 5 lakh for technical graduates.

He thanked chief minister Himanta Biswa Sharma for making cashless transaction for the Cancer patients, increasing the remuneration of the Anganwadi workers, making provision for Bamboo Start City, State's own artificial satellite installation in space and many more innovative development measures to take the state ahead of others in the race.

Without Assam Arunachal cannot be perfect: Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 13: Sahitya Akademi award recipient, Padma Shri YesheDorjee Thongchi, reiterated that without Assam, Arunachal Pradesh can never be complete.

Thongchi said this while attending the celebration of 2nd foundation day of the Assamese weekly 'Gana Kantha' published from Tezpur on Wednesday.

Delivering his speech on how he, along with the people of Arunachal, is connected with Assam, Thongchi also said that the love and hospitality of the Assamese people are incomparable, which have been the inspiration for his literary work and achievements.

He said, "Though I can't speak Assamese properly, due to the blessings poured from the heart of the Assamese people that I have enjoyed, I have been encouraged to continue to contribute towards Assamese literature."

He said, further expressing his commitment and responsibility to the Assamese language and literature and culture and heritages.

In his speech he highlighted how difficult it is to run a newspaper in the fast-moving digital age.

He stated that the two-year-old Assamese weekly "Gana Kantha" is an example of responsibility towards the society carried by the editorial team of the weekly, reflecting the dignity of a place like Tezpur. Mentioning Assam is now on the wheel of development, he also stated that if Assam is developed, its impact falls upon the en-



tire northeastern region, including Arunachal Pradesh.

"Earlier from Arunachal Pradesh, we needed a complete day to reach Tezpur, but today, as an outcome of development in surface communications like the construction of four-lane roads connecting our region, we can quickly reach Tezpur," he said.

He said explaining about the social, political, historic, and cultural background of the region that led him to work in the literary field.

Taking part in the program, wife of the noted litterateur, Inumoni Das, also spoke on how print media is at stake in the present-day situation. The program held at historic POKI (Jyoti Bharati) here was also attended by a host of dignitaries, including DC, Sonitpur, Ankur Bharali, and SP, Sonitpur Barun Purakayastha.

Earlier, in his welcome, editor of the Assamese weekly, Dr Pranjit Hazarika, said that the information available on digital platforms has become a major challenge for surviving print media, and to com-

pete, we have to work in this line, something different, exploring readers' interest.

Meanwhile, speaking on the occasion, DC, Sonitpur, Ankur Bharali said that though the present-day digital system has grabbed the world of information, the romance that decades back could be enjoyed through the radio or the print media will always remain memorable.

Congratulating the team of the Assamese weekly, he reiterated that the charm found in the print media will always remain timeless.

In the program, owners of the news agencies in Tezpur town, along with the distributors and distinguished hawkers who play a major role in surviving the print media, were specially honoured.

The program attended by educationists, the journalist fraternity, and eminent citizens of Tezpur was conducted by senior journalist Pulak Kumar Deka, while the publisher of the weekly Kulen Bharali subsequently offered his vote of thanks.

NFR introduces 7 additional pairs of special trains for enhanced connectivity

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 13: In a bid to cope up with the escalating rush of passengers during the Holi season, it has been decided to operate another additionally seven more pairs of Holi special trains between New Delhi - Katihar - New Delhi, Anand Vihar Terminal - Jogbani - Anand Vihar Terminal, New Delhi - Kamakhya - New Delhi and Chandigarh Jn. - Katihar - Chandigarh Jn, said an official statement on Thursday. The statement further informed that these trains will operate for a single trip, ensuring enhanced connectivity and improved travel options for commuters.

The statement also notified the train schedules for operational days. Special train no 04072 (New Delhi - Katihar) departed at 1445 hours on March 12, 2025 from New Delhi and reached Katihar at 14:00 hours Thursday.

Similarly, special train no 04071 (Katihar - New Delhi) departed at 18:45 hours on March 13, 2025 from Katihar to reach New Delhi at 1800 hours next day.

Special train no 04074 (Anand Vihar Terminal - Jogbani) departed at 1900 hours on March 12, 2025 from Anand Vihar Terminal and reached Jogbani at 2300 hours the next day. Similarly, special train no 04073 (Jogbani - Anand Vihar Terminal) will depart at 0640 hours on March 14, 2025 from Jogbani to reach Anand Vihar Terminal at 0825 hours on the next day.

Special train no 04076 (New Delhi - Kamakhya) departed at 1915 hours on March 12, 2025 from New Delhi to reach Kamakhya at 0830 hours on Friday.

Similarly, special train no 04075 (Kamakhya - New Delhi) will depart at 1600 hours on March 14, 2025 from Kamakhya to reach New

Delhi at 0330 hours on Sunday.

Special train no 04078 (New Delhi - Katihar) departed at 1445 hours on March 13, 2025 from New Delhi to reach Katihar at 1400 hours on the next day.

Similarly, special train no 04077 (Katihar - New Delhi) will depart at 1845 hours on March 14, 2025 from Katihar to reach New Delhi at 1800 hours next day. Special train no 04080 (Anand Vihar Terminal - Jogbani) departed at 1900 hours on March 13, 2025 from Anand Vihar Terminal and will reach Jogbani at 2300 hours on next day.

Similarly, special train no 04079 (Jogbani - Anand Vihar Terminal) will depart at 0640 hours on March 15, 2025 from Jogbani to reach Anand Vihar Terminal at 0825 hours on next day.

Special train no. 04084 (New Delhi - Kamakhya) departed at 1915 hours on March 13, 2025 from New Delhi to reach Kamakhya at 0830 hours on Saturday. Similarly, special train no 04083 (Kamakhya - New Delhi) will depart at 1600 hours on March 15, 2025 from Kamakhya and will reach New Delhi at 0330 hours on Monday.

Special train no 04508 (Chandigarh Jn - Katihar) departed at 2200 hours on March 12, 2025 from Chandigarh Jn. to reach Katihar at 0345 hours on Friday.

Similarly, special train no 04507 (Katihar - Chandigarh Jn) will depart at 0700 hours on March 14, 2025 from Katihar to reach Chandigarh Jn at 1450 hours the next day.

"The stoppage details and timings of these special trains are available on the IRCTC website and are also being published in newspapers and on N.F. Railway's social media platforms. Passengers are advised to check the details before travelling," the statement concluded.

Wild elephant wreaks havoc in Nagaon, one killed

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 13: A 20-year-old youth, Saiful Islam, was killed by a wild elephant on Wednesday night in the Shalbari area under Salna forest range office.

Reportedly, the elephant attacked Islam when he was returning home from a shop.

The local forest officials as well as police personnel rushed to the spot immediately and sent the mortal remains of the victim youth to a local hospital for autopsy.

The wild elephant has been wreaking havoc in various parts of the district, including Kaliabor, Chapanal, Khatiatoli, Kampur, and Kachua. The local residents are living in fear, and the forest department has been criticised for its inability to contain the situation.

This is not the first incident of its kind in the area.

NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati awarded for Energy Efficiency

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 13: NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati -750 MW (3x250 MW) has been awarded the Public Sector Utility - National Energy Efficient Team title at the National Efficiency Awards 2025.

The award, conferred by the Mission Energy Foundation during the 7th Annual Reducing Net Heat Rate Conference & Awards in Goa, recognises the station's excellence in improving energy efficiency.

NTPC Bongaigaon achieved this distinction in the more than 100 MW category, demonstrating its commitment to optimizing performance and sustainable power generation.

Darrang College organises a special oration on 'Wildlife and Environment'



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 13: The Forest Man of India, Padma Shri Jadav Payeng, on Wednesday said "Nature is above all religion, politics, economics, science, etc." at Darrang College here on Wednesday.

The event was organised by the Department of Political Science in collaboration with Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev Welfare Trust, IQAC Darrang College, and IICNNS.

Reportedly, Payeng was delivering his speech on the topic 'Wildlife and Environment'.

Emphasising the tangible and impactful solutions to climate change, Payeng said, "Nature is our real God, Allah, etc. Instead of building concrete temples, mosques, or churches to worship God, let's all plant trees to protect nature with that money."

Padma Shri Payeng urged all to come forward to dedicate everyone's service to protect our nature and the environment.

In his speech, Payeng lamented that there is no adequate curriculum on nature available for students in the education policy of the countries in the world.

Further, mentioning the role of the women's community in maintaining the balance of nature, he urged the students and women to act for the

protection of nature and play a pivotal role in this regard. He said, as a result of global warming, the temperature has risen significantly, and it would reach 50 degrees celsius this year.

Several children have died due to the heat wave in the past year.

He further urged the government in his speech, to schedule summer vacation for schools only in the months when the temperature will rise too high.

In his speech, he briefed his journey of making the Molai forest as a living example of how individual actions can contribute to a sustainable and harmonious coexistence between humanity and the environment.

Instead of cutting cakes on birthdays, everyone should try to plant a tree and nurture it, Payeng added. He urged all to continue all developmental and construction works without felling trees.

President of Darrang College Governing Body and retired professor Dr Khageswar Borkakoti chaired the meeting while Principal of the college Dr Polashmoni Saikia delivered the welcome address.

Among others, Dr Manas Patgiri, HoD, Political Science; Prince Zeme, Chairman of Srimanta Sankardev Welfare Trust; Hiranya Hazarika, Vice Principal of the college; Pranabjyoti Das; and college faculties Dr Swapnali Kakati, Bhagyshree Saikia, Dr Harendra Nath Morang, and Dr Sweta Mahanta; students; and faculties attended the meeting.

During the program, the Department of Political Science of the college signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Srimanta Sankardev Welfare Trust to carry out some activities.

Noted environmental activist and nature lover Dr Harendra Nath Morang planted a Nagchampa seedling in the college premises for the occasion.

Noted drama activist and senior employee of the college, Achyut Sarma, conducted the entire program.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

OFFICE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, P.W.D. (R&B) HILLS, ASSAM, DIPHU

No. ACEH/CS/SOPD-G/14/2024-25/03

Dated. 10-03-2025.

The Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam Diphu, on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids the following work has experience of similar nature of work from APWD registered contractor. Details of the bids may be seen at e-procurement portal website www.assamtenders.gov.in and also in the office of the undersigned during office hour, the Bidders must be enrolled in www.assamtenders.gov.in for participating in the bidding process.

Name of work	Approx. Valuc Works (Rs.)	Category of APWD (R) registered contractor	Cost of Bid	Bid Security	Completion Period
Improvement of road from (i) DLHS Road to Tamulbari, (ii) Dayaram ME School Approach Road, (iii) Disagisim Sibnagar Road to Langkhailu Village, (iv) Upper Chapong to Irrigation Dam, (v) Majgaon to Dimasa Gaon to Cremation Ground, (v) Huglakata to Sunpura, under SOPD-G for the year 2024-25. Under Diphu LAC.	2,49,43,000.00	Class- 1(A&B)	Rs.5000.00	2% for General and 1% for Reserved category	06 (Six) Months

Note:- 1.The prospective bidder must visit the work site before submission of tender.

Sd/-

Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D. (R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu

Dated. 10-03-2025.

Memo No. ACEH/CS/SOPD-G/14/2024-25/03-(A)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Courage is the ladder on which all the other virtues mount - Clare Boothe Luce

CPI-M's Kerala blueprint

The 24th State Conference of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) concluded with a ringing reiteration of its intent to build on the spectacular gains the Pinarayi Vijayan-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government in Kerala has made during the nine years it has been in power. The Conference adopted the New Pathways for a Nava Kerala Document, which encapsulates the blueprint for Kerala's future development, unanimously. The highlight was the document presented by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan contained steps for resource mobilisation which deviates slightly from the party's known positions. Not surprisingly, the deviation triggered concerns in a few quarters. Reservations were voiced over the difficulties of implementing these policies. But both the Chief Minister and the CPI(M) State secretary M. V. Govindan allayed the fears by declaring in no uncertain terms that nothing that would adversely affect the common masses would be implemented. The concerns were expressed when the Nava Kerala Document hinted at the need to take steps to counter the Union Government's economic strangulation of Kerala.

The assurance from both the Chief Minister and the party secretary were necessary as the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and the BJP had signalled their intent to take political advantage of the additional steps for resource mobilisation. The Government and the party have taken the wind out of the Opposition's sails by making it clear that no additional burdens would be imposed on the people. That strategy has frustrated the Opposition's designs as it was clear that they would have weaponised the issue to extract electoral advantage in the forthcoming local bodies elections, only a few months away. The party is particularly concerned over the fact that a slice of the party votes had gone to the BJP in a few constituencies. All steps to ensure their return would be taken on a war footing, Govindan averred. The Conference reflected the strength the CPI(M) had attained. The State had overcome the difficulties stemming from the Union Government's attempts to scuttle Kerala's advance by denying central funds even for Wayanad disaster relief. It was nothing but a case of cruel discrimination, the Chief Minister pointed out. The Conference also laid accent on the paramount need to strengthen the party organisation to effectively frustrate the BJP-RSS to divide the people on religious lines and target the minorities for discriminatory treatment.

It also unambiguously declared its determination ensure a third term for the Pinarayi Government. The Conference also witnessed perfect synergy between the party and the Government with barely a dissenting voice being raised. Especially noteworthy was the voicing of concern over some of the policies the Nava Kerala Document hinted at and the CM's prompt intervention to allay the fears that it could affect the life of the common masses. The Conference also gave the green signal to M. V. Govindan to remain as the State Secretary after a unanimous re-election. Govindan had become the state secretary after Kodiyeri Balakrishnan had vacated the post for medical treatment in 2022. Polit Bureau co-ordinator Prakash Karat, who inaugurated the rally mentioned that the conferences from branch to the state level had shown the strength and heft the party has attained over the years. The CPI(M), Karat stressed, had become a highly unified party, ready to meet the challenges ahead.

Are money laundering cases linked to Chattisgarh liquor scam political?

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday, March 10 raided several premises of former Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh Bhupesh Baghel as part of probe into a money laundering case involving his son Chaitanya Baghel, which Congress has alleged a part of BJP's political conspiracy. Bhupesh Baghel's office has said, if someone is trying to stop Congress in Punjab through this conspiracy, then it is a misunderstanding.

It is only recently in February, Bhupesh Baghel was appointed AICC general secretary in charge of Punjab, to launch strong political campaign to wrest power in Punjab from the ruling AAP, whose leaders in Delhi are also accused in Delhi liquor scam. One of the accused in Chhattisgarh Liquor Scam is also linked to Jharkhand Liquor Scam. ED has come out with money laundering cases against several officials and political entities from opposition. One of the ED cases of money laundering linked to Chhattisgarh Liquor Scam was quashed by the Supreme Court of India on April 8, 2024, observing that there were no proceeds of crime.

The quashed ED case was against a former IAS officer Anil Tuteja and his son Yash. The Supreme Court Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan observed that they complained against the two accused was based on an offence under Income Tax Act, which is not classified as a scheduled offence under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

At that time Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, had told the bench that the probe agency may lodge a fresh complaint against the accused in view of additional

material the agency has recovered during investigation. The court had instructed the ED not to take coercive measures against the father-son duo in connection with the money laundering probe related to the Chhattisgarh liquor irregularities case. The ED case stemmed from a 2022 income tax department chargesheet filed in a Delhi court in which ED had alleged that distillers in Chhattisgarh were collecting bribes on liquor sourced from CSMCL, the state entity overseeing the liquor trade. ED also alleged that country liquor transactions were conducted off-the-books.

While the EC case was quashed, the original FIR registered by ACB/EOW of Chhattisgarh in January 2024, remained under investigation. Chhattisgarh elections were held in November 2023, in which BJP had wrested power from CM Bhupesh Baghel led Congress government. Congress had put an end to BJP's 15 years rule in 2018.

BJP led Chhattisgarh government led by Raman Singh had implemented the new excise policy in 2017, and set up the CSMCL to retail liquor through its stores. ED says that the objective of the BJP led government was "noble" but the policy was misused after Baghel took over power in the state.

ED has told the court that "...A change in the state government in 2018 led to change of management of CSMCL and it became the tool in the hands of the syndicate which used it to enforce a parallel excise department. The syndicate comprises of senior bureaucrats of state, politicians and officials of excise department."

In February 2019, Arun

Pati Tripathi, an Indian Telecommunication Service officer, was chosen to lead CSMCL. In May, he was made Managing Director of CSMCL. According to the ED, the illegal sale of liquor through government vendors started that year.

It is only on March 8, 2025, the Supreme Court of India has granted bail to Arun Pati Tripathi, however, directed that he shall be released on bail on April 10, 2025, to ensure that the ongoing investigation is not affected. And it in on April 10, ED has conducted fresh raids on Bhupesh Baghel's several premises.

The bench of Justice Abhay Oka and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan noted while granting bail that Tripathi had been in custody for approximately 11 months and observed that there is no possibility of the trial commencing in the near future.

Tripathi was arrested on April 12 by ACB Chhattisgarh.

While granting bail Supreme Court has referred to its earlier order of December 12, 2024, which had noted that Tripathi had been in custody for eight months and that the charge sheets had already been filed in the case in which more than 300 witnesses were cited, and the trial could only commence once the final charge sheet is filed. Supreme Court has also granted bail to three others - Anurag Dwivedi, Dilip Pandey, and Deepak Duary - accused in related cases.

On December 7, 2024, the Supreme Court bench had flagged "disturbing features" in the arrest of former IAS officer Anil Tuteja by the ED. The bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih termed the fact of the

case as "glaring" in the arrest of the former bureaucrat on April 20, 2024.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi appearing on behalf of Tuteja had submitted that the Supreme Court that had already quashed a case on April 8, 2024, but three days later ED registered a new ECIR complaint based on the same set of facts and material saying the agency couldn't have new information in such a short time.

Justice Oka asked if the ED could rely on the same material from the first ECIR, which had been quashed, to justify the registration of a second case. Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, representing the ED, had argued that the material collected remained on record and could form the basis of further proceedings.

The bench then told the ED to be prepared for answering

the question on the maintainability of the fresh case filed by the agency on April 11 after the court set aside the entire ED proceedings against Tuteja and other accused on April 8, as the predicate offence was based on income tax proceedings, which was not a scheduled offence under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The ED had then claimed the fresh case was based on the FIR registered by the Chhattisgarh police and on different charges and evidence.

It should also be noted that during Jharkhand elections, ED had conducted raids in Jharkhand on October 29, 2024 linked to IAS officer Vinay Kumar Choubey and others in connection with Jharkhand Liquor Scam. Raids were conducted in connection with an FIR regis-

tered against Choubey in Chhattisgarh in connection with Chhattisgarh Liquor Scam. Choubey was formerly Principal Secretary to Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and Secretary to Excise Department during implementation of the 2022 Jharkhand Excise Policy.

ACB Chhattisgarh had registered the FIR in January 2022, against an illegal liquor "syndicate" in Chhattisgarh that was controlling liquor business in both the states. ED named many officials and others in the case.

In January 2025, ED had arrested Chhattisgarh Congress leader Kawasi Lakhma in connection with the alleged Rs2161 crore Chhattisgarh Liquor Scam during 2019-23, when Bhupesh Baghel government was in power. Lakhma was the Excise and Commerce & Industry Minister in Baghel's Congress government.

Shortly after ED raids began on March 10 in the Baghel's several premises, Baghel's office said, "While the false case going on for seven years was dismissed in court, today ED guests have entered the Bhilai residence of former Chief Minister, Congress General Secretary Bhupesh Baghel." It is only on March 5, a special CBI court has discharged Congress leader and former CM Bhupesh Baghel in a 2017 alleged sex CD case, in which the arrested accused has said that he had a sex tape involving a BJP leader and minister of Chhattisgarh. Baghel was made an accused in that case.

Chhattisgarh government has said on March 10, that the extent of the loss put by investigators of the case is more than double the Rs2161 crore earlier estimated by probe agencies. (IPA Service)

The divine festivity of DouL Utsav in Barpeta

By: Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Doul Utsav, celebrated in the town of Barpeta in Assam, is a vibrant and sacred festival that brings together faith, culture, and community. Rooted in the teachings of Srimanta Sankardeva, the founder of the Neo-Vaishnavism movement, the festival is a deep expression of devotion and religious fervor. Barpeta, with its historical significance as a center of Assamese Vaishnavism, stands as the perfect setting for this grand celebration, which is steeped in centuries-old traditions. Doul Utsav is not just a festival of colors; it is a festival of spirituality, unity, and cultural expression that continues to captivate the hearts of people year after year.

The origins of Doul Utsav in Barpeta can be traced back to the early days of Srimanta Sankardeva's religious reform. Sankardeva, a 15th-century saint-scholar, emphasized the importance of devotion to Lord Krishna, and it was through his efforts that the region of Barpeta became a stronghold of Vaishnavite culture. The festival itself is inspired by the legend of Lord Krishna's playful interaction with his devotees, particularly the gopis (milkmaids) of Vrindavan. However, in Barpeta, the festival takes on a deeper significance, reflecting the essence of devotion, purity, and spiritual awakening.

Doul Utsav in Barpeta is celebrated at the Barpeta Satra, a prominent Vaishnavite monastery that has played a central role in the preservation of Sankardeva's teachings. The festival is observed in the month of Phagun, according to the Assamese lunar calendar, and it typically lasts for several days. During this period, the town of Barpeta comes alive with vibrant celebrations that involve religious rituals, music, dance, and colorful processions. The festivities are an expression of both spiritual reverence and joyous celebration, where devotees unite to honor Lord Krishna through traditional customs and performances.

One of the most important aspects of Doul Utsav in Barpeta is the participation of the local community. The festival is not merely a series of isolated events; rather, it is a collective endeavor that involves the entire town. Preparations for the festival begin well in advance, with devotees taking part in cleaning and decorating the Barpeta Satra. The Doul Ghar, the house where the deity of Lord Krishna is enshrined, is adorned with flowers and garlands, and the surrounding areas are thoroughly cleaned and painted. This act of purification is symbolic of the spiritual preparation required

before one can participate in the sacred festivities. The process of cleaning the Satra also fosters a sense of community, as people from all walks of life come together, transcending social barriers to engage in this shared activity.

On the first day of Doul Utsav, the main deity of Lord Krishna, known as Doul Govinda, is brought out in a procession from the Satra. The procession is accompanied by the sounds of traditional drums and the chanting of devotional songs known as HoliGeets. These songs, written by Sankardeva and his disciples, are filled with praise for Lord Krishna and tell the story of his divine exploits. The devotional atmosphere created by the singing and the music is a powerful reminder of the festival's spiritual roots. The procession, often held in the evening, leads the deity around the Satra and nearby areas, and devotees follow, singing, dancing, and offering prayers.

A distinctive feature of the Doul Utsav is the ceremonial lighting of the bonfire, known as the Meji, on the first night of the festival. This ritual is symbolic of the dispelling of darkness, both literally and metaphorically. As the winter season gives way to the warmth of spring, the lighting of the Meji represents the triumph of light over darkness and the renewal of life. The fire also serves as a symbol of purification, burning away the impurities of the soul. The lighting of the bonfire is followed by the release of Phanush, traditional paper lanterns that are lit and sent into the night sky, adding a magical touch to the festivities. This beautiful tradition reflects the community's devotion and their connection with the divine.

The second day of Doul Utsav, known as Bhar DouL, is marked by more intense religious activities. On this day, the idol of Lord Krishna is taken to the central courtyard of the Satra, where the devotees engage in naam-prasanga (chanting of sacred mantras) and participate in various forms of devotional performances. One of the most popular features of this day is the Ojapali, a traditional dance-drama form in which performers narrate religious stories and sing songs in praise of Lord Krishna. The accompanying rhythmic beats of the dhol and other instruments create an atmosphere of spiritual intensity, as the audience becomes immersed in the divine narrative. The presence of performers and devotees together in this collective act of devotion highlights the unity of the community and reinforces the shared nature of the festival.

The final day of Doul Utsav, known as Phakua or Suwari, is the climax of the celebrations. On this day, the idol of

Lord Krishna is placed in a beautifully decorated palanquin and is taken out on a grand procession around the Satra. The procession is accompanied by lively music, chanting, and dancing. The highlight of this day is the smearing of colored powders, or Phaku, onto the devotees and the idol. While this is a playful aspect of the festival, it is also deeply symbolic. The use of colors represents the removal of sins and the blessings of the divine. The act of applying color to others signifies love and unity, as all participants, regardless of caste, class, or gender, engage in the joyful act together. The Phaku also symbolizes the vibrancy of life, the renewal brought by spring, and the abundance of divine grace.

The rituals and performances of Doul Utsav are not only expressions of religious devotion but also of cultural continuity. The festival is a way of preserving and passing down the traditions of Sankardeva's Vaishnavism. The songs, dances, and stories that are performed during the festival are a vital part of Assamese cultural heritage. Through these performances, the values of devotion, humility, and community are instilled in the younger generation, ensuring the survival of these traditions for years to come.

The Doul Utsav is also a time of great social cohesion. It brings together people from all walks of life, creating a sense of equality and brotherhood. The festival transcends the usual social and caste distinctions, as all devotees come together to honor Lord Krishna. The communal aspect of the festival fosters a spirit of unity, as individuals engage in shared activities and work together to make the festival a success. This sense of collective participation is one of the key reasons why Doul Utsav remains such a powerful and unifying force in Barpeta.

In conclusion, the Doul Utsav in Barpeta is a celebration of divine joy, cultural heritage, and community spirit. It is a festival that transcends mere rituals and embraces deeper philosophical and spiritual meanings. Through its music, rituals, and communal participation, it embodies the values of devotion, unity, and cultural continuity. In a rapidly changing world, Doul Utsav stands as a beacon of Assamese tradition, reminding the people of Barpeta—and the wider world—of the enduring power of faith and cultural expression. The festival not only marks the arrival of spring but also the renewal of the spirit, making it a truly divine festivity that continues to inspire and unite the community year after year.

(The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK)

Holi: The vibrant tapestry of colours, unity, and tradition

By: Dipak Kurmi

India, a land of immense cultural diversity, celebrates numerous festivals that reflect its rich traditions, customs, and deep-rooted heritage. Among these, Holi stands out as one of the most exuberant and widely celebrated festivals, aptly known as the "Festival of Colors." Although the mode of celebration varies across different regions, the essence remains the same—reveling in colors, fostering unity, and embracing the arrival of spring. Holi is not merely a festival; it is a grand spectacle that reinforces India's spirit of togetherness, transcending religious and social boundaries.

The festival is deeply symbolic, marking the transition from winter to spring and signifying renewal, positivity, and joy. People take part in the vibrant festivities with unrestrained enthusiasm, smearing colors on each other, singing folk songs, and dancing to the rhythmic beats of drums. It is a time for people to let go of past grievances, mend broken relationships, and spread happiness. The colorful festival also serves as a reminder of the victory of good over evil, a theme deeply ingrained in Indian mythology.

Mythological Origins: The Victory of Good Over Evil

The legend of Holi is intricately woven into Hindu mythology, with one of the most well-known tales being that of Prahlad and Holika. According to the legend, Hiranayakashipu, a tyrannical king, sought to be worshipped as a god, but his own son, Prahlad, remained devoted to Lord Vishnu. Enraged by his son's defiance, Hiranayakashipu conspired with his sister, Holika, who was believed to be immune to fire, to burn Prahlad. However, divine intervention saved Prahlad while Holika perished in the flames. This event, symbolizing the triumph of righteousness over evil, is commemorated during Holika Dahan, the ritualistic bonfire held on the eve of Holi.

Another popular legend associated with Holi is the divine love story of Lord Krishna and Radha. It is said that Krishna, distressed over his dark complexion, playfully smeared colors on Radha's face. This act of love and mischief laid the foundation for the tradition of applying colors during Holi. Over time, this tradition evolved into a joyous celebration of unity and camaraderie.

Regional Variations: A Festival of Many Hues

While the core essence of Holi remains uniform, different regions in India have developed unique ways of

The legend of Holi is intricately woven into Hindu mythology, with one of the most well-known tales being that of Prahlad and Holika. According to the legend, Hiranayakashipu, a tyrannical king, sought to be worshipped as a god, but his own son, Prahlad, remained devoted to Lord Vishnu

celebrating the festival. In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, particularly in Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana, and Nandgaon, Holi is celebrated with great fervor, lasting for nearly a week. Mathura and Vrindavan, being the revered places associated with Lord Krishna, attract thousands of devotees who take part in processions, temple rituals, and grand celebrations where colored powders and flowers fill the air.

Barsana, a town near Mathura, is famous for its unique tradition of Lathmar Holi, where women playfully beat men with sticks, reenacting the playful teasing between Radha and Krishna. The men try to shield themselves, making it an exhilarating spectacle enjoyed by locals and tourists alike.

In Punjab, Holi takes the form of Holi Mohalla, an event initiated by Guru Gobind Singh. Unlike the conventional celebration with colors, Holi Mohalla showcases the martial spirit of the Sikh community, where warriors engage in mock battles, martial arts displays, and processions. The festival embodies courage, strength, and discipline while preserving the essence of Holi.

Maharashtra celebrates Rang Panchami, a five-day-long festivity marked by vibrant color splashes, music, and dance. The celebration is especially grand in cities like Mumbai and Pune, where people from all walks of life come together to partake in the festivities.

In West Bengal, Holi transforms into Dol Jatra or Dol Purnima, a serene and devotional celebration where idols of Lord Krishna and Radha are placed on beautifully decorated palanquins and carried in processions. Devotees sing devotional songs and apply gual (colored powder) on each other as an expression of love and devotion.

In Rajasthan, the festival is celebrated with royal grandeur. The famous Mewar Holika Dahan in Udaipur is marked by a royal procession featuring the Maharaja riding an ornamented

elephant, followed by cultural performances and elaborate feasts.

Down south, Holi is not as widely celebrated as in northern India, but regions like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu observe the festival with temple rituals, songs, and traditional dances. In Manipur, Holi coincides with the Yaoshang festival, a six-day-long celebration blending Hindu and indigenous traditions, involving folk dances, music, and sports competitions.

The Spirit of Holi: Unity in Diversity
Holi's significance extends beyond religious and cultural boundaries. It is a festival that brings together people of all backgrounds, fostering harmony and mutual brotherhood. Though primarily a Hindu festival, Holi is joyfully embraced by Sikhs, Jains, and even non-Hindus across India and beyond. It embodies the principle of unity in diversity, a defining characteristic of India.

In modern times, Holi has gained international recognition, with grand celebrations taking place in countries with large Indian diasporas, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. The festival has evolved into a global phenomenon, celebrated with music festivals, dance performances, and large-scale color-throwing events.

The Call for an Eco-Friendly Holi

In recent years, concerns over the environmental impact of synthetic colors and excessive water usage have led to a growing awareness of celebrating an eco-friendly Holi. Many communities now encourage the use of natural colors made from flowers, turmeric, and herbal extracts to ensure the safety of both people and the environment. Additionally, water conservation initiatives have gained traction, promoting dry Holi celebrations that retain the spirit of the festival while minimizing waste.

Embracing the Colors of Life

Holi is more than just a festival; it is a vibrant expression of joy, love, and togetherness. It serves as a reminder of life's inherent beauty and the importance of spreading happiness. The festival transcends social and religious barriers, reinforcing the values of unity, forgiveness, and mutual respect. As the colors of Holi paint the sky, they symbolize the blending of diverse communities into one harmonious nation.

Let us celebrate Holi with enthusiasm, kindness, and an eco-conscious spirit, ensuring that its message of love and positivity continues to brighten lives for generations to come. May this festival of colors bring joy, prosperity, and lasting harmony to all! (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@pltd@gmail.com)



By: Lalit Garg

Holi is not only a religious but a cultural festival; this festival is a unique opportunity to share happiness, love and positivity. The biggest quality of our culture is that all the festivals celebrated here enhance the love, unity and goodwill among the people by establishing human qualities in the society. The spirit behind all the festivals celebrated here is to provide prosperity to human dignity. Holi has a special message that just as nature is full of colours, life should also be full of colours. The colours of life should be such that deep reverence in God along with oneself. Holi is a perfect festival in terms of purity associated with any festival. It is a unique festival which not only associates the body, but also the soul. Holi is a festival of happiness. The happiness in us is also the colour of our soul.

In fact, Holi is the festival of fun and laughter. The most famous story about this festival is also in relation to Prahlada and Holika. Naradapurana states that Prahlada, the son of a demon named Hiranyakashipu, was an exclusive Hari-bhakta, while Hiranyakashipu considered Narayana to be his ultimate enemy. There was also a severe punishment system for chanting the name of Narayana or Srihari in his kingdom. Seeing his son as a Hari-bhakta, he warned many times, but a supreme devotee like Prahlada was always absorbed in piety. His father tried to kill him several times by taking various measures. But, he survived every time by the grace of Narayana. Holika,

sister of Hiranya Kashipu, had the boon of not burning in the fire. So she entered the fire with her nephew Prahlada in her lap. But by the grace of God, Prahlada came out alive and Holika was burned. The festival of Holi signifies 'Victory of Truth over untruth and 'Victory of Virtue over Misconduct'. In this way, the festival of Holi also symbolizes the victory of truth, justice, de-



vation and faith and the destruction of injustice, sin and demonic practices.

Holi is a festival that breaks all our limits and unites us. That is why we colour each other and say, May your life also be full of colours. Apart from the euphoria of colours, there are many other mythological stories to celebrate the festival of Holi. In North East India, Holika dahan is celebrated as the

slaughter day of demonic Putna by Lord Krishna, is celebrated as Putna Daah, then in South India it is believed that on this day Lord Shiva consumed the third eye shell of Kamadeva and he danced the ashes on his body. Thereafter, Lord Shiva revived Kamdev, being moved by the grief of Kamadeva's wife Rati, which pleased the gods and showered them with colours. For this reason, on the eve of Holi, fire is ignited in South India and sugarcane, mango blossom and sandalwood are added to it. Here, sugarcane symbolizes the bow of Cupid, mango blossom of Cupid, the burning of Cupid by the burning fire Shiva and the chanting of sandalwood to calm Kamdev for burn-

and refresher drinks give this festival a dignified image. In late night ghoomar, dandiya dance and singing troupes from different regions enhance their fun and joy as the night progresses through their performances. Today, due to the deformity of the Pollutions and anti environment, the entire environment has become polluted and fearful; all the colours of life have fallen. There was no mutual trust, no mutual love, nor a sublime feeling of cooperation, nor did the tone of unity arise in the struggle. No one held hands in the crowd of scattering, nor did anyone release the request. Like this, the divided mind is standing alone in the hope of finding everything again. How false is this wait, how much meaning is this reception. Let us also bring together the countless possibilities of the future and create a conscious atmosphere again. Make a pledge to fill the colour of truth in it. Holi requires an atmosphere and a mind too; a mind where we are all one and uproot the filthy layers of the mind so that all the faces reflected in the mirror of the undivided mind can be felt by us.

In Mathura and Vrindavan, the grand hues of Holi are seen. With the arrival of Basantotsav, the atmosphere of Vrindavan is included in a wonderful fun, the festival of spring is also celebrated with great pomp here. The joy of this festival does not slow down even when it starts, the cool month of Falgun. The traditions of Phalgun month and Holi are related to the pastimes of Shri Krishna and have special significance in the devotee's heart. Celebrating the colorful and joyous festival of Holi with a full devotion of Shri Krishna is a unique experience. Falgun Shukla Ekadashi has special significance in the city of temples Vrindavan. On this day, playing the colours of Holi starts in the traditional form. Both the fun and devotion of Holi in temples spreads its unique beauty.



In order to paint themselves in the colour of this divine month and Holi, devotees come to Vrindavan from far off places and celebrate Holi with full enthusiasm. The environment of Vrindavan is filled with Shri Krishna vibes and the fun of Holi prevails in that too. The special heart-touching dance of the group of devotees is very attractive as soon as it is made in the holy land of Vrindavan. There is no kind of worry, no malice and no madams, only a pleasant atmosphere prevails. To organize Holi in its entirety, we need not only the mind, but also the atmosphere and this is seen in Vrindavan.

The word Holi means purity in the English language. Purity is useful to every person and if the heritage of purity is associated with this festival, then the importance of this festival becomes hundred percent. The question is, how permanent is this happiness, which becomes a passion in the days of Holi? The melodic sound of dhapli (drums) and the Dandiya Raas chimes limited the usefulness of a festival like Holi to

what can only be called instantaneous happiness, while expecting this tradition of colours to provide long-term. Such a bond of affection and respect, of love, of friendship and harmony should be tied on which a person can be inspired to do something new. Celebration is the nature of consciousness and the celebration that emanates from silence is real. Holi is a celebration of consciousness. The more one feels joyful by him, the more colours are filled with colours in his life.

In a festival like Holi, all kinds of distractions are erased, then it should be felt that in the fire of Holi, all our sufferings, sorrows, worries, animosity etc. should be ignited and the colour of happiness, cheerfulness and joy in life should be scattered. We should have made some resolution and it can be resolved that we ourselves live a peaceful life and wish for a peaceful life for all. Such a resolution and such a life can really make Holi meaningful. (The author is a Journalist, Columnist who can be reached at lalitgarg11@gmail.com)

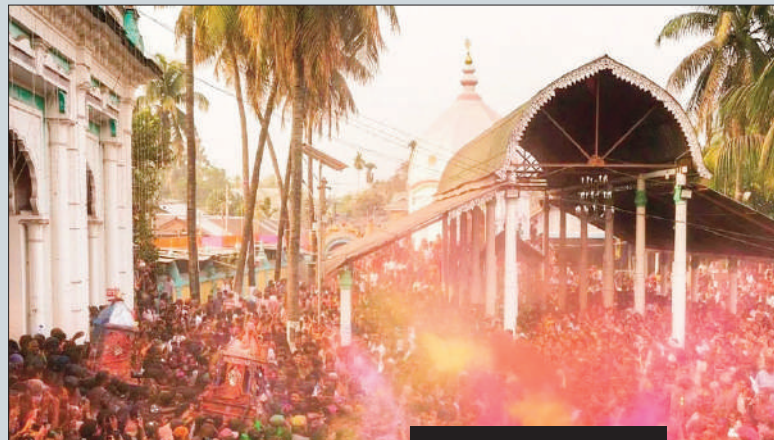
Doul and Phakuwa: Tradition and today

By: Lalit Nath

Now, the branches of Palash, Shimolu, and Madar are adorned with the buds of spring. Colours spread across every corner of human hearts. This seems like the coronation of the king of seasons, Basanta (Spring). The ancient form of the Spring Festival is embedded in Doul Yatra or Phakuwa. Amidst the colorful grandeur of the month of Phagun, Doul Yatra and Holi arrive. The Doul Festival or Phakuwa, which brings the message of spring's arrival, is a festival of life, of the mind and of the season itself. As Lord Shri Krishna proclaims in the Gita, "Rituum Kusumakaraha" (Among seasons, I am the flowering spring). In India, this festival is celebrated under various names such as Phalgutsav, Basantotsav and Madanotsav. Connected with traditional practices and religious emotions, this festival is considered sacred. It is usually observed on the full moon day (Purnima) of the Phagun month.

In the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Krishna Janna Khanda, chapter 27, it is mentioned— "Phalguni Purnima Tasya, Vatsaryyena Hi Kirtita; Tasyaam Dolotsavam Kritiva, Gayanti Cha Namanti Cha." This verse explicitly refers to Dol Purnima, Dolotsav, devotional singing and worship. Following this tradition, on Dol Purnima, idols of Shri Krishna and Radha are seated on a swing (Dola), accompanied by Kirtan and processions. Whether it is Deul, Doul, Dol Yatra, Phakuwa, Phalgutsav or Basantotsav, it is essentially a pan-Indian festival. In Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal and other states, it is celebrated with great enthusiasm.

There are two major mythological narratives associated with Doul and Holi festivals. The first centers



ing yellow garments, took Phaku (colored powder) in their hands and led by Radha, surrounded Krishna. Singing Holi songs, they splashed colors as far as the horizon. According to legend, about two thousand years ago, King Indradyumna introduced the celebration of Holi in Gokul.

As per Vaishnav belief, on Dol Purnima, Shri Krishna invited Radha and the other gopis to play with colors. Shri Radha, the embodiment of Krishna's blissful energy, is inseparable from Krishna. If Krishna, clad in yellow garments, is the tree, Radha is its blossoming vine. Although they appear in separate bodies, they are essentially one divine entity. The divine play of Radha and Krishna is interwoven with the spiritual life and religion of India. Their divine love with the gopis symbolizes the spiritual love between the devotee and the divine and Holi is one such expression of this love.

According to the Bhagavata Purana, the demon king Hiranyakashipu, who was an enemy of Lord Vishnu, gained immortality through a boon from Brahma and became arrogant. His son, Prahlada, was a de-

On the day of Dol Yatra, idols of Radha and Krishna are seated on swings, smeared with colors and Phaku, and taken on processions with devotional singing. This ritual marks the beginning of the Doul Festival. Though Holi and Dol Yatra or Phakuwa are part of the same celebration, each has distinct significance. In the Bhagavata Purana and Skanda Purana, references to the divine play of Radha and Krishna and Dolotsav are found

marks the beginning of the Holi celebration. The Bhavishya Purana also mentions Holika in its 137th chapter— "Holikayah Prahladasya Sam-sargena Hutashane; Dagdha Saa Sahasaa Devi Pashyataam Sarvadehinaam." Shri Dhar Kandali's "Ghunchha Kirtan" also narrates a story where Krishna, leaving Rukmini behind, goes to the house of Ghunchha, the daughter of King Indradyumna, riding on a swing. Angered by this, Goddess Lakshmi wreaks havoc in Ghunchha's town, but later, pacified by Krishna, she returns to her abode. "Ehimate Jagannath Jay Doul Chhari; Kautuke Chali Yanta Ghunchhar Baari." Thus, King Indradyumna once organized a grand festival, welcoming Krishna on a swing and arranging his marriage with Ghunchha according to traditional rituals.

On the day of Dol Yatra, idols of Radha and Krishna are seated on swings, smeared with colors and Phaku, and taken on processions with devotional singing. This ritual marks the beginning of the Doul Festival. Though Holi and Dol Yatra or Phakuwa are part of the same celebration, each has distinct significance. In the Bhagavata Purana and Skanda Purana, references to the divine play of Radha and Krishna and Dolotsav are found. The Brahma

Khanda of Skanda Purana, chapter 233, describes the importance of Dol Yatra: "Phalgun Masi Purnamayam Dolayatra Vidhiyate; Tatra Govindam Aradhya Snapayitva Yathavidhi; Chitra Varnaih Sragbhiih Shitalaih Panakadibhih; Pujayitva Tatah Kuryad Range Dolotsavam Shubham." On the full moon day of Phalgun, the Dol Yatra is celebrated. Shri Govinda is bathed, adorned with colorful clothes, garlands, and offered cool drinks. Afterwards, the joyful Dolotsav is observed.

While Holi is celebrated across India, Dol Yatra or Phakuwa is observed a day earlier in Assam, West Bengal and Odisha. Based on regional traditions, the festival may be celebrated for one or two days. In Assam, Phakuwa is also known as the Dol Utsav. On the first day is Gondh Yatra, the second day is known as Bhor Dol, and the third day as Suweri or Phakuwa. In Assam, the Dol Utsav gained widespread popularity under the patronage of Mahapurush Sri-manta Sankardev. He introduced this pan-Indian tradition in Assam, starting from Bardowa. Under his guidance, seven pots of Phaku were brought from Makuwa by Balaram Ata, and the Dol Utsav was celebrated on Phalguna Purnima.

'Doul' means 'house' and 'Yatra' means journey to another place. At present, Bardowa celebrates the Dol Utsav with a five-day-long programme which includes Naam-Kirtan, Bhagavata recitation, music and dance, with processions of the deity's idols. In addition to Bardowa, Majuli's Satra institutions and various other Satras and religious places across Assam celebrate it with Gayan-Bayan (traditional singing and drumming). Holi songs, and the throwing of Phaku, Haldi (turmeric), sandalwood paste, Jetuka (henna), and colorful Phaku are flung into the air, filling the skies with vibrant colors. The melodious tunes of Holi songs awaken hearts and souls, making people forget their sorrows, conflicts, and the struggles of today's world. The festival brings color and joy into everyone's life.

Traditionally, Phakuwa colors were made from natural ingredients like Palash, Shimolu, turmeric, neem, and flowers. But nowadays, synthetic colors have become popular, threatening the authenticity of the festival and posing health and environmental hazards. Chemicals in synthetic colors can cause skin allergies and eye infections. Some artificial colors contaminate water and disrupt the balance of hormones in the human body. Therefore, we should strive to revive eco-friendly practices that protect health and the environment.

Phakuwa is not merely a festival of colors, it embodies the essence of Indian culture, celebrating life, love and harmony. It transcends religious boundaries and unites people from different faiths and backgrounds. Holi breaks social barriers, bringing people together regardless of caste, religion, or status.

Holi of changing colors in changing times

By: Priyanka Saurabh

Holi is a festival celebrated by people of all backgrounds, forgetting enmity and embracing each other. Yet, this festival of unity and love is changing. The joys of Phalgun now seem like distant memories. The colors of Holi have faded over the years. Elders lament that there is no longer the laughter, merriment, and lively spirit that once characterized the festival. The sound of water splashes and the vibrancy of Holi have taken a quiet turn after a few hours of celebration. The joyous chants of "Aao Radhe khele phaag, Holi aayi" and the merriment surrounding the festival are getting subdued with time.

As soon as Phalgun arrived, the excitement of Holi started to fill the air. The sound of Phag started resonating in the temples, and Holi folk songs were heard everywhere. As the evening fell, traditional dances with dhap-chang spread the colors of Holi all around. People happily splashed water on each other, and there was no bitterness, only happiness. Holi preparations began from Vasant Panchami itself, and the courtyards and temples of the community came alive with the beats of Chang. At night, dancing to the beats of Chang attracted everyone. People singing Phalgun songs and Rasiya from a distance joined the dance and enjoyed Holi under the shadow of the stars. However, as time has changed, the warmth of relationships seems to have faded. Nowadays Holi greetings often begin and end with "Happy Holi" sent through mobile or internet. The atmosphere of enthusiasm and celebration is no longer the same as before. Earlier, children used to form groups for Holi in every locality and collect Holi donations and happily throw colors on anyone. Even when they were teased or scolded, they would laugh. Now it seems that people are more interested in arguing than having fun.

In earlier times, the daughters-in-law of neighbors were treated like family. Homes were filled with the aroma of delicious delicacies, and guests were welcomed with open arms. Today, celebrations are mostly confined to one's own home, and the sense of community is diminishing. A simple "Holi Mubarak"

over the phone has replaced the earlier heartfelt relationships, making relationships seem less cordial. This change has led to families being hesitant to let their daughters-in-law meet friends or relatives. Earlier, girls would roam around in the open air, laughing and having fun during Holi, but now if a girl stays at a relative's house for too long, her family becomes anxious.

The Holi festival used to be a season of joy, starting with the planting of Holi plants. Little girls would make waludiya from cow dung and make beautiful garlands with jewelry, coconuts, anklets, and toe rings. Sadly, these traditions have now ended. Earlier, colors were made at home by grinding tesu and palash flowers, and women would sing Holi songs. On the day of Holi, everyone would celebrate by dancing to the beats of Chang. The tunes of Faag would start resonating from Basant Panchami itself, but now Holi songs are heard only at a few places. Traditionally, people from different communities would gather to play Holi with the beats of dholak and chang. Where has that lively spirit gone now?

Today, Holi seems like a mere tradition. In recent years, social anger and divisions have grown so much that many families prefer to stay indoors on this festival day. Though people have been celebrating Holi with enthusiasm for years, the real purpose of this festival, which is to promote brotherhood and remove negativity, is now lost somewhere. Society is facing many challenges, and social inequality is eroding the values of love, brotherhood, and humanity. There was a time when Holi was an important occasion when families would gather to witness the Holika Dahan, and on the same day they would happily apply colors and throw abir on each other. Groups would visit each other's houses to share the joy of Holi and sing Fagua songs while immersed in the spirit of Bhaang. Now, the reality is that few people prefer to stay out of the house on Holi. Every month and every season brings a new festival, which reminds us of the happiness they can bring. These celebrations cheer us up, fill our hearts with hope, and remove feelings of loneliness, even if only for a little while. We must treasure this festive spirit.



around the burning of Holika on the eve of Holi and the second revolves around the Doul Lila of Radha and Krishna. The heart of the Phagun festival lies in the divine love of Shri Krishna and the gopis of Braj. Once, when Brajbhushan Hari arrived in Braj, the young women of Braj, wear-

voted follower of Vishnu, which displeased Hiranyakashipu. On his command, Holika, his sister, who had a boon that fire could not harm her, sat with Prahlada on her lap in a fire. However, Holika was burnt to ashes while Prahlada was unharmed due to Vishnu's blessings. This incident

'To completely free the Kursk region from the enemy in the nearest future' Russia says it has retaken Kursk's biggest town as Putin advisor says truce would help Ukraine

MOSCOW, March 13: Russia claimed Thursday that its troops have driven the Ukrainian army out of the biggest town in Russia's Kursk border region, as a senior Kremlin official said that a US-proposed 30-day ceasefire in the war three years after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine would help Kyiv by giving its weary and short-handed military a break. The Russian Defence Ministry's claim that it recaptured the town of Sudzha, hours after President Vladimir Putin visited his commanders in Kursk and wore military fatigues, could not be independently verified. Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment on the claim. The renewed Russian military push and Putin's high-profile visit to his troops came as US President Donald Trump presses for a diplomatic end to the war. The US Tuesday lifted its March 3 suspension of military aid for Kyiv after senior US and Ukrainian officials made progress on how to stop the fighting during talks held in Saudi Arabia. Trump said Wednesday that "it's up to Russia now" as his administration presses Moscow to agree to the



ceasefire. The US president has made veiled threats to hit Russia with new sanctions if it won't engage with peace efforts. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that US negotiators were on their way to Russia, but he wouldn't comment on Moscow's view of the ceasefire proposal. "Before the talks start, and they haven't started yet, it would be wrong to talk about it in public," he told reporters. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News that national security adviser Mike Waltz spoke Wednesday with his Russian counterpart. She also confirmed that

Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff will head to Moscow for talks with Russian officials, possibly including Putin. Russian news agencies reported Thursday that Witkoff's plane had landed in Moscow. It wasn't immediately possible to verify the reports. Senior US officials say they hope to see Russia stop attacks on Ukraine within the next few days. But Yuri Ushakov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy adviser, complained in televised remarks Thursday that a ceasefire would grant a "temporary break for the Ukrainian military."

Ushakov said that Moscow wants a "long-term peaceful settlement that takes into account Moscow's interests and concerns." His comments came a day after his phone call with Waltz. Ushakov's comments echoed statements from Putin, who has repeatedly said a temporary ceasefire would benefit Ukraine and its Western allies. The US still has about \$3.85 billion in congressionally authorized funding for future arms shipments to Ukraine, but the Trump administration has shown no interest so far in using that authority to send additional weapons as it awaits the outcome of peace overtures. By signalling its openness to a ceasefire, Ukraine has presented the Kremlin with a dilemma at a time when the Russian military has the upper hand in the war — whether to accept a truce and abandon hopes of making new gains, or reject the offer and risk derailing a cautious rapprochement with Washington. The Ukrainian army's foothold inside Russia has been under intense pressure for months from a renewed effort by Russian forces, backed by North Korean troops. (AP)

Emirati diplomat identified as having letter from Trump meets Iran's foreign minister

DUBAI, March 13: An Emirati diplomat earlier identified by Tehran as carrying a letter from US President Donald Trump seeking to jump-start talks over Iran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme met Wednesday with Iran's foreign minister in the Iranian capital. It is unclear how Iran will react to the letter, which Trump revealed during a television interview last week. Its intended recipient, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has said he's not interested in talks with a "bullying government." But Iran struggles with economic woes exacerbated by US and Western sanctions over its nuclear programme, and Trump has imposed more since he took office in January. That pressure, coupled with internal turmoil in Iran and recent direct attacks by Israel, has put Tehran in one of the most precarious positions its theocracy has faced since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. "America threatens with military action, but in my opinion, this threat is irrational," Khamenei said earlier Wednesday. "Iran is capable of delivering a reciprocal blow, and it will certainly do so." A sudden visit by an Emirati diplomat Iranian state television showed Emirati official Anwar Gargash meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Tehran. Gargash's visit had not been previously announced. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman earlier said he'd be carrying the letter from Trump. The UAE, home to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, maintains close ties with the United States. The brief footage shot before the meeting did not show the letter. Gargash and the UAE government did not acknowledge his trip during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan and did not respond to a request for comment. Trump last week acknowledged writing a letter to the 85-year-old Khamenei. The move recalled Trump's letter-writing to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in his first term, which

led to face-to-face meetings but no deals to limit Pyongyang's atomic bombs and a missile programme capable of reaching the continental US. The last time Trump tried to send a letter to Khamenei, through the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2019, the supreme leader mocked the effort. Abe ended up slipping the envelope under his leg in footage widely shared by Iranian state media to this day. On Wednesday before Gargash's arrival, Khamenei spoke to students during a ceremony in Tehran and called Trump's letter "an attempt to deceive global public opinion." "This person tore apart and threw out of the window finished and completed, and signed, talks," Khamenei said. "How could one possibly negotiate with such a person?" He added: "If we wanted to build a nuclear weapon, America couldn't stop us." Iran's uranium is now close to weapons-grade Trump's overture comes as Israel and the United States have warned they will never let Iran acquire a nuclear weapon, leading to fears of a military confrontation as Tehran enriches uranium at near weapons-grade levels of 60 per cent purity — something only done by atomic-armed nations. Iran has long maintained its programme is for peaceful purposes, even as its officials increasingly threaten to pursue the bomb as tensions are high with the US over its sanctions and with Israel as a shaky ceasefire holds in its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Israel and Iran have traded direct attacks during the Israel-Hamas war, while partners in Tehran's self-described "Axis of Resistance" are reeling after the assassinations of their leaders by Israel. In Israel, officials have suggested striking Iran's nuclear programme now, something Trump has threatened while insisting he'd prefer reaching a diplomatic deal with Tehran. (AP)

President Duda calls on US to place nuclear weapons in Poland

WARSAW, March 13: Poland's President Andrzej Duda again called on the United States to deploy nuclear weapons to Poland as a deterrent to Russia, the latest indication that the frontline NATO nation is increasingly considering nuclear protection as fears of Russia grow. Duda made his appeal in an interview with the Financial Times published on Thursday, repeating an appeal he made to the Biden administration in 2022. Duda's adviser for international affairs, Wojciech Kolarski, followed up on Duda's appeal with an interview on Poland's RMF FM radio Thursday morning in which he argued that nuclear protection would improve security for Poland, a NATO member along the alliance's eastern flank that shares borders with Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian territory of Kaliningrad. Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a political opponent of Duda's, said last week that Poland was in talks with France concerning President's Emmanuel Macron's proposal to use France's nuclear deterrent to protect the continent from Russian threats. Moscow called that idea "extremely confrontational." (AP)

Pak PM visits Balochistan after insurgents attack train

KARACHI, March 13: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday visited the restive Balochistan province to review the law and order situation and to express solidarity with the people there following the Jaffar Express hijacking incident in which 21 civilians and four soldiers were killed. Sharif's visit comes a day after security forces killed all 33 Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militants who on Tuesday hijacked the Jaffar Express. Sharif is accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Federal Minister for Planning, Development Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Nawabzada Mir Khalid Magsi and others. The incident occurred when the train, travelling from Quetta to Peshawar and carrying 440 passengers, was ambushed by BLA militants near the mountainous terrain of Gudalar and Piru Kunri in a

tunnel. They opened fire on the train and held the passengers hostage, prompting the security forces to initiate an operation that lasted two days. Announcing the completion of the operation, Director General Inter-Services Public Relations Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry on Wednesday said the armed forces took part in the action against militants who "remained in contact with their facilitators and mastermind based in Afghanistan via satellite phone". Units from the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), Special Services Group (SSG), Army, and Frontier Corps (FC) took part in the operation, the army's spokesperson said. Chaudhry said no one can be permitted to make innocent people of Pakistan the victim of their barbarism in the streets, trains, buses or markets because of their misleading ideas and instructions and facilitation of foreign masters. "Whoever does this, let me say it very

clearly, will be hunted down and brought to justice. Let me also say that this incident of Jaffar Express changes the rules of the game," he said. The bodies of those killed in the attack will be sent to their native areas after necessary administrative prerequisites. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Thursday lambasted former prime minister Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for "politicising" the incident and misinterpreting the situation on social media. "We need to rise above political interests and demonstrate national unity (on such occasions)," said Asif. Asif slammed the former PTI-led government's decision to relocate thousands of fighters from the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to the country. On the Jaffar Express rescue operation, the minister said, "God forbids, there could have been a lot of casualties, but the security forces eliminated the terrorists. (PTI)

Canada, EU swiftly retaliate against Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs

BRUSSELS, March 13: Major trade partners swiftly hit back at President Donald Trump's increased tariffs on aluminum and steel imports, imposing stiff new taxes on US products, from textiles and water heaters to beef and bourbon. Canada, the largest supplier of steel and aluminum to the US, said on Wednesday it will place 25 per cent reciprocal tariffs on steel products and also raise taxes on a host of items: tools, computers and servers, display monitors, sports equipment and cast-iron products. Across the Atlantic, the European Union (EU) will raise tariffs on American beef, poultry, bourbon and motorcycles, peanut butter and jeans. Combined, the new tariffs will cost companies billions of dollars, and further escalate the uncertainty in two of the world's major trade partnerships. Companies will either take the losses and earn fewer profits, or, more likely, pass costs along to consumers in the form of higher prices. Prices will go up, in Europe and the United States, and jobs are at stake, said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. "We deeply regret this measure. Tariffs are taxes. They are bad for business, and even worse for consumers," von der Leyen said. The EU duties aim for pressure points in the US while minimising additional damage to Europe. EU officials have made clear that the tariffs -- taxes on imports -- are aimed at products made in Republican-held states, such as beef and poultry from Kansas and Nebraska and wood products from Alabama and Georgia. (AP)

**OFFICE OF THE
DIPHU MUNICIPAL BOARD:: DIPHU
KARBI ANGLONG**

No. DMB/Tax/Govt. Value/NIT/2025-26/308/271 Dated Diphu the 13/03/2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing non-refundable Diphu Municipal Board money receipt worth Rs. 10/- (Rupees ten) only are hereby invited from intending Tenderers for settlement of Bid for the financial year 2025-26. The same shall be received upto 2:00 P.M of 20th March'2025 by the undersigned and shall be opened on the same day in presence of Tenderers or their authorized agents. The Tender Application Form and details particulars of the Items/Groups may be collected from the Office during the office hours. The intending Tenderers shall have to pay Rs. 1,000/- (Rupees one thousand) only against the cost of Tender Application Form.

Enclosed: List of Item/Groups

LIST OF ITEM/GROUP

No.	Name of Item/Group	Govt. Valuation (in Rs)	Earnest Money (1 % Tribal & 2% Non-Tribal)	Remark
A: Market Weekly/Daily				
1	Diphu Daily Market	612150		
2	ASEB Sub-Div. -I	279510		
3	Birla (NH) Daily Market	30030		
4	Bids (Factory) Daily Market	40425		
5	Rongkhelan Daily Market	51975		
6	Pirbi Daily Market	11550		
7	Mentila Daily Market	5775		
8	Rongkinti Daily Market	2887		
9	Police Reserve to Medical College Daily Market Daily Market	3465		
10	Lorulungso Daily Market	92400		
B: Parking Tax				
11	Auto	300300		
12	LMV	157080		
13	Auto-Truck	92400		
14	Taxi	92400		
15	Bus	519750		
16	Truck	150150		
17	Bicycle Parking Tax & License Fee (Tin Ticket)	34650		
18	Handpush Cart (Theta) Parking Tax & License Fee (Tin Ticket)	34650		
C: Other Tolls/Tax/Fees				
19	Expose Tax	150150		
20	Expose Tax	51975		
21	Private Ghumti Tax	63525		
D: SANITATION TAX				
22	Pay & Use Toilet (at 2 nd Floor, Block No. 10	23100		
23	Sky Train (Taralangso Children Park)	165000		
	TOTAL	2,965,297		

Terms & Conditions

The following Terms & Conditions must be fulfilled by the Tenderers. Incomplete Application shall be liable for rejection.

- (a). The Tenderers must furnish Professional Tax Clearance Certificate Valid upto 31-03-2026.
- (b) Trading License duly renewed upto 31-12-2026 must furnish by Non- Tribal Tenderers
- (c) The Tenderers belonging to Schedule Tribe (Hills) must furnish Caste Certificate in lieu of Trading License.
- (d) The Tenderers must furnish GST Registration Certificate.
- (e) The Tenderers must furnish House Tax Clearance Certificate Valid upto 31-12-2026, either of his/her own or parents (from Diphu Municipal Board).
- (f) The Tenderer must furnish Diphu Municipal Hoard Business Registration Certificate Valid upto 31-03-2026.

- Separate Tender Application Form supported by required documents MIN be submitted against each Group/Item.
- Tender shall not be accepted from any defaulter/false documents
- The selected Tenderers shall have to deposit the settle amount in 1 (one) installment within (Seven) days from the date of issue or declaration of the List/Notice of successful Tenderers, failing which the settlement shall be settled with the next highest Tender of the Diphu Municipal Board may re- settle the Lease of others regular Tenderers at highest rate.
- The selected Tenderers / Party shall have to enter into "DEED OF AGREEMENT" for execution of lease for Collection of Tolls/Tax/Fee on Stamp Paper.
- The authority of the Diphu Municipal Board reserves the right for settlement of any group/item at highest rate with regular tenders and settlement shall be accorded at the direction of the authority of Diphu Municipal Board. The authority of Diphu Municipal Board shall have the right to reject tender for settled for the year 2025-26.
- The name of each Group / Item tendered for and rate offered should be written in "BLOCK LETTER" on the body of the Application Format in every column.
- Tender in prescribe format must be submitted by the Tenderers.
- Once the tender is accepted no request shall entertained for part payment of the Bid amount and shall collect Toll/Tax/Fee as per approved rate.
- No loss or compensation will be entertained that may arise due to any kind of bundh or whatsoever.
- The Lessee shall have to print Money Receipt Book (in triplicate) at his/ her own cost for which no payment will be entertained and to be registered in the office to be certified by the undersigned (the simple of which may be obtained from the office).
- In case, the last date of receipt of sealed tender falls on a holiday that may be notified by Central/State Govt. out of event of "Unexpected Bandh", sealed tender shall be received and opened on the next working days as notified.
- The decision of the authority of Diphu Municipal Board shall be final in any dispute relating to settlement/Cancellation of any Group/Item with the highest Bidders or otherwise or Add/Modify/Alter any Terms & Conditions without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/-
Chairman
Diphu Municipal Board
Diphu:: Karbi Anglong

Memo No. DMB/Fax/Govt. Value/NIT/2025-26/308/271(A) Dated Diphu the 13/03/2025

More than 250 people killed and thousands rendered homeless in violence MHA advisor confirmed roadmap for peace in Manipur prepared, claims Meitei body

IMPHAL, March 13: A civil society organisation of Meiteis on Thursday claimed that MHA Advisor for North East A K Mishra has told them that the Centre has prepared a roadmap for peace in ethnic strife-hit Manipur. Federation of Civil Society (FOCS) Spokesperson Ngangbam Chamchan Singh told reporters here on Thursday that Mishra told them on Wednesday that the first phase of the roadmap for peace in Manipur has already been implemented.

Singh said, "A FOCS delegation met the MHA Advisor and other officials at the Old Secretariat (in Imphal) on Wednesday following an invitation during which Mishra informed them that the Centre has prepared a roadmap to end the ongoing conflict in the state and it will be implemented in phases."

The FOCS spokesperson said, "Mishra informed us that the roadmap includes surrender of weapons, reopening of roads, and curbing activities of armed groups. In connection with this, on February 20, the gov-



ernor had called for the surrender of all arms. Movement of all people on all roads of the state without any hindrances. These are part of the initial phase of the roadmap

as per Mishra." Regarding the suspension of operations (SOO) pact between the Centre and Kuki armed groups, Ngangbam said, "Mishra said

while the agreement has lapsed it has not been abrogated. However, the agreement will be re-modified and revised in due course."

The FOCS spokesperson said "We presented five points to them which include free movement of all people in the state without any hindrance. We also urged them to allow the rehabilitation of all internally displaced persons to their native places without any fear, initiate steps to stop gun attacks on villagers by armed groups, to take steps to make a detailed study of the demography of Manipur and initiate dialogue."

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The Centre had imposed President's rule in Manipur on February 13 after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned. The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

Dimapur weavers receive handloom sector support items to boost production

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 13: Handloom sector support items, including looms (frame looms and loin looms), accessories, solar lighting units, warping drums and other essential equipment, under the special cluster development programme (SCDP) were distributed to weavers at ICM hall at Toluvi, Dimapur, on Thursday, aiming to empower local weavers and promote sustainable handloom development in Dimapur.

The initiative covers four villages of Baman Pukhri A, Baman Pukhri B, Darogajan and Kushia-bill, benefiting over 200 weavers.

Key interventions of the programme included skill upgradation, product development, exposure visits, and financial assistance for works sheds and lighting units.

Speaking at the launch of the SCDP under the national handicrafts development programme in Dimapur, adviser to industries and commerce department Hekani Jakhalu called the initiative the beginning of a larger effort to empower women weavers in Nagaland.

She said it was aimed at equipping the weavers with the required skills needed to sustain themselves through training and distribution of equipment.

Jakhalu urged the weavers to focus on improving product designs, quality, and marketing strategies to compete in larger markets.

She asserted that the government is committed to supporting them through further training in product design and refinement to help Nagaland's handloom industry gain global recognition.

Jakhalu also said the industries and commerce department is working on developing a swaddle wrap designed and made in Nagaland as a unique brand.

Minister launches two revolutionary software platforms at TRIHMS

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 13: The Arunachal Pradesh Health & Family Welfare Minister Biyuram Wahge on Thursday launched two revolutionary Software platforms at TRIHMS, Naharlagun for the convenience of patients.

Launching the software, health minister Wahge said, "Arunachal Pradesh leads the Way in Healthcare Innovation: These two revolutionary software platforms for TRIHMS, Naharlagun may help the patients, attendants and others who visit the hospital to meet the patient and doctors."

"The initiative is to enhance patient experience and streamline hospital services," said Wahge.

One can scan and find and scan and feedback—as a pilot program at Tomo Riba Institute of Health & Medical Sciences (TRIHMS), Naharlagun. These digital solutions, introduced for the first time in India's healthcare sector, are set to revolutionise hospital navigation and service feedback mechanisms.

"Navigating through large hospital complexes has always been a challenge for patients, attendants,

and visitors. Scan & Find, an advanced hospital indoor navigation system, addresses this issue by providing real-time digital directions. By simply scanning QR codes strategically placed across the hospital, users can instantly access step-by-step guidance to their desired locations, such as OPD departments, diagnostic centers, wards, or administrative offices," said the minister.

He informed that this initiative is expected to significantly reduce confusion and time wastage, particularly for first-time visitors and elderly patients who often struggle with locating medical services within the hospital premises.

The system ensures a seamless experience, enhancing patient convenience and reducing the burden on hospital staff.

He emphasised that the users can Scan and Feedback: Strengthening accountability through digital feedback.

These initiatives will recognise the importance of patient feedback in improving healthcare services, the Scan & Feedback platform allows visitors to digitally share their experiences regarding hospital

services. This digital initiative can promote transparency, accountability, and service improvement.

Hospital administrators can analyse feedback instantly, identify key issues, and take corrective measures promptly.

By directly involving patients in the service evaluation process, the system empowers the hospital to enhance patient satisfaction and ensure quality healthcare delivery.

"For the first time in India, we are integrating smart technology into hospital services to improve patient experience. These initiatives will not only ease hospital navigation but also establish a robust feedback mechanism, ensuring continuous service improvement. We are proud to pilot this project at TRIHMS, and based on its success, we aim to expand it to other hospitals across Arunachal Pradesh," Wahge added.

Director Health Services, NHM Mission Director, Family Welfare Director, TRIHMS Director, teaching and non teaching faculty of TRIHMS among others were present on the occasion.

THRC seeks report from DGP over FIR refusal

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, March 13: The Tripura Human Rights Commission (THRC) has directed Director General of Police (DGP) Amitabh Ranjan to investigate allegations that police personnel in North Tripura refused to register an FIR and to submit a report by April 24.

As per the THRC, the commission received a complaint via speed post from Sati Rani Goswami, a resident of Gobindapur, Kadamtala, in North Tripura District. She alleged that officers at Kadamtala Police Station refused to file an FIR on January 1, 2025. The complaint specifically named Havildar Gayatri Das as one of the officers involved.

Along with her complaint, Goswami also submitted a copy of a court petition addressed to the Special Judge of North Tripura. Before proceeding with the case, the THRC has sought a detailed report from the DGP.

"A copy of the complaint, along with its enclosures, has been sent to the DGP, Tripura, with a request to conduct an inquiry into the matter and submit a report before the Commission within three weeks," the THRC stated in its order.

Arunachal CM unveils biodiversity action plan

ITANAGAR, March 13: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday released a biodiversity action plan aimed at achieving the 'Pakke Declaration' goals.

The 'Arunachal Pradesh State Biodiversity Strategy and Action: A People's Plan' provides localised action points that empower communities to take charge of environmental conservation with governmental support.

Khandu said that the plan aims at inclusive and sustainable growth through collective efforts.

He emphasised that the plan complements the 'Pakke Declaration' and its five key themes -- environment, climate resilience, well-being, sustainable livelihoods and collaborative action.

"It will also contribute significantly to India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reinforcing Arunachal Pradesh's role as a leader in conservation efforts," he said.

Khandu noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been consistently highlighting the importance of balancing development with environmental conservation, and his vision of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' includes a strong focus on sustainability, ecological preservation, and a green future for the coming generations.

He pointed out that under the prime minister's leadership, India has taken significant steps in environmental conservation through initiatives such as LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment), which promotes sustainable living and responsible consumption, the National Mission for



Green India, which focuses on expanding forest cover and restoring degraded ecosystems, and the Jal Jeevan Mission, which ensures access to clean and safe drinking water while promoting water conservation.

He also highlighted the Namami Gange and National River Conservation Plan, which work towards revitalising and preserving India's rivers, and the International Solar Alliance, a global initiative promoting renewable energy.

The chief minister stated that these initiatives align seamlessly with Arunachal Pradesh's biodiversity strategy, reinforcing the state's commitment to conservation while fostering economic growth through sustainable means.

Khandu said that the traditional wisdom of indigenous communities has played a crucial role in enabling them to live in harmony with nature.

He expressed confidence that the action plan would further strengthen conservation efforts and serve as an example for

the rest of the world.

The CM assured all stakeholders that implementing the plan would be the government's top priority, while reaffirming its commitment to preserving the state's natural wealth, empowering local communities, and ensuring that development and conservation go hand-in-hand.

Khandu announced that a dedicated cell would be established in the chief minister's office to monitor the implementation of schemes and projects announced in the state budget, including the state biodiversity plan.

He added that the plan would be implemented across the state at all levels, including at gram panchayats, with the active involvement of grassroots communities.

Stressing the importance of collective responsibility, Khandu asserted that biodiversity conservation is not just the government's duty but a shared responsibility of all citizens. He added that unless people take ownership of their role in protecting the environment, no government action plan would be successful.

The state cabinet on November 2021 adopted the 'Pakke Declaration' at Seijosa in Pakke Kessang district, to accelerate comprehensive, smart, climate-resilient and inclusive development of the people and the state with all-round efforts.

There are five main themes or 'Panch Dharas' of the declaration -- environment, forest and climate change; health and well-being for all; sustainable and adaptive living; livelihoods and opportunities and evidence generation and collaborative actions. (PTI)

Nagaland MP highlights village guards' plight in LS

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 13: Nagaland's lone Lok Sabha MP S Supongmeren Jamir highlighted the plight of the Nagaland village guards during the ongoing second leg of the budget session 2025 on Wednesday.

Jamir said the village guards, despite playing a pivotal role in guarding 120 villages along the Indo-Myanmar border, covering six districts of Mon, Tuensang, Kiphire, Meluri, Noklak and Longleng since their inception in 1957, have remained neglected by both the state government and the Union ministry of home affairs.

He said monthly salary of ₹ 3,000, annual clothing allowances of ₹ 100 and monthly ration allowance of ₹ 60 are given to the village guards at present, which gives a sense of the level of neglect under which they are operating.

Seeking intervention of Union home minister Amit Shah in the matter, Jamir urged the ministry concerned to revamp and strengthen the village guards and deploy them along the border, instead of promoting border fencing and free movement restriction policies.

BJP sweeps local body polls in Mizoram's Chakma council



AIZAWL, March 13: The BJP, which is in power in the Chakma Autonomous District Council in south Mizoram's Lawngtlai district, on Thursday swept the village council (VC) polls, securing a majority in 64 out of 88 VCs.

According to the final results announced by the state election commission, Mizoram's ruling party, the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), stood second, winning a majority in 12 VCs, while the Mizo National Front (MNF) bagged eight VCs.

The Congress, however, failed to secure a majority in any of the 88 VCs.

There was no clear majority in two VCs, and two others were won by independent candidates, the

SEC said.

Out of the 64 VCs where the BJP registered victory, it won nine of those uncontested, the commission said.

Polling for the village councils in the CADC was held on Wednesday, registering a voter turnout of 86.97 per cent, it said.

According to the state election commission, there are 516 seats, of which 88 are reserved for women.

The BJP won 366 seats, the ZPM 81, MNF 45 and the Congress two. Twenty-two independent candidates were also declared elected, the SEC said.

The state BJP, in a statement, thanked the people and said it will take steps for development of the region. (PTI)

Admission in five new Eklavya schools in Tripura to begin from coming academic session: Official

AGARTALA, March 13: Five more Eklavya Model Residential Schools will start functioning in Tripura in the coming academic session, an official on Thursday. Eklavya model residential schools are exclusively for tribal students. Currently, six eklavya model residential schools are operational in Tripura while the Centre has approved 21 such residential schools for the northeastern state. The estimated cost of setting up an eklavya model residential school is ₹ 48 crore, the official said.

"Out of the total of 21 sanctioned schools, construction of five schools have been completed at Rupaicherri, Karbook, Padmabil, Dumburnagar and Gabardi, all in tribal-dominated places," Tribal Welfare department, director, Subhashish Das told PTI.

The eklavya model residential schools function under the guidance of the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS).

"We plan to start the admission process in the five new residential schools during the upcoming academic session (in June). The department has already invited applications for admission in the five proposed schools. The admission will be conducted on the basis of the outcome of an entrance test," he said. The eklavya model residential schools offer CBSE curriculum from class 6 to 12.

"Manpower including teaching staff will be recruited by the NESTS, an autonomous body working under the Ministry of Tribal Welfare. Each school has an intake capacity of 480 students," he said.

The state government will provide all ancillary facilities including solar lighting and smart class for the students, he said, adding the tribal students of rural areas will immensely benefit from such educational institutions. (PTI)

Tributes paid to 3 BSF jawans

IMPHAL, March 13: Senior BSF, police and civil administration officials on Thursday paid tributes to the three border guards who were killed in an accident in Manipur's Kangpokpi district, the paramilitary force said in a statement.

The officials paid tributes to head constable Surendra Kumar and constables Bachhu Mondal and Ankul Singh of the 37 Bn BSF during a wreath-laying ceremony held at the airport, the statement added.

"The deceased BSF jawans contributed immensely through their selfless service in maintaining law and order in Manipur," it added.

Three BSF personnel were killed and 13 others injured after the truck in which they were travelling fell into a gorge at Changoubung village on March 11.

While two personnel died on the spot, another succumbed to injuries on the way to hospital. (PTI)

No:TDB/6th FC/108/2024-25/4000

Date 01/03/2025

INVITATION FOR BIDS

The Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Development Block, Dist: Tamulpur, BTC, Assam invites bid affixing non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and Twenty Paise) only from the approved and eligible contractor Class-I (A, B, C), Class-II or Class-III category registered with Assam PWD (R&B) Department for the following work under P&RD Deptt. under 6th FC (Tied Grant) for the year 2024-25. Tender Box will be available for dropping tender in the Office of the Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Development Block from 01/03/2025 up to 24/03/2025 (if any holidays or bandhs falls then the subsequent day) and the tender box will be opened at the same day on 3:00 PM in same office.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Sanctioned Amount	Tender Value	Time of completion	Tender Cost, Earnest Money & Date of tender
1	Const. of approach road at Bodoland Rural Market at Tamulpur.	10,00,000/-	10,00,000/-	90 Days from the date of issue of formal work order	1. Tender cost @ 0.03% of A/A amount to be pledged by bank draft in favour of Principal Secretary, BTC. 2. Earnest Money @ 2% (in case of ST/SC 1%) of estimated value to be pledged by demand draft/FDR in favour of BDO Tamulpur Development Block. 3. Bidders are specifically requested to inspect the field and study the following condition before submitting their offer/bid.
2	Const. of SG road at Souraguri Keot Jatiya Parishad Office, Tamulpur.	18,00,000/-	18,00,000/-		
3	Const. of Slab culvert at Balabari village.	7,00,000/-	7,00,000/-		
4	Const. of Slab culvert with approach road at Ghogapar Tlak Road.	18,00,000/-	18,00,000/-		
5	Const. of Assamese Martyr near Yuva Sangha Medhi Chuburi.	12,00,000/-	12,00,000/-		
6	Infrastructure development and Const. of store room at Baishya Suburi Nanghar.	17,50,000/-	17,50,000/-		
7	Const. of Slab culvert at Souraguri near Banamali Choudhury house.	18,00,000/-	18,00,000/-		
8	Const. of SG road from Kachubari Yuva Sangha to Susen Rabha house.	8,00,000/-	8,00,000/-		
9	Const. of RCC culvert near Pranjit Biswas house.	18,00,000/-	18,00,000/-		
10	Const. of Hume Pipe culvert near Power house at Kumbhijhar.	6,20,000/-	6,20,000/-		
11	Const. of Manasha Mandir at Ghogapar.	16,00,000/-	16,00,000/-		
12	Const. of crematorium at Dakhin Dongargaoon Samabai Samiti.	20,00,000/-	19,80,198/-		
13	Const. of Crematorium at Jajikona village.	20,00,000/-	19,80,198/-		
14	Const. of Crematorium at Mazgari Baraliapar village.	20,00,000/-	19,80,198/-		
15	Const. of Crematorium at Dowamakha Samabai Samittee.	20,00,000/-	19,80,198/-		
16	Const. of Crematorium at Ghogapar Uttar Chuburi near Matanga river.	20,00,000/-	19,80,198/-		
17	Const. of E/F and S/G road from Chenigaon Chok house to Pradip Deka house, Chenigaon village.	19,00,000/-	19,00,000/-		

Details NIT may be seen at Office of the BDO Tamulpur Development Block, Tamulpur, Dist: Tamulpur. Sd/-

Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Dev. Block, Tamulpur

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1615

DMK spokesperson Saravanan Annadurai said no law 'opposed or stopped using Ru in Tamil'

TN govt replaces Rupee symbol in budget logo with Tamil letter, draws BJP's ire

CHENNAI, March 13: Amid a fierce language tussle with the Centre, the Tamil Nadu government has replaced the Devanagari rupee symbol with a Tamil letter in its logo for the budget 2025-26, which will be tabled in the state Assembly on Friday.

Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu is scheduled to table the budget on Friday. The logo for the budget, released by the government on Thursday, carried 'ru,' the first letter of the Tamil word 'Rubaai,' which denotes the Indian currency in the vernacular language.

The logo also had the caption "everything for all," indicating what the ruling DMK claims is its inclusive governance model.

While the move drew the ire of the BJP, the ruling DMK wondered if any rule barred such a depiction.

Slamming the Stalin government's move, BJP TN chief K Annamalai asked the chief minister how stupid he could be to do it.

"The DMK Government's State Budget for 2025-26 replaces the Rupee Symbol designed by a Tamilian, which was adopted by



the whole of Bharat and incorporated into our Currency."

"Thiru Udhay Kumar, who designed the symbol, is the son of a former DMK MLA. How stupid can you become, Thiru @mk-stalin?" he said in a social media post. He also shared the logo of the 2024-25 TN budget that had the Devanagari symbol.

Responding, DMK spokesperson Saravanan Annadurai said no law "opposed or stopped using Ru in Tamil."

"Then why such anger," he asked in a post on 'X.'

Senior BJP leader and former state unit chief Tamilisai Soundararajan also attacked the DMK.

"We feel very sorry for the attitude of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister (Stalin) and the Tamil Nadu government," she told PTI Videos.

"It was 'stupidity,' like Annamalai mentioned, she said. She also asked why the change was made after so long and if they have "become Tamil now."

"They are against national integrity, national unity," she charged.

The development comes amidst the language row between the Centre and Tamil Nadu.

The ruling DMK and other major political parties in the state have been opposing the three-language policy under the National Education Policy, alleging that it was an attempt to impose Hindi by the Union government, which has denied the charge.

The DMK has argued that the Centre wants to 'impose' the north Indian language on Tamil Nadu through the implementation of the 3-language formula in the NEP and asserted that its government in the state will not follow the 3-language formula but only stick to its decades-old 2-language policy of Tamil and English.

According to the government portal 'knowindia.gov.in,' the rupee symbol is an amalgam of Devanagari "Ra" and the Roman Capital "R" with two parallel horizontal stripes running at the top representing the national flag and also the "equal to" sign.

"The Indian Rupee sign was adopted by the Government of India on 15th July, 2010," it said. (PTI)

Protesters raise slogans against Tushar Gandhi in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 13: A group of men, reportedly RSS-BJP workers has raised slogans against Tushar Gandhi, the great grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, urging him to withdraw a statement he had made against the RSS.

The police said the small group of people, allegedly linked to the Sangh Parivar, raised slogans against Gandhi at the end of a function he attended at nearby Neyyattinkara on Wednesday evening.

No case has been registered in connection with the matter, they said. Visuals aired by TV channels showed a group of men raising slogans against Gandhi, urging him to withdraw his statement.

Gandhi arrived in Neyyattinkara to unveil the statue of the late Gandhian, P Gopinathan Nair.

RSS and BJP workers protested over Tushar Gandhi's remarks against the RSS during the event, according to TV channels.

In his speech, he said both the UDF and LDF, which have had a long history of fighting each other in the state, need to realise that another very dangerous and insidious enemy has entered Kerala—the RSS and BJP.

"The BJP would be able to defeat, but the RSS is poison. And we have to be very cautious about it because if it spreads in the circulation system of our country, then all is lost," he added.

Gandhi further said the two political fronts in Kerala must be reminded that they have a responsibility to protect India, and whatever their political interests may be, is less important at this point of time.

He alleged the RSS is more dangerous than the British, claiming that while the latter sought to rule, the present danger is a threat to our existence.

"They (RSS) are trying to destroy the soul of the country. We should be fearful of that. Because if it (soul) is lost, everything is lost," Gandhi added.



He urged them to remain resolute in their decision to fight against these divisive forces. Tension gripped the area as BJP-RSS workers shouted slogans and blocked Gandhi's car. The protesters said the municipal ward was represented by the BJP and that Gandhi should withdraw his remarks against RSS.

However, Tushar Gandhi left after raising the slogan "Gandhiji ki Jai," affirming that his stance remained unchanged.

Meanwhile, Gandhi later said he will not initiate any legal action against the RSS-BJP workers.

"There was no physical assault. They stopped only my vehicle, and I will not take any action," he told a TV channel on Thursday. Congress has rallied behind Gandhi, extending support to him on the issue.

Speaking to reporters in Kochi, Leader of Opposition V D Sathesaran alleged that the protest against Tushar Gandhi was an insult to Mahatma Gandhi and condemned it as a deplorable act of fascism.

"This cannot be tolerated, and the police and government should take stringent action," he said. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) chief K Sudhakaran MP issued condemned the incident. (PTI)

BJP has weakened India economically, socially, says Akhilesh Yadav



LUCKNOW, March 13: Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday accused the ruling BJP of weakening the nation both economically and socially.

"The country has become weak due to the spread of hatred in society. Their (BJP's) conduct, language, and behaviour are weakening society and creating a rift," Yadav said at a press conference.

He further criticised the BJP for its handling of the market, saying, "They are weakening the entire market by handing it over to others. When the market is no longer in your hands, who will do business? Others are coming to our country and taking over our entire market."

"The BJP has weakened the country economically as well as socially," he said.

Yadav also took a jibe at Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's recent statements, calling him a "tees mar khaan" (someone who boasts of their actions without substance).

"Our chief minister is Tees Mar Khan. I'm saying this because he loves the number 30. How many died, 30; how much business was done, 30 crores. This kind of 'Tees Mar Khan' type of accounting can be given by no one except our CM," he said.

Yadav, the former UP CM was referring to the recent claim made by the state government that 30 people had died in a stampede during the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. Additionally, during the recent assembly session, CM Adityanath claimed that a boatman in Prayagraj earned a net profit of 30 crores during the grand event.

The SP chief also questioned Adityanath's statement that lakhs of students in Prayagraj earned money by ferrying devotee on the motorcycle during the Kumbh.

"The CM says that he has provided employment to lakhs of youth preparing for government jobs in Allahabad. Someone please explain to me when did the government decide that private vehicles can be used as commercial ones? And does this mean that youth will now get employment after 144 years," he said, mocking the UP government's claim that the recent Maha Kumbh was held after 144 years.

The former CM further accused the BJP of spreading hatred and propaganda, particularly targeting the Muslim community.

"I want to tell all the people that right now they are spreading hatred towards the Muslim community. In the coming time, they will spread hatred towards the PDA (Backward, Dalits, and Minorities) family," he asserted, adding that the Samajwadi Party would come to power in the state in 2027. (PTI)

Delhi govt to reduce water connection charges, install GPS in tankers: Minister Parvesh Verma

NEW DELHI, March 13: The BJP government will soon reduce water connection charges and install GPS in all the tankers of the Delhi Jal Board besides monitoring outflows from Underground Water Reservoirs (UGRs) to improve supply in the national capital, Water Minister Parvesh Verma said on Thursday.

In an interview with PTI, Verma, who holds PWD and flood and irrigation portfolios, said a new and easy-to-remember four-digit helpline number will be issued soon for the public to lodge their complaints with the public works department (PWD). "We will undertake various reforms in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) that suffered mismanagement in the past. Currently, the water management of DJB is not proper, but we will bring it back on track through various initiatives," he said.

The water connection rates are currently high enough to "discourage" people from having legal connections. Bringing them down will encourage people to get connections legally, he said.

"People should come forward on their own to have legal water connections. We will give a deadline for getting legal connections and penalties will be imposed on those who do not come forward for legal connections," he said.

The minister said according to rough estimates, there are around 20 lakh legal connections in the city while the number of power connections is 50 lakh.

"Every building having electricity con-



nection must also have water connection. According to this simple calculation, there must be around 30 lakh illegal connections," he said. A new tender is also being floated for GPS-fitted tankers supplying water," he said.

The water minister said local residents and MLAs will be involved with monitoring of water supply through tankers and a dashboard for real-time verification of their movements will be put in place.

"The number of trips of tankers will be increased to 16 every day so that water supply in the summers is strengthened," he said. "I have directed for fitting GPS in every tanker, making lists of water supply points and maintaining proper documents," he said. The minister said the outflow of water from the UGRs will be monitored to estimate revenue and losses.

All these steps will ensure an improved water supply and also plug losses made by the DJB, Verma said. A water distribution management system will be developed to ensure the supply of water in all areas of

the city without any unauthorised tapping of the mainlines, he said.

The minister said Haryana supplies water to Delhi according to an agreement.

"Haryana does not release less water to Delhi. If we make any request, the state will increase water supplied to Delhi," he said. The under-construction Chandrawal water treatment plant will be completed by June 2027, Verma said and added it will cater to 11 per cent of Delhi. "We will also replace non-functional tube wells in the old Delhi areas," he said.

The PWD will soon issue a four-digit helpline number for people to lodge complaints related to road maintenance, water-logging and other services provided by the department.

The current helpline is a 10-digit number that is hard to remember. "We have a list of 10 options of four-digit numbers, one of which will be finalised and released for the public soon," he said.

The PWD minister hoped that the work on the Barapulla flyover will be completed after requisite permission for tree-felling is granted by the central empowered committee. He said the BJP government is working in a mission mode to ensure cleaning and rejuvenating the Yamuna river.

Verma, part of a group of ministers headed by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, said the panel will meet to discuss the implementation of the Mahila Samridhi Yojna to provide ₹ 2,500 monthly to needy women. (PTI)

Future of 85 lakh children in 6 states at risk: Rahul slams BJP over exam paper leaks

NEW DELHI, March 13: Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said examination paper leaks were a "systematic failure" and asserted that the "serious problem" would be eradicated only when all political parties and governments forget their differences to take strict steps together.

The former Congress chief said the future of 85 lakh children in six states is at risk as paper leak has become the most dangerous "padmavyuh" for our youth.

"Paper leaks put hardworking students and their families into uncertainty and stress, taking away the fruits of their hard work. It also sends the wrong message to the next generation that dishonesty can be better than hard work, which is completely unacceptable," he said in a post in Hindi on X. "It has not even been a year since the NEET paper leak shook the country. After our protest, the Modi government hid behind a new law and called it a solution, but so many recent leaks have proven that to be a failure as well," he said.

This serious problem is a systematic failure, Gandhi asserted.

It will be eradicated only when all political parties and governments forget their differences and take strict steps together, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

"The dignity of these exams is the right of our children and it has to be protected at all costs," Gandhi asserted.

Using the 'chakravayuh' metaphor as a leitmotif, Gandhi had last year claimed that an atmosphere of fear prevails all around with a group of six trapping the entire country in a 'chakravayuh' he promised would be broken by the INDIA bloc.

Chakravayuh refers to a multi-layered military formation aimed at trapping a warrior by opponents placed strategically in an alignment resembling a lotus-shaped labyrinth. Gandhi had said the 'chakravayuh' is also called a 'padmavyuh' for its resemblance to a lotus (BJP's election symbol) formation. (PTI)

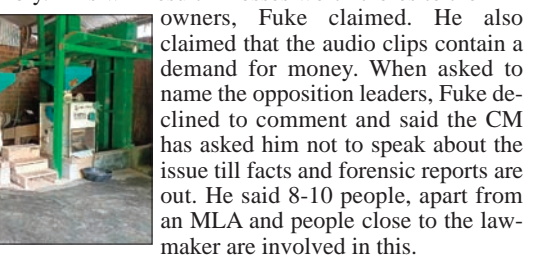
Oppn members blackmailing mill owners with threat of raising questions in House: BJP MLC

MUMBAI, March 13: A BJP MLC has alleged that some opposition members are blackmailing rice mill owners in Maharashtra with the threat of raising questions in the assembly and demanding money through their "agents".

The member of the legislative council, Parinay Fuke, said on Thursday that he had submitted video and audio clips to support his claim to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and demanded a probe. He had also raised the issue in the council on Wednesday after a "calling attention" notice concerning the matter was listed in the state assembly the previous day.

"Some opposition leaders blackmailed rice mill owners and threatened to ask questions or list calling attention notices to extract money through their agents," Fuke said. A calling attention notice is a parliamentary procedure where a member can bring a matter of urgent public importance to the attention of a minister and request a statement on the issue, without necessarily leading to a debate.

When asked about the contents of the audio and video clips he was referring to, Fuke said they state that mill owners were threatened that questions and calling attention notices would be filed in the assembly. This will result in losses worth crores to the mill owners, Fuke claimed. He also claimed that the audio clips contain a demand for money. When asked to name the opposition leaders, Fuke declined to comment and said the CM has asked him not to speak about the issue till facts and forensic reports are out. He said 8-10 people, apart from an MLA and people close to the lawmaker are involved in this.



Fuke said he raised the issue in the council only after the calling attention motion was raised in the lower house.

Such a calling attention motion, raised by senior Congress leader Nana Patole, concerning rice mills came up for discussion in the assembly on Tuesday.

When asked to comment on the matter, Patole declined to speak on it. (PTI)

Telangana CM Reddy backs DMK stand against delimitation

NEW DELHI, March 13: Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday extended support to the DMK over its opposition to the proposed delimitation of parliamentary constituencies and said he would attend the Chennai meeting on the issue after taking permission from the Congress high command.

Reddy made these remarks after a DMK delegation led by Tamil Nadu minister TK Nehru met him in Delhi and invited him to the meeting. "I welcome Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin's stand. I have to get permission from the (Congress) high command to attend the meeting. In-principle, I have agreed to attend," Reddy told reporters.

Earlier this month, Stalin had written to chief ministers of seven states, including Reddy, to form a joint action committee against the delimitation exercise. Reddy further said the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre was "conspiring" against the southern states in the name of delimitation.

"Delimitation is going to be a limitation for the south. We are not going to accept delimitation at any cost," he said.

Reddy emphasised that the southern states paid more taxes than their northern counterparts and were "contributing everything for the nation". The BJP is following vendetta politics. Since the BJP has no presence in south India, it wants to settle a score against south India through delimitation, he added.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah earlier assured the southern states that they wouldn't lose "even a single seat" after the delimitation of constituencies. (PTI)

ISRO achieves de-docking of SpaDeX satellites

'Congrats team ISRO. And heartening for every Indian'

NEW DELHI/BENGALURU, March 13: ISRO on Thursday said it has accomplished de-docking of the SpaDeX satellites, clearing the way for future missions such as exploring the moon, human space flight, and building its own space station.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh announced the successful de-docking of satellites in a post on 'X'.

"SpaDeX satellites accomplished the unbelievable de-docking. This paves the way for smooth conduct of ambitious future missions including the Bharatiya Antriksha Station, Chandrayaan 4 & Gaganyaan," Singh said. "Congrats team ISRO. And heartening for every Indian," he said.

Singh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's continuous patronage keeps the spirits soaring. The SpaDeX mission was

launched on December 30 last year when the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) placed in orbit two satellites -- SDX01 and SDX02 -- to demonstrate the docking experiment in space.

After several attempts, the space agency successfully docked the two satellites on January 16.

Later in a statement, ISRO said that after the undocking, it has planned further experiments with satellites.

"The SPADEX satellites were successfully docked on 16 January 2025. ISRO has now accomplished the pivotal operation of undocking of SPADEX satellites in the very first attempt on 13th March, 2025 at 09:20 Hrs (IST)," ISRO said in a statement.

The undocking of the satellites took place in 460 km circular orbit with 45-degree inclination, the space agency explained.



It added that the satellites are now orbiting independently and their health is normal.

With this, ISRO has now successfully demonstrated all the capabilities required for rendezvous, docking and undocking operations in a circular orbit.

ISRO said the in-orbit performance of the docked satellites was extensively analysed and an immediate opportunity was found to be

feasible from March 10, 2025 till March 25, 2025. The entire operations were monitored through ground stations located at Bengaluru, Lucknow and Mauritius.

"Having accomplished this major milestone of undocking, further experiments with satellites are planned in the coming days," ISRO said.

According to the space agency, exhaustive ground simulations and analysis were the cornerstone of achieving the undocking in the first attempt itself. Various tests replicating on-orbit conditions were meticulously planned and carried out in preparation for the earliest opportunity for undocking operations.

ISRO said it has now successfully demonstrated space docking technology using two small satellites and termed it as a cost-effective experiment. (PTI)

Nuclear deal with US led to strategic ties that put India in 'bind' today: Prakash Karat

NEW DELHI, March 13: The 2008 nuclear deal with the US, which the Left had vehemently opposed, became a cementing factor for a deeper strategic alliance between the two countries and Donald Trump's presidency has now put India in a "bind". CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat said on Thursday, as he called for improving relations with China as a balancing factor.

In an interview with PTI, Karat, the Interim Coordinator of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said India does not need to be allies with China, but improving relations with the northern neighbour will help India's position in a multipolar world.

Amid ongoing tariff dispute with the US, he said in 2008, when the Left parties withdrew support from the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government over the Indo-US Civil Nuclear deal, the move was seen only in context to the deal. However, over the years, it led to strategic relations developing in a way that today the Trump administration is trying to "extract" deals from India.

Karat, who served as the general secretary of the party from 2005-2015, was at the helm when the CPI(M)'s withdrawal of support from the UPA government led to the alliance government facing a strength test in Parliament, which it survived through with the back-



ing of the Samajwadi Party.

"People saw our opposition to the India-US nuclear deal only within the framework of that civil nuclear deal. We saw it in a wider perspective because the real thing was America was saying we will give you this nuclear deal, we will remove all those earlier restrictions and prohibitions which were there... But the quid pro quo was that you come into a military and defence agreement with us, which we entered into - the ten year military framework agreement," Karat told PTI.

"The Indo-US Nuclear Deal was the sort of cementing factor for that. That is one of the major reasons for our objection... In the last 15-20 years we have seen we have entered into a much deeper strate-

gic alliance (with the US). So, now when Trump has come you are in a bind," he said.

India and US had in 2005 signed a 10-year 'New Framework for the US-India Defense Relationship', and after that, the two countries had announced agreement on an 'Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal', through which the US removed important non-proliferation sanctions on India in exchange for India's commitment not to conduct any more nuclear tests and place its civil nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.

"Pranab Mukherjee, who was the defence minister then, first went and made this agreement. Then came the nuclear deal. We said that this is part of forging a

wider strategic alliance with the United States and we should not get into that type of alliance," he said.

Referring to the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US, he said the Trump administration is trying to force India into buying more arms from them to boost their domestic industry.

"When our prime minister went to Washington, what are the two things Trump has extracted from us? One is buying more arms. They want to sell arms to us because he (Trump) wants the US' armaments industry to boom. So, caught in a commitment we will buy more arms," Karat said.

"Second, I think we will buy USD 10 billion more of oil and gas from the US... You are not in a position to say no. For example, that fighter plane they are offering us is the F-35A. It's something everybody says is not going to be suitable for India. It's unsustainable. It's highly expensive. But will you be able to say no," he asked.

"We don't want this. So, my point is that with Trump coming, his presidency will pose very new challenges for us. And our foreign policy and strategic designs or approach should be rethought so that we retain strategic autonomy in a growing multipolar world," he said.

Karat added that for safeguarding India's interests in a multipolar

world, relations with China should be improved, even if the two Asian nations don't become allies.

"I think, for our own country's benefit and interest in a multipolar world, it is necessary for us to improve relations with China without actually becoming allies and set it in some sort of balanced, normal fashion," he said.

Karat said the recent de-escalation in eastern Ladakh and moves like giving more visas for going to Kailash Mansarovar show there is some improvement.

"So, I think that we are taking the right course now. We don't have to become allies or, but if we maintain good relations, then our capacity to intervene and maneuver in this very complex developing international situation will increase and heighten, and that will be to our benefit," he said.

Karat also added that Trump's presidency can also bring some opportunities for India, and we should use our strategic autonomy to strengthen our position.

"Trump's presidency can also give us opportunities to utilize the strategic autonomy to strengthen our position. But it's something which is unfolding and many things are unpredictable about the Trump presidency. So, better to be cautious to say what should be done or not done is something we cannot say very clearly now," he said. (PTI)

Progressive social policies, robust infra, placed TN on economic growth trajectory: Eco Survey

CHENNAI, March 13: Tamil Nadu's progressive social policies, robust infrastructure facilities, and large skilled labour force enabled the state to place itself on an elevated economic development trajectory, making the state contribute 9.21 per cent to national GDP in 2023-24, Tamil Nadu's first economic survey 2024-25 said on Thursday.

The survey brought out by the State Planning Commission and handed over to Chief Minister M K Stalin, said the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current prices reached ₹ 27.22 lakh crore in 2023-24, posting a nominal growth rate of 13.71 per cent and a real growth rate of 8.33 per cent.

"Tamil Nadu economy in 2024-25 faced global headwinds with its innate economic strength. The pandemic, coupled with geopolitical tensions and extreme weather events, disrupted global supply chains and triggered crises in the energy and food sectors," it said.

The global economy posted a real growth rate of 3.33 percent in 2023. India's economy recorded 7.61 percent growth in 2022-23, 9.19 per cent in 2023-24, and 6.48 per cent in 2024-25.

"Building on a strong foundation of inclusive policies, Tamil Nadu has demonstrated remarkable economic resilience, consistently achieving growth rates of 8 per cent or more since 2021-22, and the state is expected to maintain a growth rate above 8 per cent in 2024-25," it said.

In 2022-23, Tamil Nadu's per capita income was ₹ 2.78 lakh, 1.6 times the national average of Rs 1.69 lakh. The state consistently outpaced the national average over the years and is the fourth-largest state in per capita income. Tamil Nadu's economic development is more evenly distributed across multiple urban centers. Cities like Coimbatore, Madurai, Tirupur, Tiruchirappalli, and Salem contributed significantly to the state's economy, helping bridge the urban-rural divide. In 2023-24, the services (tertiary) sector contributed 53.63 per cent of the state's Gross State Value Added (GSVA), followed by the secondary sector (33.37 per cent) and the primary sector (13 per cent). As in developed economies, if the state's secondary sector share increases by about 5 per cent, employment prospects will likely improve fur-



ther, it stated. Accelerated growth in agriculture and allied sectors was achievable if Tamil Nadu addressed challenges such as groundwater depletion and climate change. Implementing climate-smart practices, mechanisation, and post-harvest value addition could significantly boost income in these sectors, it said.

Tamil Nadu is an industrial powerhouse, contributing 11.90 per cent to India's manufacturing GDP and leading the nation in the number of factories. With 35.56 lakh Udyam-registered Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Tamil Nadu ranked second nationally in 2023-24.

"Dubbed the 'Detroit of India,' the state houses over 1,500 factories producing automobiles and auto components," it said.

The state ranked first in motor vehicle production, wearing apparel, and leather products and second in textiles, machinery, and electronic products. It also leads the country in exporting engineering goods, electronics, ready-made garments, cotton yarn, handloom products, and leather goods. In 2023-24, 33.31 per cent of Tamil Nadu's total workforce was engaged in industrial activities, with 15.97 per cent in manufacturing and 17.2 per cent in construction.

From 2019-20 to 2023-24, total credit to Tamil Nadu's industry through scheduled commercial banks increased from ₹ 2.5 lakh crore to ₹ 3.01 lakh crore, while Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rose from ₹ 5,909 crore to ₹ 20,157 crore. Among major states, Tamil Nadu consistently ranked among the top three in the Credit-Deposit Ratio (CDR), reflecting its high economic activity. The state's CDR increased from 109.2 per cent in 2019-20 to 117.7 per cent in 2023-24, compared to India's rise from 76.5 per cent to 79.6 per cent. Credit to the service sector through scheduled commercial banks grew from ₹ 2.86 lakh crore in 2019-20 to ₹ 4.46 lakh crore in 2023-24, it said. (PTI)

Maoist leader arrested in J'khand's Gumla

GUMLA (JHARKHAND),

March 13: A central committee member of the banned Maoist splinter group People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI), Durga Singh alias Panjari Singh, was arrested in Jharkhand's Gumla district, a senior police officer said on Thursday.

One of the founding members of PLFI, Durga was apprehended during a raid near Murumkela Tetartoli village under Kamdara police station area on Wednesday night, the officer said.

Gumla SP Shambhu Kumar Singh said Durga, who was wanted in 18 criminal cases, had been leading the organisation as its second-in-command following the imprisonment of PLFI leader Dinesh Gope. "We received intelligence indicating that Durga, along with several PLFI associates, was in the area planning to execute a criminal act," the SP said.

Acting on the tip-off, a joint quick response team, comprising district police and SSB 32 Battalion, was deployed under the leadership of the sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) of Gumla.

"During the raid, our team spotted suspicious people on two motorcycles near Murumkela Tetartoli village. Upon seeing police, the suspects attempted to flee. One motorcycle managed to escape, but we successfully pursued and arrested three persons on the other motorcycle," Singh added.

Besides Singh, Kaleshwar Hajam alias Tempu Hajam, a PLFI area commander, and Ramkumar Singh, a resident of Ranchi's Ormanjhi, were also arrested. Police seized a double-barrel rifle, a country-made revolver and eight cartridges from their possession. (PTI)

Chhattisgarh Budget looks to give 'GATI' to development

RAIPUR, March 13: Resource-rich Chhattisgarh is focusing on enhancing governance and technology while fast-tracking infrastructure development to transform into an economically vibrant and industrially advanced state, its finance minister O P Choudhary said.

He last week presented the Chhattisgarh government's Budget for the fiscal year 2025-26, totalling ₹ 1.65 lakh crore, with a focus on economic revival, infrastructure development, and social welfare.

While last year's Budget focused on theme GYAN (Gareeb, Yuva, Annadata & Nari), this year's Budget aims to drive progress in the state under the theme of GYAN ke liye 'GATI' to build on the progress made so far, he said discussing the focus of this year's budget.

"In GATI, G stands for good governance, A for accelerating infrastructure, T for technology and I for industrial growth," he said.

Last year's Budget centred around inclusive development. But for inclusive growth, economic development is equally important, he said.

Aspirations of youth, women, and the poor

Himachal govt to grant 'international status' to Sujanpur Holi fair, says CM Sukhu

HAMIRPUR, March 13: The Himachal Pradesh government will accord "international status" to the Holi fair in Sujanpur, keeping in mind its historical and cultural importance. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has said.

Presiding over a cultural evening of the fair late on Wednesday, he also announced the establishment of a Jal Shakti department division in Sujanpur, an ECHS (Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme) hospital, dialysis facilities at the Sujanpur hospital and the construction of a synthetic track on the Sainik School grounds.

Extending his Holi greetings, Sukhu said, "I had visited the Sujanpur Holi fair before and I am happy to see that the announcements made then are being fulfilled at a rapid pace."

The notification for a 100-bed hospital in Sujanpur has been issued. Within two years,

can't be met without ushering in economic growth. "So to make the concept of welfare sustainable, we thought of GATI," he said. "We want to usher in rapid economic growth. And when there is rapid economic growth, the government will have the financial capacity to bring in the welfare schemes and ensure inclusive growth to the end of the society. This is our philosophy."

Without levying any new tax or raising any existing rates, the Budget is designed to propel the state towards a self-sustaining and prosperous future with a clear focus on long-term growth and development.

With enhanced allocations, the budget aims to boost infrastructure, industrial development, and regional connectivity, creating an environment that attracts both public and private investments.

There is a strong emphasis on empowering women, farmers, and rural communities through initiatives like free electricity for agriculture, housing programmes, and skill development opportunities.

Elaborating on GATI components, he said

good governance means enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in governmental processes.

Investing in the development of roads, bridges, and public facilities to stimulate economic growth is part of focus on infrastructure.

Technology is to be used to streamline governance and improve public service delivery.

Also, industrial development is being promoted through favourable policies and attracting private investments.

"We have used technology, simplified the process, reduced the compliance burden, made it easier to do business in the state, and brought transparency. We have worked to improve the processes and governance," he said.

The state, which was counted among those without highest petrol and diesel prices, cut VAT on the fuel in the Budget to give relief to consumers.

"Without increasing the rate, our transport revenue has increased by 20 per cent. In terms of GST collections, according to the data up to February, we are in the top three best performing states in the country," he said. (PTI)

a Rajiv Gandhi Day Boarding School -- equipped with world-class facilities -- will be constructed in Karot, he added, according to a statement.

He also slammed the BJP for attempting to weaken democracy, saying the people had elected a Congress MLA from Sujanpur in 2022 but he failed to meet their expectations.

He was referring to Rajinder Rana, who joined the BJP last year.

However, the people taught him a lesson by electing Captain Ranjeet Singh as their MLA from the vacant seat, Sukhu said.

The chief minister also said the state government was working with a spirit of public service and sought cooperation from everyone. During a visit to the Sainik School in Sujanpur Tira, the veteran Congress leader inspected the ongoing repairs and directed the public works department officials to expedite the work. (PTI)

EU's carbon border policy may weaken collaborative global climate efforts: Study

NEW DELHI, March 13: Implementation of unilateral Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism-like policies across jurisdictions can increase costs for exporters, complicate trade relations and potentially weaken collaborative global climate efforts, a study has found.

According to the study -- conducted by researchers from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM)-Lucknow and the Institute of Management Technology (IMT)-Ghaziabad -- the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) can pose challenges for India's small- and medium-sized steel enterprises due to financial, technological and capacity constraints.

In the first-of-its-kind study, the researchers tested if the EU's ability to extend its regulation beyond borders, commonly known as the "Brussels Effect", would drive decarbonisation in India's steel industry through the CBAM.

The researchers found that while large integrated steel plants might adapt their production to supply lower-carbon steel for the EU market, smaller and medium-sized enterprises could face challenges due to financial, technological and capacity constraints.

Co-authored by Kaushik Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, professor and chairperson of IIM-Lucknow's Centre for Business Sustainability, and Kasturi Das, a professor at the IMT-Ghaziabad and a Fulbright-Kalam Climate Visiting Fellow



at Yale University, the findings have been published in the prestigious International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics journal.

Being implemented since October 2023, the CBAM aims to apply carbon content-based charges on imports of certain emission-intensive products such as steel from countries with less stringent emission regulations, including India.

While the EU argued that the CBAM would prevent carbon leakage and encourage decarbonisation, the study critically examined its real-world implications, particularly in terms of equity and feasibility.

"The research team found that while large integrated steel plants might adapt their production to supply lower-carbon steel for the EU market, smaller and medium-sized enterprises could face challenges due to financial, technological and capacity constraints," Bandyopadhyay told PTI.

"This might create a dual-speed decar-

bonisation process, favouring the larger players and leaving the smaller ones vulnerable. The lack of adequate support for smaller and medium-sized enterprises to tackle their emissions reduction could lead to unequal outcomes within the industry," he added.

The study also highlighted that implementation of unilateral CBAM-like mechanisms across jurisdictions could increase costs for exporters, complicate trade relations and potentially weaken collaborative global climate efforts.

"Although policy frameworks are in place in India to facilitate the decarbonisation process in the steel industry, the sector is ridden with complexities. Hence, it would be naive to expect that the CBAM can hasten the process overnight," Bandyopadhyay said.

The study presented a set of actionable recommendations for policymakers in the EU and other countries contemplating similar measures to ensure that the mechanism fostered an ecosystem for a fair and effective decarbonisation pathway.

These recommendations are particularly crucial for India-EU negotiations on the CBAM as part of the ongoing Free Trade Agreement discussions.

The research employed a qualitative methodology based on primary data collected from 41 key stakeholders, including representatives from steel companies, industry associations, government bodies, academia, and civil society. (PTI)

GOVT. OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE JT. DIRECTOR OF HEALTH SERVICES, KARBI ANGLONG DIST.

D I P H U

E-mail: jtahs.as.karbianglong@gmail.com

No. KA/Esstt/H&FW/ Post/Advt./2025-26/360

Dated Diphu the 13th March' 2025

Viva-Vote Interview for Grade-III (Technical & Non-Technical) and Grade-IV Posts

It is hereby informed to all concerned candidate,, that the written examination result of different category of Grade III posts under the it. Director of Health Services, Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong, which was conducted on 15-02-2025 is hereby declared. The Roll No. of eligible candidates of Grade-III (Technical & Non-Technical) for Viva-Voce Interview are given below:-

Sl. No.	Name of Post	Roll Nos.
1.	Pharmacist	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 09, 11, 12, 13, 17, 19, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 48, 49, 50, 52
2.	Staff Nurse	01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 07, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 26, 27, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 40
3.	A.N.M.	01, 02, 04, 05, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 31, 33, 35, 39, 40, 42, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49
4.	Lab. Technician	02, 03, 05, 11, 12, 13, 14, 22, 28, 34, 35, 41, 42
5.	Ophthalmic Asstt.	01, 02, 03, 04
6.	Dresser	02, 03, 04
7.	L.D.A.	04, 08, 20, 39, 56, 60, 111, 118, 127, 140, 143, 160, 189, 233, 240, 250, 251, 256
8.	Leprosy Injector	05, 6, 10, 18, 43, 52, 61, 70, 81, 86, 92, 97, 99, 103, 106, 114, 115, 120, 123, 131, 143, 144, 146, 147, 150, 152, 160, 169, 172, 173, 178, 179, 180, 181, 183, 204, 226, 274, 330, 336, 339, 343, 352, 353, 364, 371, 374, 384, 389, 390

All the candidates of above mentioned Roll No. are directed to appear for Viva-Voce Interview on 24-03-2025 at 10:00 am at the office of the Jt. Director of Health Services, Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

Moreover, the Viva-Voce Interview for Grade-IV (Peon/ G.D.A/ Pani Wala/ Handyman/ Ward Girl/ Outdoor Attendant/ Chowkider/ Female Attendant/ Dhubi/ Packer/ Cook Helper/ O.T. Attendant/ Medicine Carrier) will be held on 25-03-2025 at 10:00 am at the office of the Jt. Director of Health Services, Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

No separate calling letter will be sent to candidates. Candidates are directed to bring all original testimonials/ certificates etc. while appearing the interview.

Sd/-

Member Secretary
Selection Committee/ Board
Cum

Jt. Director of Health Services,
Karbi Anglong District, Diphu

Memo No. KA/Esstt/H&FW/ Post/Advt./2025-26/360-A

Dated Diphu the March' 2025



AAMIR ON WORKING WITH SHAH RUKH AND SALMAN IN FILM: WAITING FOR THE RIGHT SCRIPT

MUMBAI, March 13: Superstar Aamir Khan on Thursday said he and the other two Khans of Bollywood -- Shah Rukh and Salman -- want to work in a film together and are waiting for the right script to come their way.

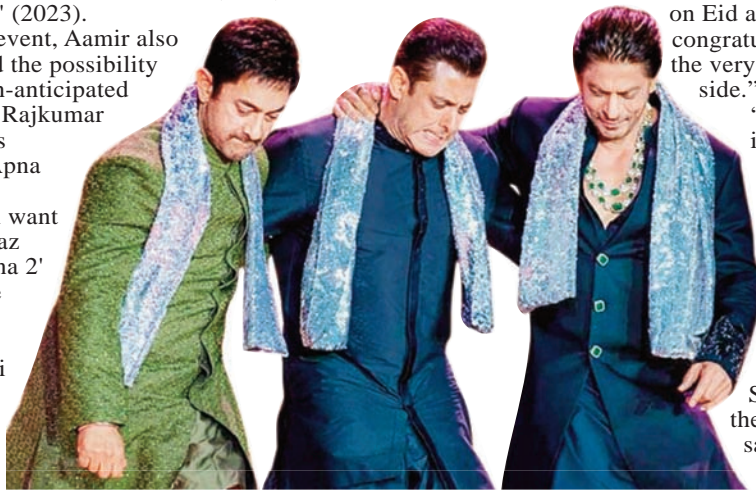
The prospect of the Khan troika appearing in a movie is something the audience is also looking forward to, Aamir said at a meet-and-greet event a day ahead of his 60th birthday.

"Salman, Shah Rukh and I would love to work together... We are waiting for the right script to come. I think the audience also wants to see us together and we have discussed about it as well... If any good story comes (our way), we will definitely do it," the actor told reporters here.

While Aamir and Salman have famously featured in the 1994 cult comedy "Andaz Apna Apna", he has never co-starred with Shah Rukh. Salman and Shah Rukh, however, have featured together in films such as "Karan Arjun" (1995), "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai" (1998), "Hum Tumhare Hain Sanam" (2005), and "Pathaan" (2023).

At the event, Aamir also addressed the possibility of a much-anticipated sequel to Rajkumar Santoshi's "Andaz Apna Apna".

"We all want that 'Andaz Apna Apna 2' should be remade... We have told Raj ji that we want to work on



it and I think the audience also wants to watch the film. We are waiting for him. He is working on the script right now," he added.

Aamir also gave an update on his next movie "Sitaare Zameen Par", calling it a "thought sequel" to his 2007 film.

"... The characters and situations are different... According to me, this thought goes 10 times beyond that. One major difference is that 'Taare Zameen Par' makes you cry but this one will make you laugh. It's a comedy, humorous film but sends a meaningful message," the actor said.

"Taare Zameen Par", which marked Aamir's directorial debut, followed the coming-of-age story of a young artistic boy named Ishaan who is dyslexic.

Aamir was last seen in "Laal Singh Chaddha", which was released in 2022.

The actor also wished Salman ahead of the release of "Sikandar", which is arriving in theatres on Eid. "Best wishes to Salman as his film 'Sikandar' is coming on Eid and many many congratulations and all the very best from my side."

"We all are waiting for it. A.R. Murugadoss, with whom I did 'Ghajini' is a fantastic director so, it will be fun to see the combination of Murugadoss and Salman. So all the very best," he said. (PTI)

Ranbir, Alia request paparazzi to not click daughter Raha's pictures

MUMBAI, March 13: In the aftermath of the attack on Saif Ali Khan at his residence early this year, Bollywood star couple Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt on Thursday requested the media not to click photos of their daughter Raha.

In an intimate meet-and-greet with the media days ahead of Alia's birthday on March 15, the actors said they want to ensure the safety of their two-year-old child.

"It might sound like a privilege problem, but as parents, we are trying to protect our child and we will do whatever we can.

"Today, everybody who has a phone, can post anything, and that can spread like wildfire, so that's not in our control. You are like our family, so we can only request you, and you can help us achieve that," Ranbir told reporters here.

When asked if the "Animal" star would take action against those who do not comply with their request, he replied in the negative.

"I was born in Mumbai, and you all are family; it's not that we will take the legal route. Whenever we request you or we give what you guys want, we give our word to each other. It's not like we will file the case," the said.

"We don't want to push for any action, but if someone is repeatedly not adhering, then there's no option," added Alia.

The couple officially introduced Raha to the media during the Kapoor family's Christmas brunch two years ago. At the meet-and-greet, Ranbir also slammed the paparazzi for invading wife Alia's privacy back in 2023.

"Alia was on the balcony, and someone had clicked a photograph from someone

else's building, so that's a wrong thing. It's a line you can't cross; you can't shoot us in our house.

"I understand we are actors and there's some kind of curiosity about an actor's life, but there's a line that you cannot cross. Beyond that, you all are respectful, and we both have known you for so many years," he said.

At the event, Alia also cut a birthday cake in the presence of the media.

The privacy of celebrity children has been a topic of discussion in the era of social media.

According to reports, Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor Khan who is Ranbir's cousin also asked the paparazzi to not click photos of her sons Taimur and Jeh after her husband Saif was injured multiple times in a knife attack by an intruder in January. (PTI)

Daunting yet satisfying: Ranbir Kapoor on reuniting with Sanjay Leela Bhansali for 'Love & War'

MUMBAI, March 13: To be on a Sanjay Leela Bhansali is both tiring and satisfying, says Bollywood star Ranbir Kapoor, who is reuniting with the master director on his upcoming feature film "Love & War".

The film is a dream project for Ranbir, who made his debut as an actor with Bhansali's 2007 movie "Saawariya". He is sharing the screen space in the movie with wife Alia Bhatt and "Sanju" co-star Vicky Kaushal.

"'Love and War' is something which is every actor's dream, like to work with brilliant actors like Alia and Vicky, and to be directed under the master Sanjay Leela Bhansali. I worked with him 17 years ago.

"I haven't met a human being who worked so hard, who understands characters, emotions, music, Indian culture, and the Indian value system as much as Sanjay Leela Bhansali. To be on his set is tiring, it is long, and the process can be a little daunting, but as an artist, it is satisfying because he nurtures art, and as actors, it's truly amazing so far," Kapoor told reporters here.

Billed as an "epic saga", the upcoming movie is slated to be released in theatres in 2026.

Bhatt, who previously worked with Bhansali on the 2022 critically-acclaimed "Gangubai Kathiawadi", said it

is blessing to be collaborating with the filmmaker once again.

"Being back on set with Sanjay sir



like he makes you feel that 100 per cent is just the beginning, you've to give way more than that, and you want to be because of how much he gives. Every scene is a key scene.

"So, no day on set is going to be like a chill day. You're giving 100 percent but we're having a great time. It's a blessing to be working under his guidance, and to be working with Vicky and Ranbir, and to see them together, and all three of us, is all fascinating," she added.

The creative process for "Love & War" involves nighttime shoots, a choice that both Kapoor and Bhatt find exhilarating.

"We are shooting a lot at night, so we work at night, and we are mom and dad during the day. So, it's a very interesting combination. We shot 'Gangubai ...' mostly in the night; it becomes like your own world; there's no distraction, and there's no noise," said Bhatt, who shares two-year-old daughter Raha with Kapoor.

In addition to "Love & War", Kapoor will be seen in director Nitesh Tiwari's "Ramayana" alongside south movie stars Sai Pallavi and Yash.

Bhatt will next star in "Alpha", Yash Raj Films' next Spy Universe movie. Co-starring Sharvari, the Shiv Rawail-directed movie will be released in theatres on December 25. (PTI)

'OVERCOMPENSATING' TO PREMIERE ON PRIME VIDEO IN MAY

NEW DELHI, March 13: "Overcompensating", an upcoming college comedy executive produced by music sensation Charli XCX, will premiere on Prime Video on May 15, the streamer announced on Thursday.

The OTT platform has shared first-look images from the show, which is created by and starring Benito Skinner. The series is produced by A24 and Amazon MGM Studios, a press release said.

"Overcompensating" follows the wild, chaotic journey of Benny (Skinner), a closeted former football player and homecoming king, as he becomes fast friends with Carmen, a high school outsider on a mission to fit in at all costs.

"With guidance from Benny's older sister and her campus-legend boyfriend, Benny and Carmen juggle horrible hookups, flavoured vodka, and fake IDs. Deeply funny and personal, the show explores the lengths to which we all overcompensate while on the path to finding out who we really are," read the official plotline.

The show also features Wally Baram, Mary Beth Barone, Adam DiMarco and Rish Shah. Recurring guest stars include Connie Britton, Kyle MacLachlan, Kaia Gerber, Julia Shipleet, Tommy Do, Alexandra Beaton, Claire Qute, Elias Azimi and Maddie Phillips.

Scott King serves as showrunner and executive producer. Jonah Hill, Matt Dines, and Ali Goodwin executive produce for Strong Baby. (PTI)



'Brahmastra 2' pre-production will begin post 'War 2' release, says Ranbir Kapoor



MUMBAI, March 13: Bollywood star Ranbir Kapoor on Thursday said work on pre-production for the sequel to his much-anticipated movie "Brahmastra" is most likely to begin this year.

Titled "Brahmastra Part One: Shiva", the first movie in the big-budget epic fantasy franchise, featuring Ranbir and Alia Bhatt, hit the screens in 2022. It was directed by Ayan Mukerji.

"'Brahmastra 2' is something that Ayan has been nurturing as a dream for a very long time, the entire story of 'Brahmastra'. He is currently working on 'War 2'. Once the film releases, he is going to start the pre-production of 'Brahmastra 2', it (the film) is definitely happening.

"We haven't announced much of it, but there will be some interesting announcements coming regarding 'Brahmastra 2'," Kapoor told reporters here.

"War 2", starring Hrithik Roshan and Jr. NTR, is scheduled to be released on August 14, 2025, during the Independence Day weekend, as announced by production banner Yash Raj Films.

In 2023, Mukerji announced that the two follow-up movies in the "Brahmastra" franchise will be released in theatres in 2026 and 2027, respectively.

Part one of "Brahmastra" revolved around a deity named Shiva (Ranbir), who sets out on a journey to find the origins of his special powers with Isha (Alia), a woman he falls in love with at first sight.

The film also featured megastar Amitabh Bachchan with special appearances by Shah Rukh Khan and Nagarjuna. It was produced by Star Studios and Dharma Productions. (PTI)

At KKR, new mentor Bravo looks to mix Gambhir's success formula with his own style



KOLKATA, March 13: Charismatic West Indian Dwayne Bravo, who replaced Gautam Gambhir as mentor at Kolkata Knight Riders, on Thursday said he will mix some elements from the former KKR strategist's blueprint with his own distinct style for a successful campaign in the upcoming IPL.

With Gambhir playing a key role behind the scenes, KKR won

their third IPL title last season. The reigning champions have turned to Bravo ahead of the IPL 2025 season, following the departure of Gambhir who is now the head coach of the Indian team.

"Unfortunately, we lost some players. But I think GG had his style, I have my style. We're both successful in our own ways," Bravo said, making it clear that while he respects Gambhir's

legacy, he will bring his own methods to the role.

The former West Indies skipper though admitted to reaching out to Gambhir for insights.

"Definitely, I messaged him a few times and stuff. But again, I will be leaning a lot on these guys because they had a successful formula. And it's important that we follow that formula," he said during KKR's first media interaction

ahead of the upcoming season.

Bravo emphasised the need to study and adopt elements of last season's success and it was necessary to keep the core of the side intact. "I think it's going to be disrespectful of me not to try and find out some of the good things he did last season. But also, the core of the team is here.

"And that's our responsibility, coach, myself, Venky sir to go

back into the auction and try our best to get back. It was our duty to go into the auction and try to get back as much as the same squad of players from the championship-winning team. And we were able to get that," added the 41-year-old.

Having released Venkatesh Iyer earlier, KKR went all out in the auction for the explosive batter and bought him back for Rs 23.75 crore, making him the third most expensive buy, after Rishabh Pant and Shreyas Iyer.

Given his long-standing association with Chennai Super Kings, Bravo's appointment came as a surprise. But the Trinidadian is excited about working with Shah Rukh Khan and hailed KKR as one of the best franchises in the league. "I think it is good to have a boss like Shah Rukh who is definitely really invested in the game. My first thing started off with the Trinbago Knight Riders when he first bought the team.

"I was the happiest person on the planet to know that someone like him showed that interest to buy a team in the Caribbean. But not only in the Caribbean, but my hometown. And I was able to help build Trinbago Knight Riders, one of, to this day, the most successful franchises in CPL history.

"That energy and that vibe, I am going to try to bring that here as well. It is already a successful team. Behind MI and CSK, we have the third most trophies in the cabinet and we look to build on that." (PTI)

The break is working to our advantage, we're ready for WPL final: DC vice-captain Rodrigues

NEW DELHI, March 13: Delhi Capitals vice-captain Jemimah Rodrigues emphasised that the long gap between the last league match and the Women's Premier League final has revitalised the team, and said it will work to her side's "advantage" in the title clash.

The Capitals have qualified for their third straight WPL final after Mumbai Indians were defeated by Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the last league match at Mumbai on March 11.

The Capitals had finished their league engagements on March 7 with a defeat against Gujarat Giants. Hence, they had to wait until the match between RCB and MI to decide the group leaders.

"It's (the gap) actually working for our team. We've had a lot of team bonding sessions and at the same time, this WPL was a bit hectic for us. We did play back-to-back games, we traveled and we played too," Rodrigues said in a virtual press meet on Thursday.

Rodrigues said the DC have had good training sessions in the last six days, and that will stand her team in good stead.

"I think getting this break is, honestly, how I look at it and I think how the team is looking at it, that it's working to our advantage," she said.

The Capitals will meet the winner of the Eliminator between Mumbai and Gujarat Giants in the title clash on March 15.

"So I think sometimes it's nice to have this break and yes, you know, we're ready for the finals. They are looking forward to it. We're prepared well. You know, like the other two years, this year has not been like the smoothest sailing for us. "But like I said in one of the interviews that this team just doesn't know how to give up and we're going to come back stronger this year," she noted. However, the WPL draw meant that the Capitals advanced to the final without having played a single league match at the Brabourne Stadium

Rodrigues patted the opener for keeping her composure during tough times. "Shafali is such an inspiration in the way she's come back. The kind of strike-rate and the kind of impact she's been having for the team. I think it just shows her character," she said.

Shafali has made 300 runs from eight WPL 2025 matches with a strike-rate of 157. "But to be dropped and to come back the way she did, I think hats off to her. I can't wait to see her. I'm sure she'll be back soon in the Indian team too," said Rodrigues. (PTI)

Rodrigues did not read too much into that.

"The thing is that everyone in our team has played on these pitches (in Mumbai). Everyone's pretty familiar with the conditions and the pitches.

"And like I said, we've been having good practice sessions on these off days, which is preparing us well enough to adjust to the conditions.

"The Mumbai pitch is a batter's dream. The outfield's fast. So yeah, I mean, we are really looking forward to it and so are our bowlers. They've come up with their plans," she said.

Rodrigues said the experience of skipper Meg Lanning will help DC in landing their maiden WPL title after defeats in the last two editions. "I think Meg is someone who wants to win, who wants to win every game. The thing I love about Meg, and this is something that I would like to add in myself also. She's calm but aggressive at the same time. And I think as a leader, that's a very, very crucial quality to have.

"She told me last year that as a captain, it's very important that I set the tone for the team. If I stay calm and because everyone's looking up to me and if I am calm, I know the team is calm."

Shafali Verma made a bright return to her run-making ways after a slew of disappointing moments last year, where she was also dropped from the Indian team.

Rodrigues patted the opener for keeping her composure during tough times. "Shafali is such an inspiration in the way she's come back. The kind of strike-rate and the kind of impact she's been having for the team. I think it just shows her character," she said.

Shafali has made 300 runs from eight WPL 2025 matches with a strike-rate of 157. "But to be dropped and to come back the way she did, I think hats off to her. I can't wait to see her. I'm sure she'll be back soon in the Indian team too," said Rodrigues. (PTI)

Malvika loses to Yamaguchi, exits in pre-quarters of All England



BIRMINGHAM, March 13: India's women's singles campaign in the All England Championships ended with Malvika Bansod losing in straight games against two-time world champion Akane Yamaguchi of Japan in the pre-quarterfinals here on Thursday.

World no. 3 Yamaguchi hardly broke a sweat to get the better of world no.28 Malvika 21-16 21-13 in a contest that lasted just 33 min-

utes. Yamaguchi has now extended her head-to-head record against Malvika to 4-0.

Earlier on Wednesday, two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu crashed out of the women's singles event. Against Yamaguchi, Malvika struggled to adjust to the conditions, repeatedly hitting wide, long, and into the net to fall behind early. Despite a few unforced errors of her own, Yam-

aguchi seized the advantage at the mid-game interval with a deft drop shot followed by an accurate placement. The Indian shuttler managed to stay within striking distance till 13-15, but Yamaguchi soon surged ahead, earning a slew of game points before sealing the opening game as Malvika sent another shot wide. The Japanese started the second game strongly, taking a 3-1 lead but Malvika

fought back to level scores at 5-5 and later 8-8.

However, her inconsistency returned, allowing Yamaguchi to go into the interval with a comfortable lead. There was little resistance from Malvika after the change of ends, as Yamaguchi raced ahead, earning eight match points. She closed out the contest with a smash on her second opportunity. (PTI)

F1's Mercedes chief Wolff says he's not looking to sign Verstappen for 2026

MELBOURNE, March 13: Mercedes team principal and chief executive Toto Wolff has denied rumors on the eve of the Australian Grand Prix weekend that he's still seeking to sign reigning F1 world champion Max Verstappen for 2026.

Mercedes, which has a new driver lineup this year that sees rookie prospect Andrea Kimi Antonelli join George Russell, is hoping to emerge from its recent lean spell in F1 that has seen it score just five wins from the last three seasons, four of which came in 2024.

But while Verstappen was reportedly on Mercedes' shopping list last year as a top-gun replacement for its then-outgoing star Lewis Hamilton, Silver Arrows' team boss Wolff says extending Russell's contract beyond 2025 is the priority.

"I think we've said it pretty clearly last year, and (Verstappen) said the same, we need to concentrate on our driver line-up, we need to do (the best with) that we have," Wolff said Thursday in Melbourne.

"I don't flirt outside if I'm in a good relationship, and that is true for this year, too. So, at the moment that is not on any, let's say, radar and I don't plan to shift my concentration away from these guys and make sure that George has a contract (extension) pretty soon and we agree on the final things."

Plenty of decisions to come—Wolff's future driver lineup came into focus this week after McLaren extended its deal with Australian Oscar Piastri, which puts him out of reach during the sport's next big expected grid shuffle in 2027.

"We have had a chat (with Russell) a few weeks ago about what the right timing would be to liaise, and I'm — naively or not

— someone that sticks to what he says," Wolff said.

"These three (including reserve driver Valtteri Bottas) are the combination that I want to go forward with Mercedes, and I have no reasons to doubt that. We're going to find some time, I guess, before the summer."

Russell, a long-time Mercedes protégé who joined the works team in 2022 fresh from three years at Williams, is keen to stay in silver.

"We've had such a long-term relationship, and there's so much trust," Russell said. "We are focused on getting Mercedes back on top and trying to win races, and championships, and to be honest in this sport, the performance speaks." Hamilton: "most exciting period of my life/Hamilton made it clear in Melbourne that he's moved on, following his record-breaking stint with Mercedes, with the seven-time F1 world champion enjoying life at Ferrari as he prepares for his maiden start with the Scuderia.

Hamilton, who'd been powered by Mercedes for his entire F1 career from 2007 to 2024, made a shock switch to Ferrari starting this year, following negotiations with Mercedes in 2023 that saw him offered a shorter tenure to future proof the operation.

Hamilton signed the one-plus-one (option year) deal in August 2023, but made a swift u-turn in January last year to join the Prancing Horse from 2025.

And the veteran Brit has been enjoying every moment spent at Maranello.

"You're looking at things from a different perspective, and that makes it exciting and challenging," Hamilton said Thursday. "This is definitely the most exciting period of my life, I'm really enjoying it, and I'm so excited to get in the car tomorrow." (AP)

Injured head coach Dravid attends Rajasthan Royals' pre-season camp on crutches

JAIPUR, March 13: Despite sustaining a leg injury while playing in a local league match, Indian stalwart and new Rajasthan Royals head coach Rahul Dravid attended the team's IPL pre-season training session, displaying his full commitment.

In a video shared by the franchise in their official social media handle, Dravid was seen making his first appearance at the Royals' camp, arriving in a golf cart before switching to crutches for mobility.

Although his left leg was secured in a medical walking boot, Dravid remained actively involved in the session despite



his injury.

He shook hands with players, before engaging in discussions with young talents like Riyan Parag, and shared a moment with Yashasvi Jaiswal as the young India opener was seen demonstrating shadow shots while seeking the legendary batter's advice.

Seated with crutches in hand, Dravid closely observed the entire session on Wednesday.

The Royals earlier confirmed that Dravid suffered the injury while playing.

"Head Coach Rahul Dravid, who picked up an injury while playing Cricket in Bangalore, is recovering well and will join us

today in Jaipur," posted Rajasthan Royals in 'X' with a photo of a relaxed Dravid flashing a thumbs-up.

Last week, Dravid had injured his left calf muscle while batting for Vijaya Cricket Club against Jayanagar Cricketers in the Karnataka State Cricket Association Group I, Division 2 semifinal for the Sri Nassur Memorial Shield.

The 52-year-old, playing alongside his 16-year-old son Anvay, appeared in discomfort just two deliveries into his innings after reportedly pulling a calf muscle.

Despite the pain, he battled on, scoring 43 off 66 balls in a

crucial fourth-wicket stand with Anvay. However, Vijaya CC ultimately lost the match.

Dravid earlier last month marked his first club appearance in 13 years in a league match.

There, he partnered with Anvay, who impressed with a 60-ball 58, while Dravid chipped in with 10 runs.

Dravid took over as Rajasthan Royals' head coach after his successful stint as India's head coach from 2022 to 2024, which culminated in their T20 World Cup triumph.

He will work closely with captain Sanju Samson and director of cricket Kumar Sangakkara as the Royals. (PTI)

Dortmund aim to bring some of its Champions League success to disastrous Bundesliga campaign

DUESSELDORF (GERMANY), March 13: The two German teams in the Champions League quarterfinals are having very different Bundesliga seasons.

While Bayern Munich is eight points clear at the top and confirmed its domestic supremacy with a 5-0 aggregate win over Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League, Borussia Dortmund is 10th and will likely need a big late-season surge to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Beating Lille in the Champions League on Wednesday eased some of the pressure on new coach Niko Kovac but Dortmund takes on Leipzig on Saturday with both teams desperate for a win.

Key matchups— Dortmund's game against Leipzig on Saturday is a crucial test for Leipzig, too. Two wins from 10 Bundesliga games since the new year have seen Marco Rose's team slide to sixth.

Bayern's Champions League exertions took their toll last week in a shock 3-2 home loss to Bochum. A trip to Union Berlin on Saturday is another tricky test, given Union surprised Eintracht Frankfurt 2-1 last week.

Leverkusen has lost three games in a row for the first time under coach Xabi Alonso. The injury-hit squad can turn things around with a win on Sunday over Stuttgart, itself on a four-game losing run.

Players to watch— When Manuel Neuer hurt himself celebrating last week, it gave 21-year-old Jonas Urbig an opportunity as Bayern goalkeeper. The loss to Bochum last week was a rocky start but Urbig won praise for some solid saves against Leverkusen.

Michy Batshuayi's first Bundesliga goal in seven years wasn't enough as Frankfurt lost to Union last week. Frankfurt could need more goals from the new signing to halt a slide since



Omar Marmoush left for Manchester City. Frankfurt plays Bochum on Sunday.

The pressure is on Stuttgart striker Deniz Undav after seven Bundesliga games without scoring. Undav was a star last season as Stuttgart finished second but now risks being dropped.

Injury list— Star attacking midfielder Florian Wirtz is a big absence for Leverkusen with an

ankle ligament injury.

Defender Mario Hermoso was sent for scans on his shoulder after the Bayern loss, while defender Edmond Tapsoba and midfielder Nathan Tella are doubtful to recover from injuries on Sunday.

Transfer news— Joshua Kimmich looks set to extend his contract at Bayern after all after a contract offer was reportedly

withdrawn last month in frustration at the long-running talks. Kimmich said on Tuesday he was looking forward to "getting the ball over the line."

Serbia defender Milos Veljkovic will leave Werder Bremen for Red Star Belgrade after nine years, Bremen said on Tuesday.

Holstein Kiel captain Lewis Holtby is set to leave as a free agent.

"What they're saying 'It's difficult and we aren't satisfied either. It's hard for us to get a result like this in the Bundesliga almost every week and play our best in the Champions League. We're trying everything to make it work in the Bundesliga too.'" — Dortmund forward Karim Adeyemi.

"I won't surf on a hype wave, no chance ... My focus is absolutely on the Union Berlin game on Saturday and nothing is won until it's won." — Bayern coach Vincent Kompany. (AP)

Rohit has no reason to retire, will be among best ODI captains: AB de Villiers



NEW DELHI, March 13: Rohit Sharma has no reason to retire, says South African batting great AB de Villiers, who believes the India skipper could go down as one of the greatest ODI captains of all time.

Speculations were rife about Rohit's retirement from ODIs after the Champions Trophy, but the 37-year-old put them to rest after leading India to an unprecedented third title.

"Compared to other captains, look at Rohit's win percentage -- it's almost 74 per cent, which is substantially more than any other captain of the past," de Villiers said in his YouTube channel.

"If he keeps going, he will go down as one of the best ODI captains of all time. Rohit has also said he is not retiring and has requested that rumours be stopped spreading."

Rohit smashed an 83-ball 76, playing a pivotal role in India's tricky 252-run chase in the final against New Zealand in Dubai to win the player-of-the-match.

"Why would he retire? With that kind of record not only as captain but also as a bat-

ter. That 76 in the final, giving India a fantastic start, laying the foundation for success and leading from the front when the pressure was at its peak," de Villiers said.

Hailing Rohit's record as both a batter and captain, de Villiers was effusive in his praise for how the India captain transformed his batting in the ODI format over the last three years to win the T20 World Cup and the Champions Trophy in a span of nine months.

"Rohit Sharma has got no reason to retire. No reason to take any criticism whatsoever. His record speaks for himself. Not only that, but he has also sort of transformed his game," he said.

"If we have a look at his strike rate in the Powerplay it was quite low for an opening batter but since 2022 his strike rate has risen to 115 in the first powerplay and that's the difference between good and great.

"It's transforming your own game and it never stops. You have always something to learn and something to do better," he added. (PTI)

BCCI mourns Syed Abid Ali's death

NEW DELHI, March 13: The BCCI on Thursday condoled the death of former India all-rounder Syed Abid Ali, saying he "embodied the spirit of the game" and his contribution to Indian cricket will always be remembered.

Ali, who was known for his versatility and sharp fielding skills, died on Wednesday after a prolonged illness.

He was 83. He was part of a golden generation of Hyderabad cricketers that included MAK Pataudi, ML Jaisimha, and Abbas Ali Baig. He died in the United States.

"Shri Syed Abid Ali was a true all-rounder, a cricketer who embodied the spirit of the game. His contributions to India's historic victories in the 1970s will always be remembered," said BCCI president Roger Binny in a statement.

"His dedication and versatility made him stand out. My deepest condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time."

Ali represented India in 29 Tests and 5 ODIs, leaving a mark with his all-round capabilities.

His contributions were instrumental in India's historic Test series victories in England and the West Indies in 1971, where his fielding, bowling, and batting proved invaluable.

"Shri Syed Abid Ali's all-round skills and his contribution to Indian cricket are quite valued. He was a true gentleman of the game. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and loved ones,"



BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia stated.

Ali made his Test debut in December 1967 against Australia in Adelaide, marking the occasion with a sensational 6/55 in the first innings -- his career-best bowling figures.

His batting prowess was on display later in the same series when he scored 78 and 81 in the Sydney Test, proving his all-round capabilities.

Between 1967 and 1974, he played 29 Tests for India, tallying 1,018 runs and taking 47 wickets. (PTI)

Satwik-Chirag pair enters All England second round

BIRMINGHAM, March 13: India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the second round of the men's doubles competition at the All England Championships, registering a straight-game victory over Denmark's Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard.

Returning to the court after his father's loss last month, Satwik, along with his doubles partner Chirag, put on an impressive display, securing a 21-17, 21-15 win in just 40 minutes late Wednesday.

Moments after sealing the victory, Satwik raised his finger to the sky, his gaze fixed skyward -- perhaps reaching out to his father, searching for him in the beyond.

"It's tough, but that's how life is," said Satwik. "It wasn't expected."

The 24-year-old from Amalapuram expressed his gratitude to his partner for being there during this challenging time.

"During hard times he (Shetty) came to my home town, we practised there a bit, and for that I'm thankful. He was there during my injury; his parents came down and our coach also came down to my home town.

"My father always wanted to bring them there."

Reflecting on the sudden turn of events in the past fortnight, Chirag said: "Credit to Satwik, what he's gone through and how he's come back and decided to play here, nobody could do that."

"Kudos to him, he's a strong-willed person to come out of it, and keep it all aside, because that's what his dad would've wanted him to do, I'm proud to be his partner."

The duo, seeded 7th, will next take on China's Hao Nan Xie and Wei Han Zeng in the round of 16 on Thursday.

In other matches involving Indian players, Lakshya Sen will face Indonesia's Jonatan Christie, while Malvika Bansod takes on Japan's third seed Akane Yamaguchi, a two-time World Champion.

Malvika had earlier stunned Singapore's Yeo Jia Min in her debut match at the prestigious tournament.

World No. 9 Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who reached back-to-back semifinals at this event, will meet the eighth-seeded Korean pair of Hye Jeong Kim and Hee Yong Kong.

Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde will square off against the fifth-seeded Chinese duo of Yan Zhe Feng and Ya Xin Wei. (PTI)

Under-fire PCB revises match fees of players in National T20 C ships

KARACHI, March 13: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday increased the players' match fee for the National T20 Championship after its decision to enforce a pay cut faced severe backlash.

The PCB had earlier reduced the match fees to ₹ 10,000 and ₹ 5,000 for players and reserves, forcing its chairman Mohsin Naqvi to issue orders to review the decision.

Finding itself in a corner after widespread criticism, PCB has now increased the match fees of players to ₹ 40,000 and reserves to ₹ 20,000.

Pakistan's domestic cricket schedule and structure has been under discussion this season after the board abruptly stopped the National Under-19 Championship after just one day's play. (PTI)

I think my friend Abid Ali was a grossly underestimated cricketer: Farokh Engineer



NEW DELHI, March 13: Former India keeper-batter Farokh Engineer on Thursday paid rich tributes to his teammate Syed Abid Ali and said he was a "grossly underestimated cricketer" despite his versatility and ability to take catches with great dexterity at close-in fielding positions.

The India all-rounder of yesterday died on Wednesday after a prolonged illness, leaving his well-wishers, acquaintances and friends, including Engineer, sad. He was 83.

"My friend Abid Ali, rest in peace. I just can't believe it. You know, one by one, people are sadly, sadly passing away. Abid was a real dear friend, a contemporary of mine, my colleague, my roommate at one time also, a wonderful person, a wonderful cricketer, very talented all-rounder," Engineer said.

Abid Ali was part of an illustrious group of Hyderabad cricketers that included MAK Pataudi, ML Jaisimha, and Abbas Ali Baig. He died in the United States.

The news of Abid Ali's passing was shared by the North America Cricket League.

Engineer said "He gave 100 per cent to his team every time he played for India, and I think he was a grossly underestimated cricketer because people don't realise how good a close-in fielder was, you

know he was overshadowed a bit by Solkar.

"But Solkar on one side and Abid Ali on the other side made the spinning quartet even more dangerous, of course with the wicketkeeper behind."

"Coming back to my dear friend Abid, he will be sadly missed. We don't know what was wrong with him was he ailing for a while or what? But I sent my sincerest condolences to my family in America, in Hyderabad, or wherever they may be.

"He was a great man, a great cricketer, and a great friend indeed. A sad loss for India and for Indian cricket," Engineer, 87, added from his home in the UK.

Abid Ali made his Test debut in December 1967 against Australia in Adelaide, marking the occasion with a sensational 6/55 in the first innings his career-best bowling figures. His batting prowess was on display later in the same series when he scored 78 and 81 in the Sydney Test, proving his all-round capabilities.

Between 1967 and 1974, he played 29 Tests for India, tallying 1,018 runs and taking 47 wickets.

He was ahead of his time and was known for his work ethic.

Abid Ali was lightning-quick while running between the wickets and was one of the finest fielders of his time. (PTI)

Penalties, amnesty, whistle-blower mechanism: Sports Ministry releases Draft NCAAF for feedback

NEW DELHI, March 13: Uniform penalties, amnesty scheme, and a whistle-blower mechanism are some of the key features of the Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) which was released for public consultation by the Sports Ministry on Thursday.

The Draft NCAAFS 2025, which is a significant update to the existing framework, invites suggestions and comments from the general public till March 31.

"The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has put in the public domain the Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) 2025 for inviting comments/suggestions from the general public and stakeholders, as part of the consultation process," the ministry said in a statement.

"This addresses age fraud comprehensively, aiming to protect genuine athletes and uphold the integrity of sports competitions nationwide.

"This revision has been undertaken almost after 15 years marking a significant update to the existing framework to ensure fair competition, ethical governance, and enhanced accountability in Indian sports."

The Draft Bill has 10 salient features, including Mandatory Age Verification & Digital Locking, Medical Examination for Age Discrepancies, Two-Tier Appellate Mechanism, Dedicated National Database and QR-Enabled ID Cards.

According to Draft NCAAFS,

NRAI name 36-member team for Junior World Cup in May

NEW DELHI, March 13: Paris Olympian Raiza Dhillon is part of a strong 36-member Indian junior squad announced by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) for the upcoming ISSF Junior World Cup scheduled in Suhl, Germany, from May 19 to 27.

The squad will participate in 15 events, including three mixed team events.

Dhillon will be part of the 12-member shotgun squad, while two standout performers from



"Athletes found guilty on the first violation will face a two-year ban from all competitions, along with forfeiture of any titles or medals won.

"A second violation will result in a lifetime ban and initiation of legal proceedings under the penal code. Coaches and other officials found guilty will also face suspension and debarment from their roles," the statement said.

As part of the amnesty scheme, a one-time amnesty window of six months will be provided, "allowing athletes to voluntarily declare their correct age without penalties."

"Athletes who participate in this amnesty program will undergo a performance review and subsequently be reassigned to the appropriate age group," the ministry said.

There will also be a Whistle-blower Mechanism where "a secure and confidential platform will be created for stakeholders to report cases of age fraud anonymously."

"Additionally, a reward system will be implemented to encourage and incentivise whistle-blowers to come forward with genuine reports."

There will also be a Two-tier Appellate Mechanism to "handle disputes related to age determination" and a "centralised digital portal linked with the National Sports Repository System (NSRS) will be established to securely store all age verification data of athletes."

The draft also says "athletes will receive ID cards embedded with QR codes" after verification.

"These ID cards will be made

accessible digitally through the DigiLocker platform and must be presented mandatorily for participation in all sporting events," the statement said.

"A robust monitoring framework will be established to ensure effective implementation of the Code."

As per the draft Bill, "all athletes must submit three mandatory documents during the registration process. Upon verification, the athlete's age will be securely recorded in a centralized digital database, permanently locking their verified age to prevent any future manipulations."

Also for cases involving age discrepancies, "medical examinations will utilize the TW3 method, MRI scans, and general physical and dental examination."

"Further, AI-based bone assessments to accurately determine an athlete's age will be done in pilot phase. Any disputes arising from these examinations may be appealed through designated appellate medical panel for further review."

The Bill will be applicable to "all athletes, coaches, officials, administrators, and support personnel involved in recognized National Sports Federations (NSFs), Sports Authority of India (SAI), Sports Control Boards managed by Central Government departments and Central Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and NGOs, NSPOs, public/private agencies, and institutions promoting sports development." (PTI)

I'm most comfortable batting in top order: KL Rahul

NEW DELHI, March 13: KL Rahul has been performing consistently irrespective of his position in the batting order but given a choice, the stylish keeper-batter would be "most comfortable" occupying one of the top-order slots.

Rahul, who usually bat No. 5, was pushed down a position lower in the Champions Trophy, and made 174 runs in five innings in Dubai. Rahul's success was a reflection of his preparedness for this new challenge and dedication to keep working on his game.

"I have grown up playing in the top order. From my first competitive match in Mangalore at the age of 11 to my early days playing for India, and for most of my career, I have been a top-order batter. It is the position I am most comfortable in and the one that feels most natural to me," Rahul said.

"That said, when you play a team sport, you don't always get to choose what you want. You have to be flexible and willing to adapt to the team's needs. Over the years, I've learned to embrace that and give my best in whichever role I'm assigned," he added during an interaction with JioHotstar.

Rahul, who has led Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants in the past, has reportedly turned down an opportunity to captain his new franchise Delhi Capitals in the upcoming IPL.

Speaking about the IPL auction, he said



it can significantly impact a player's future in the game.

"Having been a captain for the last three

seasons, I have been actively involved in the process of building a team. I understand the kind of pressure franchises face

when assembling a squad.

"But from a player's perspective, it's even tougher because your career is at stake. The auction can shape a player's future or present unexpected challenges."

"I was definitely nervous, even a little anxious (during the last auction). But at the same time, I knew this was the right step for my career. There was excitement too, though it didn't last very long because reality sets in quickly."

If not Rahul then spin-bowling all-rounder Axar Patel is the favourite to lead DC this season.

After a forgettable season at LSG last year, Rahul is looking for a fresh start at the Capitals.

"I'm really happy to be joining Delhi Capitals. Parth Jindal, the team's owner, is a close friend, and we have spent a lot of time outside of cricket discussing various things."

"I know how passionate he is about the sport, and I'm thrilled to be a part of this team. We have a strong squad, and I'm looking forward to the season ahead. This will be a new experience for me - joining a new franchise, possibly my fourth or fifth team in the IPL. I feel both excited and a little nervous."

"Every time you step into a new team environment, a lot of thoughts cross your mind - how the players will be, how the owners run the team, how the fans will respond - all of that. So, it's a mix of emo-

tion," he added.

DC have never won the IPL, but Rahul is optimistic of putting up a good show with a "solid team."

"Looking at the squad and how the management has built the team, it looks like a well-balanced side with most areas covered. There's a great combination of experienced players and young talent, and I'm excited to play alongside some incredibly skilled youngsters and learn from them as well."

"With players like Mitchell Starc, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, many of whom I have played with before, we have a solid squad. I can't wait for the IPL to begin."

Rahul, who has maintained an impressive average in recent times, remained not out on a fluent 34 in the final of the Champions Trophy against New Zealand on Sunday, also reflected on his journey in international cricket.

"The journey has been filled with challenges — there have been highs and lows, and I have experienced everything an athlete possibly can. But looking back, it has been a beautiful ride, and I wouldn't want it any other way."

"Now, I am excited for the next 10 years of my career. I want to build on everything I have learned in my first decade, apply that experience, and continue evolving. My focus is on improving every day, growing as a player, and winning more matches for my team," he added. (PTI)