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## Assam, M'laya keen to resolve border disputes: Himanta 'Survey of India conducting demarcation process'



**GUWAHATI, March 28:** Assam and Meghalaya are keen to resolve their long-pending border disputes, and a resolution is expected sooner or later, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Friday.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Dikshant ceremony for 70 Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSP) probationers at the North East Police Academy (NEPA) at Umiam, Meghalaya, Sarma said six issues remain unresolved.

"Three of these can be settled at any time, but Meghalaya wants all six to be resolved simultaneously," he said.

"We are working on these issues and hope to resolve all six disputes. Since this involves the sentiments of people from both Assam and Meghalaya, setting a definite time frame may not be appropriate. However, we should hope and pray for an early resolution," Sarma added.

The Survey of India is currently conducting the demarcation process, which is progressing well, he informed.

Sarma reiterated that the agreement signed by both states under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah is binding on both parties.

Assam and Meghalaya have had long standing disputes in 12 areas along their 884.9-km-long inter-state border.

In March 2022, the two states signed an agreement in New Delhi, in the presence of the Union Home Minister, to resolve issues in six areas during the first phase.

Under the first-phase settlement covering 36.79 sq km of disputed (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 70 police officers - 62 from Assam and 8 from Mizoram - pass out from NEPA

## Tough police action reduced crime rates in Assam: Himanta

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 28:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said that the strong measures taken by Assam Police against crimes and criminals are responsible for substantial decline in crime rates.

The chief minister said this at the Dikshant Parade of 70 Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSPs) probationers in North Eastern Police Academy (NEPA) at Umsaw village in Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya.

He further claimed that in the last few years the state witnessed no disruption in the smooth conduct of governance.

"Since assuming office, the present state government has adopted a decisive goal to transform Assam, where crime is minimal and citizens can actively contribute to the state's progress. In coordination with the commit-



ment of the government for a crime-free and drug-free state, Assam Police has been dealing with all forms of crime and their manifestations," an official statement quoted him as saying.

He also said that it is heartening that the police force has adopted a firm stance against criminals thereby sending a strong message that there is no place of disruption

in the state. The chief minister asked the probationers to uphold the highest standard of professional excellence, integrity and honesty, which will help them in meeting the expectations of the society, the government and the people they represent. Appreciating the role of the Assam Police, Sarma said that the crime (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Powerful earthquake rocks Myanmar, Thailand; kills at least 3 in Bangkok high-rise collapse



**BANGKOK, March 28:** A powerful earthquake rocked Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand on Friday, killing at least three people in Bangkok and burying dozens when a high-rise building under construction collapsed.

Photos and video from two hard-hit cities in Myanmar showed many collapsed buildings and other destruction, raising fears that many were killed or injured.

The 7.7 magnitude quake, with an epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, struck at midday and was followed by a strong 6.4 magnitude aftershock.

The full extent of death, injury and destruction was not immediately clear — particularly in Myanmar, which is embroiled in a civil war and where information is tightly controlled at the best of times.

Photos from the capital of Naypyidaw showed multiple buildings used to house civil servants destroyed by the quake, and rescue crews pulling victims from the rubble.

Myanmar's government said blood was in high demand in the hardest-hit areas. Images of buckled and cracked roads in Mandalay and damaged highways as well as the collapse of a bridge and dam raised further concerns about how rescuers would even reach some areas in a country already enduring a widespread humanitarian crisis.

Near Bangkok's popular Chatuchak market, a 33-story building under construction, with a crane on top, crumpled into a cloud of dust, and onlookers could be seen screaming and running in a video posted on social media.

The sound of sirens echoed throughout central Bangkok and vehicles filled the streets, leaving some of the city's already congested streets grid-locked. The elevated rapid transit system and subway shut down.

While the area where the quake struck is prone to earthquakes, they are usually not so big and it is rare for them to be felt in the Thai capital, which sits on a river delta and is at moderate risk for quakes.

April Kanichawanakul, who works in an office building in Bangkok, initially didn't even realise it was an earthquake, the first she'd ever experienced. "I just thought I was dizzy," she said.

She and her colleagues ran downstairs from the 10th floor of their building and waited outside for a signal that it was safe to go back in.

**Crane-topped building collapsed in a cloud of dust**

In Bangkok, at least three people were killed in the building collapse and 90 were missing, according to Defence Minister Phumtham Wechayachai. He offered no more details about the ongoing rescue efforts but first responders said (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Mizoram proposes talks with Assam on border dispute

**AIZAWL, March 28:** The Mizoram government has made a proposal to Assam to initiate official-level talks in mid-April on the long-standing border dispute, a senior home department official said here on Friday.

Mizoram Home Secretary Vanlal-mawia said that a letter has been sent to Assam for the fourth time proposing that official-level talks be held before the ministerial-level discussion in Guwahati.

He said Mizoram is awaiting a response from Assam.

Vanlal-mawia said that official-level deliberations have been proposed to prepare and finalise the groundwork and modalities for the subsequent ministerial-level talks.

According to the home secretary, during the ministerial-level talks held in Aizawl on August 9 last year, it was proposed that official-level talks be held at least three times before the fifth round of ministerial-level discussion.

"After the ministerial-level talks



in August last year, we have so far sent four letters to Assam with the last being sent recently proposing to hold official-level talks in Guwahati in mid-April before the ministerial-level dialogue. We are waiting for a reply from Assam," Vanlal-mawia told PTI. Responding to the previous letters, the Assam government had earlier intimated its proposal to hold official-level talks in the third

week of March, which the Mizoram government had declined due to the assembly session and visit of Union home minister Amit Shah, he said.

Three Mizoram districts—Aizawl, Kolasib and Mamit share a 164.6 km long border with Assam's Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts. In the last and fourth round of ministerial-level talks in August last year, both (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Traffickers using drones to deliver drugs: Himanta

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 28:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday highlighted the scale of the battle against drug trafficking, noting that traffickers are adopting new and dangerous tactics, including the use of drones to transport narcotics.

The CM explained that drug cartels have modified their strategies, enabling them to operate from remote locations, posing a serious threat.

"In Assam and Meghalaya, drug carriers have been active, and our fight against them is ongoing. However, traffickers now use various delivery methods, including drones, to transport narcotics," Sarma said.

Speaking to reporters, Sarma emphasised the severity of the drug problem and the efforts by state

governments to curb it. He reiterated Assam's commitment to cracking down on drug networks with a "zero-tolerance" policy. According to him, sustained anti-drug operations are key to eliminating this menace from society.

Sarma also pointed out that the masterminds behind these drug networks are based outside India, coordinating their operations through local agents. He explained how traffickers use sophisticated methods to evade law enforcement.

"Sometimes, several agents travel together, each carrying tiny quantities of drugs, which makes detection and arrest difficult. For instance, if ten people travel by train from Guwahati to Delhi, each carrying half a gram of heroin, it becomes (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Lok Sabha passes Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill

The bill strengthens India's maritime commerce legal framework: Sonowal

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 28:** The Lok Sabha on Friday passed the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2024 in an attempt to modernise, update legal framework as well as enhance Ease of Doing Business (EODB) in India's maritime sector.

The bill was introduced by Sarbananda Sonowal, the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW).

In an effort to support the country's growing shipping sector, Sonowal introduced the 'Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2024,' marking a significant legislative reform by replacing the colonial-era 'Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 1925'. The colonial era act was rooted in the century-old Hague Rules, which limited scope with complex language, and misaligned with

modern commercial realities. The new bill addresses these gaps with clarity, foresight, and renewed relevance for a rapidly evolving maritime sector.

"The passing of the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill in the Lok Sabha marks a crucial step toward realising PM Narendra Modi's vision of updating & modernising India's legal framework—making it more relevant, efficient, and accessible, while shedding colonial-era legacies that have impeded progress. The passage of this bill is a significant step toward strengthening India's legal foundation for maritime commerce. It not only promotes investor confidence but also positions India as Viksit Bharat," Sonowal said.

The Union minister also introduced the 'Indian Ports Bill, 2025',

aimed at consolidating laws related to port management, promoting integrated port development, and enhancing the ease of doing business in the maritime sector. The bill seeks to optimise the utilisation of India's vast coastline by establishing and empowering State Maritime Boards to ensure effective management of ports other than major ports. It also proposes the formation of the Maritime State Development Council to foster structured growth and development of the port sector.

Adding further, Sonowal said that today marks a historic milestone in India's journey towards a modern, efficient, and globally competitive shipping sector.

"The passing of the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2024, in the Lok Sabha is (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## BJP seeks apology from SP's Ramji Lal Suman, disrupts proceedings in RS

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Ruling BJP MPs on Friday forced a 30-minute adjournment of proceedings in the Rajya Sabha as they demanded an unqualified apology from Samajwadi Party leader Ramji Lal Suman for his 'condemnable' remarks against Rajput king Rana Sanga.

BJP MPs were up on their feet no sooner had the House met for the day, shouting slogans.

Chairman Jadeshpurkar as well as Union ministers and senior leaders from opposition Congress weighed in on the issue, but they persisted with their demand, forcing adjournment of the proceedings.

Suman rose to speak but BJP MPs started shouting slogans. Dhankhar gave him the floor but the slogan-shouting did not stop, forcing him to adjourn the proceedings till 12 noon.

Calling Rana Sanga a symbol of chivalry, patriotism and nationalism, Dhankhar called Suman's remarks as "highly disparaging, objectionable and painful."

The SP MP had kicked up a row calling Rana Sanga a "traitor" for inviting Babur to India to defeat Ibrahim Lodi. He has so far re-



fused to apologise or withdraw his statement. This statement has angered many with scores of purported activists from the Karni Sena vandalising his Agra house.

When the House met for the day, BJP MPs were up on their feet protesting against Suman's remarks and his reiteration on Thursday.

Dhankhar said, "If we as members of this House express in the manner we are doing, irrespective of gravity or enormity of the situation, then we are not contributing to evolution of peace in society and we will have to introspect and reflect that in this House, on such sensitive issues, if we do not send a message of peace, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

'Till March 1, over 2.21 crore hospital admissions worth Rs 34,954 crore were authorised'

## Except WB, all states and UTs have been onboarded for Ayushman Bharat scheme: Nadda

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Except for West Bengal, all states and Union Territories across the nation have been onboarded for the Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) as of March 26, Union Health Minister JP Nadda told the Lok Sabha on Friday.

More than 8.9 crore hospital admissions worth Rs 1.26 lakh were authorised under AB-PMJAY since its inception till March 1, 2025, Nadda said. Responding to a question, Nadda said that as of March 20, more than 10.21 lakh, 14.47 lakh, and 14.76 lakh Ayushman cards have been created for Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) beneficiary families, respectively, under the scheme.

Till March 1, 30,957 hospitals, in-



cluding 13,866 private and 17,091 public hospitals, were empanelled under the scheme.

Nadda said that till March 1, over 2.21 crore hospital admissions worth Rs

34,954 crore were authorised under AB-PMJAY for FY 2024-25.

Regular updation such as expansion of beneficiary base, inclusion of new procedures, empanelment of new hos-

pitals and other improvements are done in the scheme as per requirements from time to time, he said.

Nadda said that under AB-PMJAY, the eligibility criteria for the beneficiary families were initially identified from the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 on the basis of six deprivation and 11 occupational criteria across rural and urban areas, respectively.

Further, in January 2022, on the basis of decadal growth rate of 11.7 per cent, the Government of India revised the beneficiary base to 12 crore families and provided the flexibility to states and Union Territories to use other databases (of similar socio-economic profile) for verification of beneficiaries against such SECC beneficiaries who could not be identified and verified. Several states and Union (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)



# Investors' wealth swells by ₹ 25.90 lakh cr in FY25 as markets log over 5 pc gains

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Dalal Street investors became richer by ₹ 25.90 lakh crore in the entire 2024-25 financial year, with the BSE benchmark Sensex climbing over 5 per cent, amid an overall optimistic trend in equities.

After a stellar show in 2023-24 fiscal, stock markets had a roller coaster ride in FY25.

In the 2024-25 fiscal, the BSE bellwether gauge jumped 3,763.57 points or 5.10 per cent, and the NSE Nifty climbed 1,192.45 points or 5.34 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms surged by ₹ 25,90,546.73 crore to ₹ 4,12,87,646.50 crore (USD 4.82 trillion) in FY25.

"FY25 proved to be an eye-opener for new market participants, marking a departure from the continuous bull run they were accustomed to. While robust retail participation and domestic inflow drove a rally in the equity markets, FIIs turned cautious, selling off positions as valuations elevated due to the strong bull run and global uncertainties."

"Lower-than-expected corporate earnings particularly in the second half of FY25 further compounded the pressure on valuations. At the fiscal year end, policy actions by the new Trump administration added another layer of volatility which intensified market corrections," Palka Arora Chopra, Director, Master Capital Services Ltd, said.

The Sensex hit its all-time high of 85,978.25 on September 27, last year.

Stock markets came under bear attack from October onwards amid worries over foreign investors fleeing the domestic market and stretched valuations of the equities.

In October 2024 alone, the BSE benchmark slipped 4,910.72 points or 5.82 per cent.

But, heavy retail investors' participation played a significant role in the overall market's



positive trend this fiscal.

Also, a number of mainboard Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) and listing of shares imparted optimism in the equity markets.

The major positive drivers behind the equity markets this fiscal were favourable election outcome and a surge in retail participation, according to Palka Arora.

"The election result boosted investors confidence by signalling political stability and continuation of the policies, which helped set a positive tone across the markets," she added.

On the last trading day of the 2024-25 fiscal on Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 191.51 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 77,414.92 in a volatile trading session. The Nifty dropped 72.60 points or 0.31 per cent to 23,519.35.

"It really is a tale of two halves for Indian equities in FY25. Markets entered the fiscal year during the start of general elections in a range-bound fashion and have been volatile till the results in June with flat performance but went on to hit multiple record highs in Jun-Sep period after the coalition government headed by PM Modi signalled policy continuity despite BJP not getting majority on its own," Satish Chandra

Aluri, Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

However, the tone dramatically shifted from October as Q2 corporate earnings disappointed bringing elevated valuations back into focus as foreigners started to exit India, he noted.

"Coupled with global developments such as China's massive stimulus as well as the return of Trump after the US election, foreign outflows accelerated," Aluri said.

In 2023-24 fiscal, the Sensex climbed 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent.

The market cap of BSE-listed companies had soared by ₹ 128,77,203.77 crore to ₹ 3,86,97,099.77 crore in FY24.

"After rallying ~17% in the first half of fiscal year, markets recorded 5 consecutive monthly declines from Oct-Feb 2025 – a record not seen in the last 29 years – on disappointing earnings, sharp devaluation and foreign exodus," Aluri noted.

Markets staged a rebound in March to close out the fiscal year in gains, despite weak global cues due to Trump's tariff threats and concerns over slowdown in the US, he added.

According to Aluri, FY25 also saw widespread euphoria in the IPO markets.

Reliance Industries is the country's most valued firm with a market valuation of ₹ 17,25,377.54 crore, followed by HDFC Bank (₹ 13,99,208.73 crore), TCS (₹ 13,04,121.56 crore), Bharti Airtel (₹ 9,87,005.92 crore) and ICICI Bank (₹ 9,52,768.61 crore) in the top five order.

Aluri believes that markets are entering the new fiscal with better fundamentals and improving domestic outlook as valuations are now close to historic levels for large caps while RBI is expected to deliver further rate cuts in the coming months.

However, global uncertainty continued to rise with trade wars and shifting geopolitical headwinds from the Middle East to Europe, he said. (PTI)

## Royal Enfield launches Classic 650 in India

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 28:** Royal Enfield has introduced the Classic 650 in India, with prices starting at ₹ 33,70,000.

The latest addition to the brand's mid-size motorcycle segment retains the signature elegance of the Classic series while offering modern design and enhanced performance.

Describing the new model, B Govindarajan, Managing Director of Eicher Motors Limited and CEO of Royal Enfield, said, "The Classic 650 is more than just a

motorcycle – it's a tribute to our rich legacy, where timeless design meets effortless performance."

He emphasised that the bike continues the spirit of Royal Enfield, blending craftsmanship with an unshakable connection between rider and machine.

Built on the brand's proven 650cc parallel twin platform, the Classic 650 is designed to offer a refined yet powerful riding experience.

Govindarajan highlighted its appeal to motorcyclists who appreciate the Classic's heritage but

seek more power and versatility.

"With the Classic 650, we are not just building motorcycles; we are preserving the essence of pure motorcycling for generations to come," he added.

The Classic series has long been a symbol of Royal Enfield's DNA, with its distinctive character and vintage-inspired aesthetics.

The Classic 650 continues this tradition while incorporating modern craftsmanship, ensuring that it remains an aspirational choice for riders across the country.

## Gold rallies ₹ 1,100 to scale new record high of ₹ 92,150 per 10 g

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Gold prices rallied by ₹ 1,100 to hit a fresh peak of ₹ 92,150 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid rise in precious metal rates in the overseas markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had finished at ₹ 91,050 per 10 grams on Thursday.

In FY25, gold prices have increased by ₹ 23,730 or 35 per cent from ₹ 68,420 per 10 grams on April 1 last year.

Continuing the momentum for the third straight session, gold of 99.5 per cent purity jumped by ₹ 1,100 to hit a lifetime high of ₹ 91,700 per 10 grams. It had concluded at ₹ 90,600 per 10 grams in the previous market close.

"Gold prices continues the bullish momentum and set a new record high on Friday. The gold rise is being driven by the fear of an escalating global trade war and its implications for economic development," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Silver prices surged by ₹ 1,300 to trade near a record high at ₹ 1,03,000 per kg against Thursday's closing level of ₹ 1,01,700 per kg.

On March 19, the white metal prices hit a record high of ₹ 1,03,500 per kg.

Meanwhile, gold futures for April delivery appreciated by ₹ 542 to ₹ 88,926 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

"Gold prices continued to trade higher in the spot market as tariff concerns persisted, keeping buying interest intact," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

With the April 2 reciprocal tariffs approaching, US President Donald Trump is expected to impose them across all trade deals, further fuelling uncertainty, Trivedi added.

On the global front, spot gold surged to hit a record high of USD 3,086.08 per ounce. Also, Comex gold futures hit yet another peak of USD 3,124.40 per ounce.



According to Kotak Securities, Comex gold futures surged to a record high driven by escalating trade war anxieties as President Trump's auto import tariffs and threats of further levies against the EU and Canada intensified safe-haven demand.

Gold prices have increased by about 8.2 per cent this month supported by geopolitical tensions and robust central bank purchases, the brokerage firm said in a note.

Spot silver in the Asian market hours was trading flat at USD 34.42 per ounce. In addition, Comex silver futures rose 0.7 per cent to USD 35.33 per ounce.

Traders said growing uncertainty over the economic fallout from these tariffs is further amplifying market volatility, as the levies are expected to fuel inflation and slow global economic growth, strengthening demand for the precious metal.

Abans Financial Services' Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said, "Investors are awaiting speeches from multiple Federal Reserve officials for insights into the central bank's monetary policy outlook this week."

Additionally, market participants will also closely monitor the US Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) data, to be released later on Friday, as it is the US Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge and a key indicator for its next policy moves, Mehta added. (PTI)

## Levi's launches 'Easy in Levi's' campaign featuring Diljit Dosanjh

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 28:** The Levi's® brand has unveiled its latest campaign, 'Easy in Levi's®', starring global brand ambassador and multi-talented artist Diljit Dosanjh.

The campaign highlights relaxed and loose-fit denim, blending comfort with effortless style and confidence.

Dosanjh, a music icon and fashion trailblazer, brings his cross-cultural influence to the campaign, reinforcing Levi's® commitment to merging denim heritage with contemporary trends in India.

Known for his sold-out world tours and trendsetting presence in film and fashion, Dosanjh embodies the campaign's message—loose fits are not just about clothing but about how they make you feel.

The campaign introduces three key denim styles: the 555™ Relaxed Straight, a timeless straight-leg fit with a comfortable roomy feel; the 568™ Loose Straight, a '90s-inspired relaxed silhouette with easy-cool vibes; and the bold 578™ Baggy, an oversized fit with stacked ankles that channels '90s streetwear aesthetics.

A series of dynamic montage films showcase Dosanjh in his element—effortlessly moving through his world in Levi's® Loose Fits, from sound-checks to everyday moments.

The visuals highlight authenticity and ease, reinforcing the idea that these jeans are designed for movement, versatility, and self-expression.

"With 'Easy in Levi's®', we're tapping into the growing demand for relaxed and loose silhouettes that marry comfort with style," said Amisha Jain, Managing Director and SVP, South Asia, Middle East and Africa at Levi Strauss & Co. "Diljit Dosanjh brings this vision to life, proving that when you feel good in what you wear, effortless style follows."

The new Levi's® Loose Fits are now available in Levi's® stores across India and online at <http://www.levi.in>.

Whether opting for the clean-cut 555™ Relaxed Straight, the carefree 568™ Loose Straight, or the statement-making 578™ Baggy, the collection offers versatile styling options for everyday wear.

## Govt to impose strict penalties on sugar mills violating stock holding limits



**NEW DELHI, March 28:** The government will take stringent action against the sugar mills violating monthly stock holding limit orders, the Food and Consumer Affairs Ministry said on

Friday. The ministry prescribes monthly stock holding limits for white/refined sugar to prevent hoarding and control price increases. For April, the stock

holding limit is set at 23.5 lakh tonnes.

In a directive issued to mills, the ministry said it has found repeated violations by some group and individual sugar mills despite previous warnings, prompting the issuance of new, stricter guidelines.

Key penalties include: for first-time violations, 100 per cent of excess sugar sold will be deducted from the subsequent month's release quota.

Subsequent violations will see progressively higher deductions: 115 per cent for the second, 130 per cent for the third, and 150 per cent for the fourth violation.

Mills dispatching less than 90 per cent of quota without intimation will have restricted future allocations.

Multiple violations in a sugar

season will disqualify mills from additional releases and government scheme benefits.

"No benefit under any scheme of DFPD and DSVO, including export quota, as and when issued, may be granted to the sugar mills which violate stockholding limit orders more than two times in a sugar season, starting from the month of third instance," the directive said.

Ethanol procurement allocations may also be reduced.

The ministry will distribute the deducted quantity among compliant sugar mills while issuing monthly stockholding orders.

The guidelines, effective April 1, 2025, aim to ensure consistent supply and price stability in the sugar market. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## 'Survey of India conducting

land, Assam received 18.46 sq km, while Meghalaya got 18.33 sq km. The remaining six areas, where the differences are more complex, are now being addressed in the second phase. Meghalaya, which was carved out of Assam in 1972, has challenged the Assam Reorganisation Act, 1971, which Assam recognises as its border. (PTI)

## Tough police action reduced

rate per lakh population in the state has significantly dropped from 349 in 2020 to 139 in 2024, adding, "The charge sheet rate has surged from 47.8 percent to 66.7 percent, while the conviction rate has increased to 22.9 per cent in 2024". Commenting on the crimes against women, Sarma said that such crimes have declined from 26,352 cases in 2020 to 5,555 in 2024.

Further, Sarma informed that the stringent actions against child marriage offenders which have led to a substantial rise in case registrations, from 138 cases in 2020 to 5,498 cases in 2023.

Speaking on the drug trafficking, Sarma said that Assam Police has undertaken an unwavering crackdown on drug trafficking. "As a result, since 2020 drugs worth ₹ 2,885 crore have been seized and over a thousand bighas of cannabis and opium cultivation have been destroyed. In 2024 alone, Assam Police registered 3323 drug related cases, underscoring its firm stand against narcotics," he stated.

Later, the chief minister congratulated the 70 DSPs, and said that the passing out parade at the culmination of the 54th Basic Course at NEPA marked a significant milestone in the life of the officer trainees. He said that the rigorous training undertaken at the NEPA will definitely help the officers to become professionally competent to face myriad challenges. He also extended his gratitude to Director NEPA Danesh Rana, the indoor and outdoor faculty members and the entire NEPA fraternity for their dedication in shaping the future of policing. "The drills and discipline instilled in the officer trainees will undoubtedly empower them to meet the expectations of the society," he said.

It may be noted that since its establishment in 1978, NEPA's Basic Courses have trained over five thousand DSPs and Sub-Inspectors. Assam alone has witnessed the training of over one thousand DSPs Cadet Sub-Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors since 2016. The 54th Basic Course started from 2 April, 2024 had 70 DSPs out of which 62 are from Assam and the remaining eight from Mizoram.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Ashok Singhal, director NEPA Danesh Rana, DGP Assam Police Harneet Singh and hosts of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

## Arrested journalist granted

by the students' wing of a political party. Mozumder, who is also the assistant general secretary of the Gauhati Press Club, was first arrested under Section 351(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for criminal intimidation or the act of threatening someone to harm them or force them to do something, read with relevant sections of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

He was granted bail for a surety of ₹ 20,000 but was not released the same day as the formalities could not be completed and he was sent to judicial custody. His lawyers waited the whole day on Thursday to complete the formalities for his release but when the bond was furnished, police rearrested Mozumder in connection with the second case and whisked him away from Guwahati Central Jail to Panbazar police station.

The Gauhati Press Club (GPC), in an emergent executive meeting, decided to protest Mozumder's arrest and all journalists will wear black badges at their workplaces while performing their duties from Friday to Sunday.

It was also decided that a general meeting of all journalists will be held to discuss the issue of 'Safety of Journalists' and a memorandum will be prepared to submit to appropriate authorities, according to a GPC statement.

The Press Club of India (PCI), in a statement, expressed 'shock' at the re-arrest of the senior digital media journalist and also concern that an attempt was made to shift the attention from the core issue — that of preventing a journalist from carrying out his official duty which is a grave infringement of the freedom of press guaranteed under Article 19 (1) (A) of the Constitution. The Assam Women Journalists' Forum (AWJF) also condemned the re-arrest of Mozumder in a second case after he was granted bail in the first by a Gauhati court following his arrest on Tuesday midnight.

The AWJF expressed concern that a narrative is being used to undermine journalists who might not fit into the government's definition of a 'legitimate' journalist, with some sections also attempting to malign certain journalists, including women media persons, a statement issued by the forum said. The Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ) also condemned the 'vindictive arrest and re-arrest' of Mozumder and congratulated Assam journalists for organising protests demanding his release. (PTI)

## Mizoram proposes talks with

states agreed to hold the next round of ministerial-level dialogue in Guwahati before March 31 this year.

Apart from maintaining peace along the inter-state border, both sides also agreed that the administrative authorities of border districts of both states will organise joint cultural and sports festivals, commencing before March 31, to improve relations. The last meeting, held in Aizawl, was attended by Mizoram Home Minister K Sapdanga and Assam's Border Protection and Development Minister Atul Borah.

The decades-old border dispute between Mizoram and Assam mainly stemmed from two conflicting colonial-era demarcations- one from 1875 under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) and another from 1933.

Mizoram claims that 509 square miles of the Inner Line Reserved Forest (ILRF) delineated in 1875 under the BEFR as its legitimate area or boundary.

In contrast, Assam asserts the border defined by a map prepared by the Survey of India in 1933 as its constitutional boundary. As a result, both states lay claim to overlapping areas, with no ground demarcation conducted till date. The dispute escalated into violence on several occasions, and the most ugly turn was reported on July 26, 2021 near Mizoram's Vairengte village, where a deadly clash between police forces of both the states resulted in seven fatalities and several injuries. (PTI)

## Powerful earthquake rocks

that seven people had been rescued so far from the area. At least two of the dead were construction workers who were killed by falling rubble or debris, rescue worker Songwut Wangpon told reporters. The building was being built by the China Railway Construction Corporation for Thailand's government auditor general.

Elsewhere, people in Bangkok evacuated from their buildings were cautioned to stay outside in case there were more aftershocks. The US Geological Survey and Germany's GFZ centre for geosciences said the earthquake was a shallow 10 kilometres, according to preliminary reports. Shallower earthquakes tend to cause more damage.

**Screaming and panic as buildings swayed**

Bangkok's city hall declared the city a disaster area to facilitate the response. The greater metropolitan area is home to more than 17 million people, many of whom live in high-rise apartments.

"All of a sudden the whole building began to move. Immediately there was screaming and a lot of panic," said Fraser Morton, a tourist from Scotland, who was in one of Bangkok's many malls.

"I just started walking calmly at first but then the building started really moving, yeah, a lot of screaming, a lot of panic, people running the wrong way down the escalators."

Like Morton, thousands of people poured into Benjasiri Park from nearby shopping malls, high rises and apartment buildings along Bangkok's busy Sukhumvit Road.

Many were on phones trying to reach loved ones as others sought shade from the hot early afternoon sun.

Voranoot Thirawat, a lawyer working in central Bangkok, said his first indication that something was wrong came when she saw a light swinging back and forth. Then she heard the building creaking as it moved back and forth. She and her colleagues ran down 12 flights of stairs. "In my lifetime, there was no earthquake like this in Bangkok," she said. Paul Vincent, a tourist visiting from England, was at a street-side bar when the quake struck.

As he came onto the street himself, he said he saw a high-rise building swaying and water falling from a rooftop pool. "There were people crying in the streets and, you know, the panic was horrendous really," he said. (AP)

## Traffickers using drones to

challenging to catch them. However, Assam Police work tirelessly to stay ahead and dismantle the drug networks," he added. The Chief Minister further emphasised that drug trafficking is a global issue, not just limited to Assam or Meghalaya. He noted that even the Trump administration in the US had focused on tackling the narcotics problem. "In a recent US Senate meeting, combating drug trafficking was a key topic. This shows that the drug menace is a worldwide challenge," Sarma said, stressing that ongoing operations are essential to addressing this threat. He said that the battle against drug networks is a tough job and should be dealt with using accurate methods, adding, "The security personnel have to be cautious with a zero-tolerance policy on narcotics peddling."

## Lok Sabha passes Carriage

a significant step in fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of modernising India's Maritime sector to become future ready and globally competitive," he added.

## BJP seeks apology from

tranquillity, then we will be failing in our duty." The conduct of MPs should in all situations be decorous, he said. In the same vein, he said the "dignity of a member of the House, his security, and his prestige is equally important".

"There is always an occasion when we are carried away by emotion, we must rectify," he said. "But I wish to make it very clear, the sentiments of the people are very precious".

He said on Thursday certain remarks made on the issue were expunged as they were "outrageous" and "unexpected" of a member of the House.

On Thursday, Suman and his party colleague Javed Ali Khan had given notice under Rule 267, seeking suspension of the business of the day to take up a discussion over the alleged threat and vandalism at the Agra residence of Suman. The notices were rejected, following which opposition MPs had staged a walkout. Dhankhar said even though the remarks were expunged from the records, they had already got traction on social media because of how technology works in beaming events live. (PTI)

## Except WB, all states

Territories (UTs) implementing AB-PMJAY have further expanded the beneficiary base under the scheme using non-SECC data sources (including the National Food Security Act, state specific datasets).

In March 2024, the eligibility criteria under the scheme were expanded to include 37 lakh ASHA workers, AWWs, AWHs and their families, Nadda said. Further, on October 29, 2024, the government expanded AB-PMJAY to provide free treatment benefits of up to Rs 5 lakh per year to approximately six crore senior citizens aged 70 years and above, belonging to 4.5 crore families, irrespective of their socio-economic status.

Under AB-PMJAY, the health benefit packages have been revised five times since the launch of the scheme. Initially, the scheme included 1,359 packages, but the Health Benefit Package (HBP) 2022 now comprises 1,961 packages across 27 medical specialities, the minister said. (PTI)



## More than 200 community leaders and experts to participate in the event National seminar on linguistic and cultural development of BTR begins today in New Delhi



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, March 28:** The Bodo Study Centre under the aegis of the Gandhi Hindustani Sahitya Sabha, Rajghat, New Delhi (a premier Institute founded by Mahatma Gandhi for promotion of Indian languages and culture) will organise a two-day National Seminar on the topic of "The Lingual and Cultural issues of the local communities of Bodoland" beginning from March 29 to 30 in New Delhi.

The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro is slated to attend the inaugural programme on March 29 as the Chief Guest in the presence of the Speaker of the BTC Legislative Assembly Speaker, Katiram Baro.

Linguistic and Cultural Experts,

namely, Shobha Satyanath, TS Satyanath, and Abdul Alim among others are scheduled to facilitate the unique seminar that will see the participation of more than 200 community leaders and experts representing the local cultural communities in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

The two-day event aimed to provide a platform for discussion and deliberations to formulate an action plan to guide the future of society, particularly the policymakers of Bodoland region.

It may be mentioned here that the historic Bodo Peace Accord signed on January 27 in 2020 under the guidance of Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, and in the august presence of Home Minister of India Amit Shah has already ushered in a new era of hope,

peace, all-round development and progress in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in the state of Assam.

The Bodoland Model of Peace has also gathered regional and national acclaim in the past five years. The Bodoland Territorial Region, one of the ten Sixth Schedule Councils of India (North East), was previously known for its volatile environment- conflicts, violence, killings and rapes for over four-decades since the 1980s. For the first time, the region has seen peace, security and harmonious co-existence in the post-Independence period.

Recently, the Pramod Boro-led BTR Government launched the BTR Community Vision Documents. The respective community vision documents have been touted to develop aspirations of the diverse communities living in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). As part of the flagship Bodoland Happiness Mission, this initiative reflected the Council Government's steadfast commitment to fostering sustainable peace, promoting healing and addressing the enduring scars of over four decades of conflict and violence. It captures the diverse aspirations of the communities residing in BTR and seeks to align the government's efforts with their needs, ensuring that every voice is heard and represented in the journey towards peace and development.

The National Seminar is unique in its community-driven approach, emphasising the importance of equal ownership among all stakeholders. By involving community organizations, grassroots leaders, and individuals the process fosters trust, inclusion and social unity. It is expected that the seminar will lay the foundation for holistic and inclusive development in the Bodoland Territorial Region. It has been designed to foster the resilience and aspirations of BTR, while also serving as a roadmap for the Council Government to prioritize initiatives and allocate resources effectively. Such an approach aimed at a future where the wounds of the past are healed, communities are empowered, and sustainable peace is achieved.

Through this initiative, the Gandhi Hindustani Sahitya Academy, All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), and all the participating CSOs from BTR reaffirm their unwavering commitment to build bridges between communities and fostering a harmonious, progressive, and green Bodoland.

This seminar is thus a significant step towards realizing this shared dream, ensuring that the aspirations of every community shape the region's path forward, a PR stated.

## Beyond politics, toward autonomy: Diphu summit unites voices for Article 244(A)

**HT Correspondent**

**KHERONI, March 28:** The Forum for Hills Autonomous State Movement (FHASM) organised a significant discussion session titled "In-depth Discussion on Article 244(A)" under the motto "United for Autonomous State." The event took place at the Sarsing Teron Langkung Habe Memorial Town Hall in Diphu, Karbi Anglong, drawing a distinguished gathering of indigenous leaders, intellectuals, and community representatives.

The session was graced by the presence of notable figures, including the Traditional Karbi King, Longsing Ronghang (Karbi Recho), alongside Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC). Other prominent attendees included Raju Tisso, Speaker, KAAC, Avijit Kro, Deputy Speaker of KAAC, as well as Executive Members (EMs), Members of Autonomous Council (MACs), and Board Chairpersons. The event also saw the participation of esteemed former leaders such as Jayanta Rongpi, former MP and CEM, Horen Sing Bey, former MP, and Jotsong Bey, former CEM, along with James Hanse, President of the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC). Representatives from the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) and Karbi Students Association (KSA), including Joint Convenor, Peter Tisso, General Secretary of the Forum for Hills Autonomous State Movement, joined other dignitaries in this historic gathering.

The discussion centered on the long-standing demand for the implementation of Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution, which promises greater autonomy for the hill regions of Assam. Participants engaged in a broad and reflective



dialogue on the historical struggles tied to this cause. Key movements highlighted included the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) efforts since 1986, the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) Peace Accord from 1999 to 2011, the Joint Action Committee for Autonomous State (JACAS) Movement between 2013 and 2017, and the ongoing Six Militants Struggles from 1999 to the present day. The session also revisited the significance of the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill of 2019, which remains a pivotal point in the autonomy discourse.

Speakers emphasised that the dream of an Autonomous State for Karbi Anglong (West/East), Dima Hasao and its indigenous communities Karbi, Dimas, and others

requires unity, sincerity, courage, and unwavering commitment. "This is not just a political goal but a shared vision for our future," one speaker noted, urging all communities to rise above political differences and organizational agendas. The session underscored the need for a collective effort, free from individual or partisan motives, to achieve this long-cherished aspiration.

The event concluded with a renewed call to action, stressing that the path to autonomy lies in solidarity. Organisers and attendees expressed hope that this discussion would mark a turning point in galvanizing support and momentum for the implementation of Article 244(A), ensuring a brighter future for the hill regions and their people.

## Sivasagar residents demand flyover at St Chariali

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, March 28:** Sivasagar Municipality Tax Payers' Association through an executive meeting on Thursday reiterated their demand for expediting the infrastructural development of the three century old Mandir township and criticized the government for the civic woes.

The meeting, presided over by senior adviser Pradip Bordoloi, resolved to move the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sharma to do the needful for constructing a flyover at Station Chariali from ASTC point to Sikh Gurudwara and a modern RCC bridge over Dikhow removing the British era rickety iron bridge over Dikhow.

The meeting expressed concern over the perfunctory nature of works of the Sivasagar Municipality Board despite collection of over Rs 5 crore property tax in the last fiscal.

The meeting criticised incomplete works of the covered drain construction works as it began a year ago on the sides of the Purana Amolapatty road and the LKB road and AT road widening works are still incomplete. The members observed that the Municipality Board has been afflicted by internal squabbles between the chairperson Mrinali Konwar and Ward Members and hence there has been no transparency or consensus on public works and the office staff was utilising the opportunity to the hilt.

The Association demanded a clear statement from the Board on financial grants from the government and property tax expenditures for the last three years.

The Tax Payers' Association demanded strict control over licensing e-rickshaw, and other three wheelers in the Municipality area. The e-rickshaws have created serious traffic chaos now. The demand for Traffic police points at Amolapatty Chariali and ATRoad Purana Amolapatty Rd junction and completion of Sivasagar District Library Auditorium has remained unheeded by the Sivasagar District Administration. Sivasagar Deputy Commissioner Ayush Yadav assured the association of an early action in this regard immediately after assuming charge of the district.

Manoj Kumar Bordhakur, and Arabinda Barua, president & secretary respectively, Municipality Tax Payers' Association among others were present.

## New MACs of NCHAC appointed

**HT Correspondent**

**HAFLONG, March 28:** The Governor of Assam has appointed Ajay Chakraborty from Haflong and Krishna Joshi from Umrangso as nominated Members of the Autonomous Council in the 13th North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC).

Their appointment has been believed to strengthen the council's leadership and representation, contributing to the region's governance and development in Dima Hasao district.

## NSO organises awareness campaign rally

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, March 28:** As part of the 75th anniversary celebration of National Sample Survey (NSS), the NSO, Regional Office-Dibrugarh of National Statistics Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoS&PI), successfully organized an awareness campaign rally on Friday.

The rally commenced at the DDA Complex, Phoolbagan and proceeded through Thana Chariali traffic and HS Road, aimed to raise awareness about NSO activities/initiatives, encourage community participation in data collection, and highlight the importance of data in nation-building.

Employees from RO-Dibrugarh participated enthusiastically, holding placards showcasing NSS's contributions to socio-economic development and policy formulation while chanting slogans about the importance of reliable data to the government.

Pamphlets were also distributed along the route to further educate the public on the significance of statistical data in governance.

RN Soreithem, Director of NSO (FOD), RO-Dibrugarh, spoke at the event and highlighted that the National Statistics Office is actively engaged in collecting data that significantly contributes to the formulation of citizen-centric policies by both Central and State Governments.

He noted that to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the NSS, NSO will be organizing a number of activities over the year, including planting of saplings, displaying banners and standees in public places, distributing pamphlets, and hosting community awareness and seminar programs, all aimed at celebrating its rich history and ongoing initiatives.

He expressed gratitude to the citizens, especially residents of Assam, for their continued support in the data collection process.

He urged the public to provide accurate information/data to NSO field staff in the coming years, which will assist the Central and State Governments in developing citizen-centric policies, contributing to the vision of "Viksit Bharat 2047" a developed India that is inclusive and prosperous for all.

## KAAC EM reviews construction works

**HT Correspondent**

**HAMREN, March 28:** The Executive Member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), irrigation, P&RD, and Excise, Lun Sing Teron, visited the ongoing construction of the CC lining from the Telehor River to Rongkuru and the boulder pitching work at Dera River, Telehor.

He was accompanied by the Executive Engineer, Baithalangso Division, Darsing Ronghang; SDO, Hamren, Longdili Terang; Contractor, Babusing Engthi, and other officials.

He inspected the flood-affected CC lining at Deramukh during the visit under the Bithung Rengthama Constituency. Seeing the extent of the damage firsthand, he directed the engineers to speed up the reconstruction work. Emphasizing the urgency, he stressed that swift action is needed to prevent further erosion and ensure public safety.

He reaffirmed the government's commitment to improving infrastructure and tackling the effects of natural disasters. The progress of the work will be closely monitored to ensure timely completion.

## Jatiya Nari Bahini protests irregularity in Arunudoi 3.0 Scheme

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, March 28:** Jatiya Nari Bahini, the women wing of the Rajior Dal here on Friday took to streets for a demonstration in Sivasagar Doulmukh Chariali against alleged irregularities in Arunudoi 3.0 beneficiary selection in Sivasagar LAC. The activists gheraoed the Sivasagar Municipality Board office also and raised slogan against the BJP government.

The Rajior Dal activists alleged that the BJP leaders selected the beneficiaries whimsically depriving the genuine ones in Kheluwa and Gaurisagar Block.

## Deshbhakti Samaroh held to remember King Prithu

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, March 28:** A patriotic event called "Deshbhakti Samaroh" was held on Friday at Rampur pokikua Tiniali, Jagun in Margherita in Tinsukia to commemorate the birth anniversary of King Prithu.

The event was initiated by Seemanta Chetana Mancha, Purvottar Margherita Sahayak Nagar Samiti with the assistance of Jagun residents.

Seemanta Chetana Mancha is a Border based umbrella organisation of RSS formed in the year 1985 in Rajasthan and in 2006 Seemanta Chetana Mancha, Purvottar was formed at Northeast.

The event began with the lighting of lamps and featured patriotic songs performed by children.

Purnima Upadhyay President of the Organising Committee presided over the meeting where notable attendees such as Ashim Das, Secretary of Seemanta Chetana Manch, Purvottar Margherita Sahayak Nagar Samiti, Bisa Mung Dang Singpho and Bisa Tang Singpho grandson of Freedom fighter Bom Singpho, Lila Nath Sharma Gautam, Bodh Prakash Upadhyay former Zilla Parishad Member, Kasto Sema vice president of All Assam Sema Naga Council and village pradhan of Longtong village, Ankur Gogoi Honorary Member, Northeast Committee, Seemanta Chetana Mancha Purvottar and In-charge of Nagaland State, Henry James member, Assam State Minority Development Board government of Assam, many senior RSS leaders and local residents of this area attended.

The event also honoured the family member of late freedom fighter Bom Singpho and Leela Dhar Gogoi



as both the freedom fighters of Margherita region were honoured posthumously for their sincere dedication, love and sacrifice towards greater development of Assam.

Bodh Prakash Upadhyay said that many unsung heroes and kings of our country have been forgotten due to wrong information provided by historians and academics, which now time has come to honour those Kings and heroes who have sacrifice their lives for our country.

King Prithu also known as Jalpeswara used to be the King of Kamarupa kingdom in Northeastern India, as King Prithu is seen as a benevolent ruler who care for his people and ensured there well being, established a system of good governance during his period said Bodh Prakash Upadhyay.

The attendees discussed King Prithu sacrifice and patriotism, emphasizing the importance of national loyalty as the event aimed to promote patriotism and national pride among the people.

## Nagaon celebrates district day with enthusiasm

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, March 28:** Nagaon district, which has a rich history, was established on March 27, 1833 commemorated recently with a day long programme here. The district administration organised various programmes on Thursday.

The day began with cleanliness drives and tree plantation programmes in all government offices. A cleanliness drive and tree plantation programmes were also organised at the District Commissioner's office. District Commissioner Narendra Kumar Shah, Additional District Commissioner Debahuti Bora, and other officials participated in the programme.

A quiz competition, "Amar Nagaon," was organized at the district library auditorium. Six teams were selected for the final round. Dilip Kumar Sarma and Alak Jyoti Bora won the first prize, while Anuj Sankar Debnath and Nayan Mani Hira secured the second prize. Bishwa Jyoti Bora and Amiya Kumar Bora won the third prize.

A photography exhibition and competition were also organized. Mahananda Borgohain from Dhing won the first prize, while Nipjyoti Bora from Nagaon secured the second prize. In the evening, a cultural programme was organized at the district library auditorium. The programme included songs, dances, and two short plays on road safety and drug abuse. The programme also honored individuals and organizations that have brought glory to the district through their achievements.

The cultural programme was inaugurated by Krishna Moni Nath in presence of District Commissioner Narendra Kumar Shah, Additional District Commissioner Debahuti Bora and other officials.

## Biswanath district admin expedites farmers' registration process

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 28:** Ashim Borgohain, ADC (Agri), Biswanath and district Agricultural Officer Baneswar Bey visited different camps under six Gaon Panchayats under Ghahgaon and Pabhoi ADO circles to enhance the "Farmers Registration" process ongoing in the district on Thursday and Friday respectively.

They interacted with local farmers, enquiring about challenges faced during registration. The duo visited the camps under Tokoubari, Karbil, Misamari, Tetonbari, Amjaroni, and Bamunipathar Gaon Panchayats.

The ADC (Agri) Ashim Borgohain addressed the queries and concerns raised by Gaon Pradhans, local farmers, and village-level

workers regarding farmers' registration process with a strict instruction to the VLEs and GRs to render their duties, to register all the farmers having their own land documents. He also instructed the Gaon Pradhans and Krishi Sakhi's to inform all the PM Kisan as well as non PM Kisan farmers to visit the nearest camps with the required land documents.

The DAO Baneswar Bey emphasized the importance of farmers' registration, highlighting its benefits, including access to government schemes, subsidies, and other agricultural benefits.

During the visit, they were accompanied by ADOs Aditi Baruah and Rituraj Deb, BTM Krishna Dihingia, Media Expert Kristi Borah & AAI, AEA from concerned circles.

## Contributions of armed forces to national unity highlighted at LGB Girls' College

### 'Rashtriya Kritagyata Evam Jagrookta' Yojna sensitisation

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, March 28:** In a remarkable effort to instil patriotism and civic responsibility among the youth, the prestigious Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Girls College, Tezpur, hosted the Rashtriya Kritagyata Evam Jagrookta Yojna on Thursday. Spearheaded by the Governor of Assam, this initiative underscores the pivotal role of India's armed forces in safeguarding national integrity and sovereignty.

The event featured insightful sessions led by distinguished veterans, including Lt Col AK Nandi (Retd), Sub Major Probul Gogoi (Retd), and JWO Kulendra Sarmah (Retd), who shared their invaluable experiences and pro-



found dedication to the nation. Over 220 students from Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Girls College, Tezpur, and Tezpur Girls' High School actively participated in this inspirational program.

The program commenced with a comprehensive briefing on the

Rashtriya Kritagyata Evam Jagrookta Yojna, emphasizing the indispensable contributions of the armed forces to national unity. The initiative also aligned with the grand vision of "Viksit Bharat by 2047," inspiring students to embrace their civic duties by respecting and supporting the armed

forces. Veterans passionately conveyed the honour and responsibility of serving the nation through the armed forces, urging the youth to channel their energy into community welfare and innovative services that uplift the underprivileged. The programme fostered a profound sense of pride and commitment to nation-building among the attendees.

The sensitization program reaffirms Assam's commitment to cultivating a generation of patriotic and socially responsible citizens. As the echoes of the event linger, the youth of Tezpur are set to embark on journeys of empowerment and service, driving India towards a brighter and united future.







# Meteorology as a Career Choice

By: Ranjan K Baruah

Studying weather patterns is very important as it helps us in many ways. One of the terms which is associated with weather is meteorology. It is the science of weather and is essentially an interdisciplinary science because the atmosphere, land and ocean constitute an integrated system. The three basic aspects of meteorology are observation, understanding and prediction of weather. There are many kinds of routine meteorological observations. Some of them are made with simple instruments like the thermometer for measuring temperature or the anemometer for recording wind speed.

Every 23 March, the World Meteorological Organization commemorates the coming into force of the Convention establishing the World Meteorological Organization on 23 March 1950. It showcases the essential contribution of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services to the safety and well-being of society and is celebrated with activities around the world. The themes chosen for World Meteorological Day 2025 was "Closing the early warning gap together".

The beginnings of meteorology in India can be traced to ancient times. Early philosophical writings of the 3000 B.C. era, such as the Upanishadas, contain serious discussion about the processes of cloud formation and rain and the seasonal cycles caused by the movement of earth round the sun. Varahamihira's classical work, the Brihat-samhita, written around 500 A.D., provides clear evidence that a deep knowledge of atmospheric processes existed even in those times. It was understood that rains come from the sun (Adityat Jayate Vrishti) and that good rainfall in the

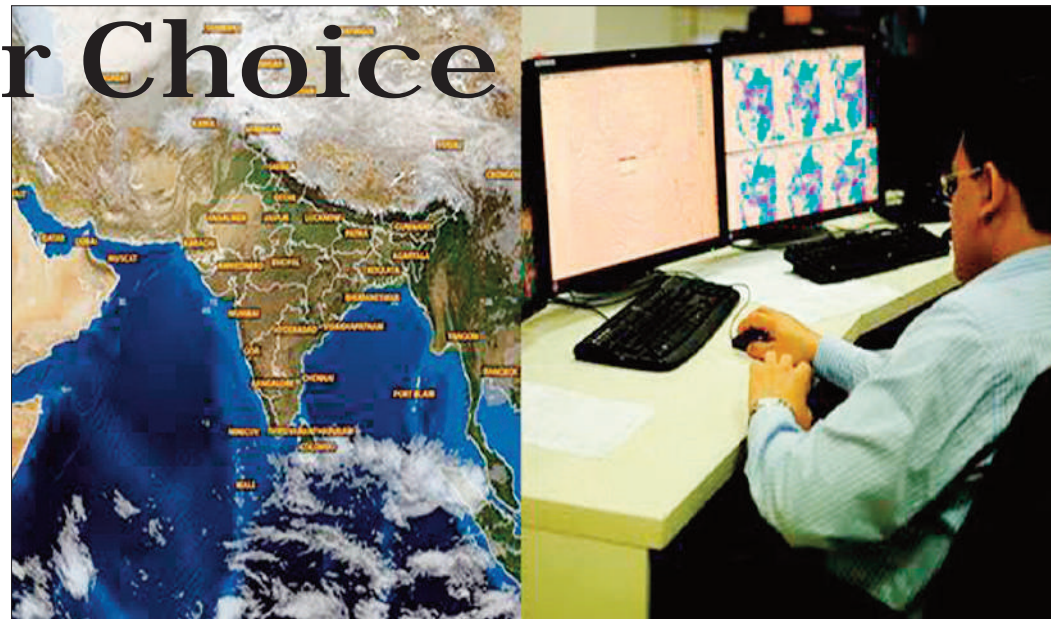
rainy season was the key to bountiful agriculture and food for the people. Kautilya's Arthashastra contains records of scientific measurements of rainfall and its application to the country's revenue and relief work. Kalidasa in his epic, 'Meghdoot', written around the seventh century, even mentions the date of onset of the monsoon over central India and traces the path of the monsoon clouds.

A meteorology career involves studying and forecasting weather patterns, with opportunities ranging from weather forecasting to climate research and even media weather casting. Meteorologists can work in government, academia, the private sector, or broadcast media. Meteorologists are engaged in weather forecasting which predicts short-term and long-term weather conditions; Climate Research which studies long-term weather patterns and climate change; data analysis which analyzes weather data

from various sources, including satellites and weather stations; communication which presents weather information to the public through media or reports.

There are also specialized roles which include forensic meteorology (reconstructing weather conditions for investigations), operational meteorology (providing weather forecasts for specific industries), and more. Courses include graduation and post graduation level in meteorology or atmospheric sciences, etc. Designation includes atmospheric scientist, climatologist, weather forecaster, weather analyst, environmental scientist, climate change analyst, remote sensing scientist, air quality specialist, etc.

Apart from qualifications like a masters degree in physics or mathematics one must have strong mathematical skills as meteorology is a mathematically-intensive field, requiring a strong understanding of calculus, statistics, and other mathematical concepts. Other important attributes include physics knowledge, computer skills, analytical skills, communication skills, etc. Meteorologists often need to communicate their findings to the public, so strong communication skills are important.



Indian Institute Tropical Meteorology (IITM) is recognized as a national centre for basic and applied research in Meteorology and Atmospheric Sciences. The Institute has state-of-the-art world-class infrastructure and facilities. IITM is working dedicatedly on these subjects with emphasis on Tropical Meteorology and Monsoon Studies. (The writer is a Career Mentor and Skill Trainer and currently the Advisor, Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department of Bodoland Territorial Council and can be reached at bkranjjan@gmail.com or 8473943734)

## CISF Recruitment 2025 – 1161 Constable/ Tradesmen Vacancy, Online Apply

Last Date: 03/04/2025

Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has released an advertisement for the recruitment of 1161 Constable/ Tradesmen Vacancy in Central Industrial Security Force. Interested and eligible candidates can apply online.

Name of post: Constable/ Tradesmen  
No of posts: 1161 posts

Post-wise vacancy:

# Const. / Cook: 493  
# Const. / Cobbler: 09  
# Const. / Tailor: 23  
# Const. / Barber: 199  
# Const. / Washer-man: 262  
# Const. / Sweeper: 152  
# Const. / Painter: 02  
# Const. / Carpenter: 09  
# Const. / Electrician: 04  
# Const. / Mali: 04  
# Const. / Welder: 01  
# Const. / Charge Mech.: 01  
# Const. / MP Attendant: 02

Pay Scale: Pay Level-3 (21,700-69,100)

Eligibility Criteria of CISF Recruitment  
Nationality: Candidate must be a citizen of India.

Educational Qualification:

# Matriculation or its equivalent from a recognised board for skilled trades on or before closing date of receipt of online Application Form. (i.e. Barber, Boot Maker/Cobbler, Tailor, Cook, Carpenter, Mali, Painter, Charge Mechanic, Washer Man, Welder, Electrician and Motor Pump Attendant). Industrial Training Institute trained personnel will be preferred.

# Matriculation or its equivalent from a recognised board for unskilled trades on or before closing date of receipt of online Application Form (i.e. Sweeper).

Age Limit: Candidate age must be between 18 to 23 years as on 01/08/2025. Candidates should not have been born earlier than 02/08/2002 and later than 01/08/2007.

Age Relaxation: Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below:

# SC/ST: 5 years  
# OBC: 3 years

Application Fee:

# Others: Rs 100  
# SC/ST/ ESM and Female: Nil  
# Payment mode: Net Banking, Credit or Debit or RuPay cards, and UPI or through cash in SBI Branches by generating SBI Challan .

How to Apply for CISF Recruitment ?  
Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for CISF Recruitment by visiting at official portal of CISF. They may follow below mentioned steps .

# Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .  
# Click on Online Application Form link .  
# A new webpage will be opened and register yourself.  
# Again click on Online Application Form and Log-in.  
# Enter all your personal and educational details as required .  
# Upload your passport sized photograph and signature and other required documents.  
# At the end pay the application fee as per your category and click on submit button .  
# Don't forget to take a print of submitted application form .

Important Dates of CISF Constable Recruitment 2025

# Starting date of submission of online application: 5th March 2025  
# Last date of submission of online application: 3rd April 2025

## MSSV Nagaon Recruitment 2025 – 2 Grade III & Grade IV Posts

Last Date: 03/04/2025

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya (MSSV), Nagaon has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 2 Grade III & Grade IV Posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

1. Grade III  
No of posts: 1  
Pay: As per Pay Matrix, MSSV  
Educational Qualification:  
a) Candidate must have Bachelor Degree from any recognized University.  
b) Candidate must have working knowledge of an educational institution as Grade III Employee.  
c) Candidate must have One year Diploma in Computer Application.

2. Grade IV (MTS)  
No of posts: 1  
Pay: As per Pay Matrix, MSSV  
Educational Qualification:  
a) Candidate must have passed HSLC or an equivalent examination from any recognized institution.  
b) Candidate must have working knowledge of an educational institution as Grade IV Employee.  
Place of posting: MSSV, Dhubri Unit, Dumardaha Pt IV, Dhubri, Assam - 783331

Other Criteria of MSSV Nagaon Recruitment

Citizenship: The Applicant must be a citizen of India.

Medical Fitness: He/she must be medically fit both in mind and in body-a certificate duly signed by the District Medical Officer, Nagaon District or any competent Registered Medical Officer, approved by the Vice-Chancellor, shall have to be produced.

Character Certificate: A certificate about good character from the Head of the Institution last attended or served shall accompany the application.

Application Fee of MSSV Nagaon Recruitment

₹ 500.00 (Rupees five hundred) only to be deposited in the Accounts Branch of the University. However, the fee can be deposited by demand draft in favour of "REGISTRAR, MAHAPURUSHA SRIMANTA SANKARADEVA VISWAVIDYALAYA" payable at "State Bank of India, Nagaon Main Branch (IFSC: SBIN0000146)".

How to Apply for MSSV Nagaon Recruitment ?

# Prescribed application form (pdf/word) may be downloaded from the University website i.e., www.mssv.ac.in.

# Completed application in prescribed form along with necessary enclosures must reach the following address latest by 3rd April, 2025.

Dean,

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya,  
Dumardaha Pt IV, Dhubri, Assam - 783331.

# The name of post must be written on the envelop of the application.

# Date of Interview: 7th April, 2025 on 1.30 P.M. onwards at MSSV, Dhubri Unit.

## BTC Kokrajhar Recruitment 2025 – 420 VCDC Secretary Posts

Last Date: 07/04/2025

The Central Selection Board (CSB), Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), Kokrajhar, Assam has released an advertisement for the recruitment of 420 Secretary posts for Village Council Development Committees (VCDC) under the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, BTC. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these posts.

Name of post: Secretary for Village Council Development Committees (VCDC)

No of posts: 420 posts

Name of department: P&RD Department, BTC

Resident-ship: Candidates must be permanent resident of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Assam.

Age Limit: Age of the candidates must be between 18 and 40 years as on 1st January 2025. The upper age limit is relaxable as per existing government norms.

Employment Exchange Registration: Applicants must be registered with any of the Employment Exchange of the state of Assam.

Educational Qualification: Candidates must be Graduate in any discipline or equivalent qualification from a recognized university along with a one-year diploma in computer proficiency.

Application Fee: Category-wise application fee is as under.

Category	Fee (in Rs.)
General	₹350
OBC/MOBC	₹350
SC/ST	₹250

Important Dates of BTR Recruitment 2025

# Starting date of application submission: 24th March 2025  
# Last date of application submission: 7th April 2025

## DEE LP UP Teacher Recruitment 2025 – Online Apply for 4500 Posts

Last date: 31/03/2025

Directorate of Elementary Education (DEE), Assam has released two employment notifications for the recruitment of 4500 posts of Assistant Teacher in Lower and Upper Primary Schools of Assam under the Directorate of Elementary Education, Assam. Candidates who are Indian Citizens as well as permanent residents of Assam and qualified in the Assam Teacher Eligibility Test (ATET) or the Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET) may apply online for these posts.

Name of post: Assistant Teacher (LP) & Assistant Teacher (UP)

No of posts: 4500 posts

# Lower Primary: 2900 posts  
# Upper Primary: 1600 posts

Name of department: Directorate of Elementary Education (DEE), Assam

Scale of pay: Pay Band - 2 (PB-2) @ ₹ 14,000/- to ₹ 70,000/- plus Grade Pay and other allowances as admissible as per "The Assam Service (Revision of Pay) (Amendment) Rules, 2019".

District-wise vacancy: The district-wise, medium-wise and category-wise break-up of vacancies showing the reservation for OBC/MOBC/SC/ST(P)/ST(H)/PwD/Women/Ex-Servicemen etc. will be notified & updated in due course of time.

Helpline No & Email: To be updated

Eligibility Criteria for DEE LP UP Teacher Recruitment

Nationality: Candidates must be a Permanent Resident of Assam .

Age Limit: A candidate must not be less than 18 years of age and not more than 40 years as on 1st January 2025.

Age Relaxation: The Category-wise age relaxation for different categories are as mentioned below:

# Ex-Servicemen: 2 years  
# OBC/ MOBC: 3 years  
# SC/ST(P)/ST(H): 5 years  
# Persons with Disability (PwD): 10 years

Small Family Norms: No person having more than two living children on or after 01/01/2021 from a single or multiple partners shall be eligible for appointment as per the Govt. policy on Small Family Norms .

Medium of Instruction: Either the Language-I or the Language-II of both ATET and

CTET candidates shall match the medium of instruction of the school, wherein the candidate wishes to apply

ATET/ CTET Qualification: The candidates who have passed ATET/ CTET for Lower Primary / Upper Primary will be eligible for applying.

Educational Qualification: Post-wise educational qualifications for each posts are as mentioned below .

Assistant Teacher (LP)

Qualification:

# Higher Secondary/ Senior Secondary (or its equivalent) with at least 50% marks.  
# 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education (by whatever name known).  
# Assam TET or Central TET for Lower Primary School.

Assistant Teacher (UP)

Qualification:

# Higher Secondary/ Senior Secondary (or its equivalent).  
# Graduate from the UGC-recognized University.  
# 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education (by whatever name known) OR Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Elementary Education.  
# Assam TET or Central TET for Upper Primary School.

Science Teacher (UP)

Qualification:

# Higher Secondary/ Senior Secondary (or its equivalent).  
# B.Sc. from the UGC recognized University.  
# 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education (by whatever name known) OR Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Elementary Education.  
# Assam TET or Central TET for Upper Primary School.

Hindi Teacher (UP)

Qualification:

# Higher Secondary/ Senior Secondary (or its equivalent).  
# Graduate with Hindi as one of the subjects from the UGC-recognized University.  
# 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education (by whatever name known) OR Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Elementary Education.  
# Assam TET or Central TET for Upper Primary School.

How to Apply for DEE Assam Teacher Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy by visiting Official DEE Assam Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply for Assam TET Teacher Vacancy.

# Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .

# Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process by clicking "Register Now".

# In the next stage, fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.

# At the end, submit the form.

# After submitting the online application, the candidates will get a Unique Number against the submitted application and will keep the printout of the unique Number for all future references.

Candidates should be cautious while submitting the online application as once the online application is submitted against a particular Roll Number of ATET/CTET examination, they will not be allowed to submit the online application for second time.

Documents To be Uploaded with DEE Teacher Online Application Form  
Documents as mentioned below should be coloured scanned and upload while applying online.

# Passport Size Photograph.

# HSLC Admit Card.

# HSSLC Mark-sheet and Certificate.

# Graduation Mark-sheet and Certificate.

# Any other Mark-sheet and Certificate of higher education.

# DEEd/ BED Marksheet (1st Year & 2nd Year) and Certificate.

# Caste Certificate (in case of SC/ ST(P)/ST(H)/OBC/MOBC).

# Document in support of Permanent Resident of Assam.

# Certificate and Mark sheet of ATET/CTET for UPS.

# Candidates with disabilities will have to enclose certificates of disabilities issued by Govt. authority.

# Certificate of Ex-servicemen issued by the Director, Sainik Welfare Board.

# Scanned Signature.

Important Dates of DEE TET Teacher Recruitment 2025

# Starting date of submission of online application: 15th February 2025, 10 AM  
# Last date of submission of online application: 31st March, 2025, 05 PM.

## Oil Valley School Digboi Recruitment – 3 Faculty Posts

Last Date: 31/03/2025

Oil Valley School, Digboi has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 3 Faculty posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

1. Physical Education Teacher  
No of posts: 02, Male / Female

Educational Qualification: M.Ped / B. Ped

2. PGT Sociology  
No of posts: 01

Educational Qualification: M.A in Sociology with B.Ed

Buy-Books-Online

Pay: Salary is negotiable and will not be constraint for deserving candidate. Residential teachers are provided with free accommodation and fooding.

How to Apply for Oil Valley School Digboi Recruitment ?

Interested candidates can mail their resume to oilvalleyschool@rediffmail.com or sent by post to Oil Valley School, Bogapani Colony, Digboi, Dist- Tinsukia, Assam- 786171 within 15 days from the date of publication of the advertisement.

Preference will be given to candidates willing to stay at school campus. Only Selected candidates will be call for interview.

About Oil Valley School, Digboi

Oil Valley School, a CBSE Affiliated School is situated at Bogapani Colony, Digboi, Dist- Tinsukia, Assam. It is a Day cum Residential Sr. Secondary School.



'Zelenskyy, whose term expired last year, lacks the legitimacy to sign a peace deal'

## Putin suggests putting Ukraine under UN-sponsored external governance, boasts battlefield gains

**MOSCOW, March 28:** Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed on Friday to put Ukraine under external governance under the UN aegis as part of efforts to reach a peaceful settlement, a blustery statement that reflected the Kremlin leader's determination to achieve his war goals.

Speaking to the crew of a Russian nuclear submarine in televised remarks broadcast early Friday, Putin reaffirmed his claim that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose term expired last year, lacks the legitimacy to sign a peace deal.

Under Ukraine's constitution it is illegal for the country to hold national elections while the country is under martial law.

Putin claimed that any agreement that is signed with the current Ukrainian government could be challenged by its successors and said new elections could be held under external governance.

"Under the auspices of the United Nations, with the United States, even with European countries, and, of course, with our partners and friends, we could discuss the possibility of introduction of

temporary governance in Ukraine," Putin said, adding that it would allow the country to "hold democratic elections, to bring to power a viable government that enjoys the trust of the people, and then begin negotiations with them on a peace treaty".

He added that such external governance is just "one of the options", but didn't elaborate.

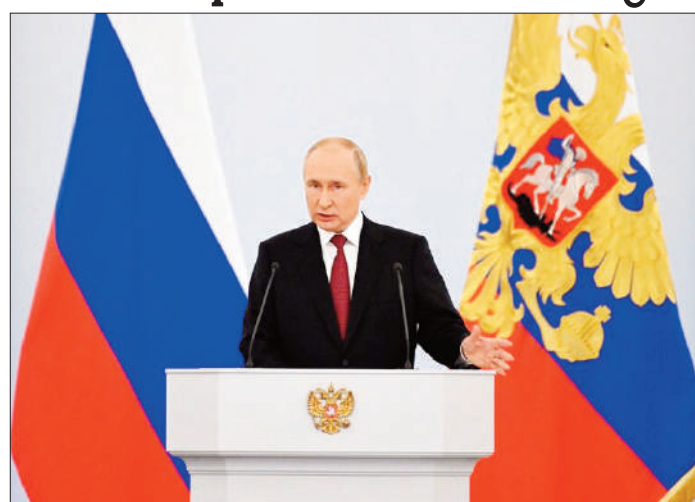
Putin's remarks came hours after the conclusion of a summit hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron that considered plans to deploy troops to Ukraine to cement an eventual peace deal.

Macron said "several" other nations want to be part of the force alongside France and Britain.

Russia has warned it wouldn't accept any troops from NATO members as part of a prospective peacekeeping force.

Macron and other participants of the Paris summit on Thursday accused Russia of only pretending to want a negotiated settlement.

"They are playing games and they're playing for time," said UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer. "We can't let them drag this out while they continue prosecuting their il-



legal invasion."

Russia and Ukraine have agreed to a tentative US-brokered deal to pause strikes on energy infrastructure, but quickly accused each other of violations, underscoring the challenges to negotiating a broader peace.

Russia launched 163 strike and decoy drones at Ukraine late Thursday, according to the Ukrainian air force, which said that 89 of them were downed and 51 more

jammed.

The drones damaged multiple residential buildings and injured a 19-year-old in Zaporizhzhia, regional head Ivan Fedorov said. In Poltava, drones damaged warehouses, administrative building, and a high-voltage transformer, according to regional head Volodymyr Kosh.

Damage to buildings and infrastructure facilities was also reported by the authorities in the

Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipro and Mykolaiv regions.

The Russian Defence Ministry said that Ukrainian forces struck a gas metering station in Sudzha in the Kursk region with US-made HIMARS rockets, completely destroying the facility.

It said another Ukrainian strike on an energy facility in Russia's Bryansk region led to a power cut-off, and added that air defences downed 19 Ukrainian drones that attempted to strike an oil refinery in Saratov.

The ministry charged that the continuing strikes show that Kyiv's pledge of adherence to a US-proposed halt on strikes on energy facilities was just "another ruse by Zelenskyy to prevent the collapse of Ukrainian defences and to restore military potential with the help of European allies".

While Ukraine has agreed to a full, 30-day ceasefire that Trump has proposed, Putin has made a complete ceasefire conditional on a halt of arms supplies to Kyiv and a suspension of Ukraine's military mobilisation — demands rejected by Ukraine and its Western allies.

Putin declared in overnight re-

marks that the Russian military has "gained steam" and is now pushing offensives all along the front line.

"Our troops, our guys are moving forward and liberate one territory after another," he said. "Our troops are holding strategic initiative all along the line of contact."

He noted that Russia is open to a peaceful settlement, but emphasised the need to "remove root causes that led to the current situation".

"We certainly need to ensure Russia's security for a long historic perspective," he said.

Putin has demanded that Kyiv withdraw its forces from the four regions Moscow has partially seized. He also wants Ukraine to renounce joining NATO, sharply cut its army and legally protect Russian language and culture to keep the country in Moscow's orbit.

Russian officials also have said that any prospective peace deal should involve unfreezing Russian assets in the West and lifting other US and European Union sanctions. The Trump administration has said it would consider potential sanctions relief. (AP)

## Pakistan repays loan worth USD 1 billion to Chinese bank

**ISLAMABAD, March 28:** Pakistan has repaid a USD 1 billion commercial loan to the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) with the understanding of getting it refinanced soon, according to a media report.

This repayment has temporarily pulled down the country's already thin foreign exchange reserves to a six-month low of USD 10.6 billion, the report added. The loan was originally provided by ICBC two years ago at a floating interest rate of approximately 7.5 per cent, reported The Express Tribune. The repayment was made in two equal tranches this month, according to Pakistani authorities.

Additionally, another loan tranche of USD 300 million by the ICBC will mature by mid-April, which the Pakistan government plans to retire in the same month, sources said. Due to the second USD 500 million repayment in the third week of March, the central bank's reserves dropped to USD 10.6 billion, marking the lowest level in six months.

The first USD 500 million tranche had been paid in early March and the central bank covered the gap by purchasing dollars from the market and receiving some foreign inflows.

The central bank governor previously stated that USD 9 billion had been purchased from the market in 2024 to build foreign exchange reserves. Without these purchases, reserves would have been barely USD 2 billion, even with support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) program.

The Finance Ministry was hopeful that ICBC would refinance the facility. They said that discussions have already begun but have not yet reached the point of interest rate determination.

Pakistan is heavily dependent on China for financial support, with Beijing consistently rolling over USD 4 billion in cash deposits, USD 6.5 billion in commercial loans and a USD 4.3 billion trade financing facility.

Furthermore, an additional USD 2.7 billion in Chinese commercial loans is set to mature between April and June this year.

A USD 2.1 billion syndicate financing loan by three Chinese commercial banks is maturing in June. Separately, the Bank of China's USD 300 million loan will also mature in the same month, which Pakistan has to get refinanced to retain the reserves at their critical minimum levels. (PTI)

## Lebanon, Syria sign agreement on border demarcation, easing tensions

**BEIRUT, March 28:** Lebanon and Syria have signed an agreement on border demarcation and to boost coordination between the two countries regarding security along their tense frontier, the Saudi Press Agency reported Friday.

The deal signed by the Lebanese and Syrian defense ministers in Saudi Arabia late Thursday came after clashes in border areas earlier this month left several people dead and dozens wounded on both sides.

The plan for border demarcation also comes after the ouster in early December of the 54-year Assad family rule in Syria, leading to tensions along the frontier where Lebanon's Hezbollah group was active on both sides of the border during Syria's 14-year conflict.

Hezbollah had been fighting in Syria alongside Assad during the conflict that has left half a million people dead.

The deal also comes after the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war that weakened the Iran-backed group in Lebanon.

Lebanese Defence Minister Michel Menassa was scheduled to visit the Syrian capital, Damascus, on Wednesday but the visit was canceled. Menassa and his Syrian counterpart, Murhaf Abu Qasra, later flew to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia on Thursday, where they held talks that were attended by Saudi Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman

and signed the deal.

The Saudi agency said the Lebanese and Syrian ministers signed an agreement in which both sides agreed on the "strategic importance to demarcate their border" and the formation of legal and specialised committees in different fields.

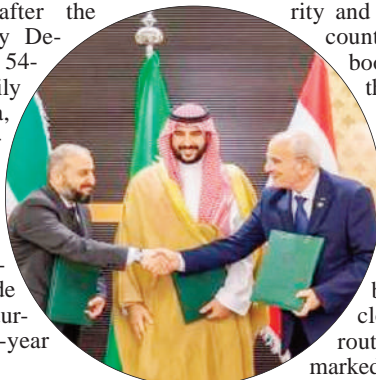
It added that both countries agreed to "activate coordination mechanisms" to deal with any security challenges along the border.

It said Saudi Arabia backs security and stability in both countries and that boosts security in the region.

Over the past weeks, authorities on both sides of the nearly 400-kilometer (250-mile) long border have been closing smuggling routes along the unmarked frontier.

Earlier this month, intense clashes broke out along the border after Syria's interim government accused militants from Lebanon's Hezbollah group of crossing into Syria, abducting three soldiers and killing them on Lebanese soil. The Lebanese government said the three killed were smugglers.

Hezbollah denied involvement, and some other reports pointed to local clans in the border region that are not directly affiliated with Hezbollah but have been involved in cross-border smuggling. Authorities in Beirut at the time said seven Lebanese citizens were killed and 52 were wounded. (AP)



## Xi Jinping makes strong push for greater foreign investment as economy continues to lag

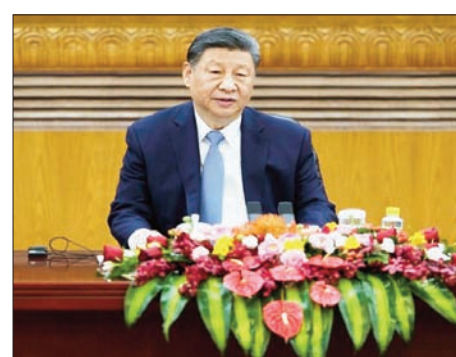
**BEIJING, March 28:** In an address to major global business leaders, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged foreign investors to have faith in China's business prospects, the latest move to revive the world's second-largest economy that has been dragged down by a property bust and a loss of momentum.

"China has always been and will certainly be an ideal, safe and promising investment destination for foreign investors," Xi told executives, including Akio Toyoda, chairman of Toyota, Lee Jae-yong, chairman of Samsung Electronics and Stephen Allen Schwarzman, CEO of investment firm Blackstone.

China remains a major exporter of products to countries around the world and boasts a domestic market of 1.4 billion people. However, massive overbuilding in the property sector has tied up trillions of dollars in capital, sapping business and consumer confidence and depriving the economy of its past vitality, while a tariff war unleashed by the US is compounding those problems.

Private businesses, which provide a large share of growth and jobs in the country's state-dominated economy, have borne much of the burden after years of regulatory crackdowns have shaken the confidence of entrepreneurs and other investors.

China's unprecedentedly tough response to the Covid-19 outbreak also shut down business for much of three years and some sectors of the economy have yet to recover, particularly where



global supply chains are involved.

Yet, Xi, considered something a sceptic when it comes to inviting in overseas businesses, said foreign investors could have confidence that "the door of opening up will only open wider and wider. The policy of utilising foreign investment has not changed and will not change," he said.

"China contains huge investment and consumption potential," he added.

China has set an economic growth target of about 5 per cent for this year, the same as last year and a level that analysts said would be difficult to achieve.

The government has said it would attempt to stimulate the roughly USD 20 trillion economy by borrowing more money for a slew of initiatives, such as giving 300 billion yuan (USD 41.3 billion) in rebates to consumers who trade

in old cars and appliances for new ones. But much of the borrowing will go to supporting the housing market and local governments weighed down by debt.

What is clear is that a trade war with the United States has left the outlook for the coming months uncertain. Trump has raised tariffs on imports from China twice since taking office in January, leaving them at 20 per cent across-the-board. China has shown no sign of backing down, retaliating with tariffs on US goods.

Xi did not mention the tariffs directly, but appeared to be referring to the importance of stable trade terms by saying: "Blowing out other people's lights will not make your own lights brighter. Blocking other people's paths will eventually block your own paths."

For now, however, China is seeking to portray itself as "an ideal, safe and promising investment destination for foreign investors," he said.

"Going with China is going with opportunities. Believing in China is believing in tomorrow. Investing in China is investing in the future," the president, who has made himself leader for life and also heads the ruling Communist Party, said.

Others in attendance Friday included Amin H Nasser, president of Saudi Aramco; Sherard Louis Cowper-Coles, the chair of China-Britain Business Council; Oliver Zipse, BMW CEO and Ray Dalio, chief investment officer of hedge fund Bridgewater Associates. (AP)

## Vance and wife to tour US military post in Greenland

**NUUK, March 28:** US Vice President JD Vance and his wife are due to visit an American military base in Greenland on Friday in a trip that was scaled back after an uproar by Greenlanders and Danes who were irked that the original itinerary was planned without consulting them. The couple's revised trip to the semi-autonomous Danish territory comes as relations between the US and the Nordic country have soured after U.S. President Donald Trump repeatedly suggested that the United States should in some form control the mineral-rich territory of Denmark — a traditional US ally and NATO member. Friday's one-day visit to the US Space Force outpost at Pituffik, on the northwest coast of Greenland, has removed the risk of violating potential diplomatic taboos by sending a delegation to another country without an official invitation. It will also reduce the likelihood that the Vance and his wife will cross paths with residents angered by Trump's annexation announcements. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Tuesday that the visit, which was originally set for three days, created "unacceptable pressure." On Thursday she was cited by Danish public broadcaster DR as saying: "We really want to work with the Americans on defence and security in the kingdom. But Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders." (AP)

## Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Yunus meets Chinese President Xi Jinping

**BEIJING, March 28:** Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus here on Friday, official media reported.

Yunus, on a four-day visit to China, took part in the country's Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in Hainan after his arrival there on Wednesday. He arrived in Beijing on Thursday and was received at the airport by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong. Gearing up for his meeting with Xi, Yunus called on China on Thursday to reduce interest rates for Chinese loans and waive commitment fees on Chinese-funded projects. In his meeting with the Chinese Executive Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference, Yunus sought Chinese support in an array of development projects, Bangladesh media reports said.

He also called for a reduction of interest rates for Chi-

nese loans from three per cent to 1-2 per cent to Bangladesh and sought a waiver of commitment fees on the Chinese-funded projects in Bangladesh.

China is Bangladesh's fourth-largest lender after Japan, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, with total loans disbursed since 1975 coming to USD 7.5 billion, according to a report in the Daily Star newspaper of Bangladesh.

In his meeting with Ding, Yunus sought Beijing's help in facilitating the relocation of the Chinese manufacturing industries, including ready-made garments, electric vehicles, light machinery, high-tech electronics, chip manufacturing and the solar panel industry.

On the sidelines of the forum, Yunus also met Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk, who expressed Moscow's interest in exporting more wheat and fertiliser to Bangladesh. (PTI)

## Household air pollution takes centre-stage at WHO conference in Colombia

**CARTAGENA (COLOMBIA), March 28:** Household air pollution from biomass fuels is the lowest-hanging fruit for India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), and it is already included as a sectoral priority, said Kalpana Balakrishnan, Director of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health.

At the World Health Organisation's second conference on air pollution and health in Cartagena, Colombia, household air pollution has taken centre stage. Balakrishnan, one of the keynote speakers at the event, said that India is admirably placed in terms of infrastructure to address this issue.

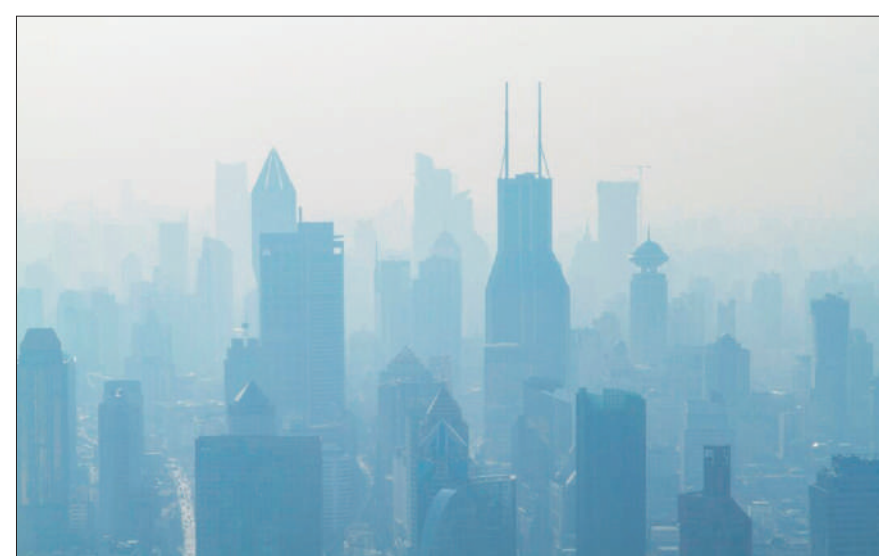
"For a modest additional investment, we can achieve significant reductions in ambient PM2.5 levels, in addition to reducing residential PM2.5 exposures that the rural population experiences," she said.

Speaking to PTI, Balakrishnan further emphasised that India possesses all the necessary elements to tackle household air pollution and could do so in ways that are cost-effective and inclusive of all possible stakeholders.

"We can demonstrate to the world that we can achieve what any other country can -- and do it even better," she said.

In January 2024, an independent think tank in India reported that 41 per cent of the Indian population still relies on wood, cow dung, or other biomass as cooking fuel. This practice cumulatively emits around 340 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the environment annually, accounting for approximately 13 per cent of India's greenhouse gas emissions.

Balakrishnan also highlighted that the burden of household pollution is twofold:



exposure occurs indoors when cooking with solid fuels, and emissions are also released into the outdoor environment.

She stressed that the transition to clean cooking energy is crucial to protect poor and marginalised communities who cannot afford the shift.

"Solid cooking fuels are the primary contributors to ambient PM2.5. While we have technological solutions like LPG and electricity, we still need to find creative economic solutions to support the poor and marginalised sections of society," she told PTI.

People must recognise that air pollution causes nearly seven million deaths annually and is a major risk factor for both mortality and morbidity worldwide, said Maria Neira,

Director of the World Health Organisation (WHO). She attributed these deaths to both outdoor and household air pollution.

Speaking at a session at the Cartagena conference, Neira reiterated that over two billion people are exposed to household air pollution due to a lack of access to clean cooking energy.

"Air pollution, mainly arising from inefficient energy use, is a major environmental health risk. By reducing air pollution levels, countries can lower the incidence of health issues such as stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, pneumonia, and asthma. A large number of people -- including doctors, scientists, and journalists -- still do not realise that air pollution causes almost seven million deaths

every year," the WHO Director said.

Referring to China's success in transitioning to clean energy to combat household air pollution, Balakrishnan pointed out that both India and China faced similar challenges around 20 years ago due to solid cooking fuels contributing to ambient PM2.5 levels.

"For China, it was coal, and for India, it is biomass fuel. China aggressively phased out solid cooking fuels. It was a significant challenge for China, as coal was used not only for cooking but also for heating, leading to enormous PM2.5 contributions, particularly in winter," Balakrishnan told PTI.

She added that China identified the "lowest-hanging fruit and tackled it."

"The phasing out of residential coal was a key component of China's Blue Sky Programme -- alongside interventions in power and transport," she said.

Meanwhile, a report presented to the Rajya Sabha by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests, and Climate Change revealed that a substantial Rs 858 crore allocated for pollution control in 2024-25 remains unutilised.

This budget represents 27.44 per cent of the ministry's revised annual allocation.

Reacting to the report, Balakrishnan told PTI that continued investment in additional monitoring is essential for assessing the effectiveness of the NCAP's actions.

"Once the administrative roadblocks are resolved, this should be prioritised in budgetary spending," she said.

The WHO is currently holding its second conference on air pollution and health after a five-year gap. The first conference took place in 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland. (PTI)

## Protesters disturb Mamata Banerjee's meeting in Oxford University college

**LONDON, March 28:** A group of people disrupted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's speech at a college in Oxford University, displaying placards and heckling her over election violence and the R G Kar college rape case in her state.

According to a video shared by the Students Federation of India (SFI), UK on their social media platforms, the protesters repeatedly interrupted her speech on her various claims and showed placards that mentioned, among other things, "2023 TMC-engineered election violence".

Banerjee was addressing a gathering at Kellogg College at the University of Oxford on Thursday on 'Social Development -- Girl, Child and Women Empowerment in West Bengal' and was almost 30 minutes into the speech when she was talking about industries coming to her state.

Members from the audience reminded the Trinamool Congress (TMC) chief how Tatas went away from her state, apparently referring to the Singur protests by her party in 2008 that prompted the Tata group to move out their plant for Nano car manufacturing from West Bengal.

She replied that Tatas are back and set up their industry in Kharagpur and Rajarhat area.

But soon people standing at the back started shouting and heckling Banerjee on points raised in her speech.



They also held placards pointing out incidents such as the election violence in 2023 in West Bengal, and also the violence unleashed by TMC workers.

"I can't hear, please speak more loudly," Banerjee said and in reply to allegations about the R G Kar college case, she said, "The case is sub-judice, also, it is with the Central government, not with us."

"Please don't do politics here on this stage. That you can do with me in my state, not here," she added.

A post-graduate trainee doctor was raped and murdered on the campus of the R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata on August 9, 2024. The case is being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

When the protesters spoke about the poll-related violence, Banerjee first told them to tell their party back home (CPI-M) to be stronger and then showed a photo of herself, all bandaged and lying down injured, and said, "This is me, have a look. This is proof of an attempt to kill me." (PTI)



# China has been laying claims over Arunachal Pradesh saying it is part of Southern Tibet

## Arunachal minister raises funding challenges with Sitharaman

**ITANAGAR, March 28:** Arunachal Pradesh Urban Affairs, Civil Aviation, and Land Management minister Balo Raja on Friday apprised Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman about the state's deprivation of financial assistance from international institutions due to alleged interference from China.

Raja, accompanied by Itanagar Municipal Corporation Mayor Tame Phassang, met the minister in the national capital.

He informed her that, except for Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, all other states and union territories are availing loans from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank for infrastructure development, an official statement released here said.

"Due to protests from China,

Arunachal Pradesh is being deprived of financial assistance from international institutions and is therefore fully dependent on central assistance, as it is a resource-crunch state," Raja was quoted in the statement as saying to the Union finance minister.

China has been laying claims over Arunachal Pradesh saying it is part of Southern Tibet.

While expressing gratitude to the central government for its continued support, Raja briefed Sitharaman on various developmental projects undertaken through urban local bodies, highlighting their financial requirements for timely and successful completion.

He also drew her attention to pending grants meant for urban local bodies and requested her intervention for their consideration.



Sitharaman assured the minister of the central government's continued and comprehensive

support for the state's overall development, the statement added. (PTI)

## Centre releases ₹ 37 crore for scholarship to Nagaland ST students

**KOHIMA, March 28:** The Directorate of Higher Education, Government of Nagaland, has informed on Saturday that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, has released ₹ 37 crore for payment of the post matric scholarship to ST students of Nagaland, which the scheme implementing agency will soon disburse to the beneficiaries after completing the necessary formalities.

Furthermore, the scheme implementing agency acknowledged the efforts of the Minister for Tourism & Higher Education, Temjen Imna Along, for his proactiveness and all-out efforts in coordinating with the funding ministry for the release of scholarship, the education directorate also said.

The scheme implementing agency also extended gratitude to the Union Minister and the Ministry officials of Tribal Affairs for keeping their assurance in releasing the sanction order at the specified time. (NNN)

## Arunachal DyCM pushes for full implementation of EoDB Act

**ITANAGAR, March 28:** Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Friday underscored the urgency of fully implementing the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) Act 2021, directing all departments to digitise their services and establish EoDB rules to formalise the process.

Chairing a high-level review meeting on the state's EoDB reforms, he emphasised the importance of timely service delivery and the need for appropriate action under Citizen Services Delivery Acts in case of lapses.

The deputy chief minister urged departments to adopt a proactive approach to eliminating procedural bottlenecks and fostering a business-friendly environment, an official statement said. The meeting was convened to improve the business climate in the state.

Planning and Investment secretary R K Sharma reaffirmed the state's commitment to an investor-friendly regulatory framework. He highlighted that the EoDB Act 2021 mandates integrating all departmental services into the EoDB portal to streamline processes and enhance transparency. (PTI)

## Four militants arrested in Manipur

**IMPHAL, March 28:** Security forces have nabbed four militants belonging to different proscribed outfits from three districts of Manipur, police said in a statement on Friday.

The arrests were made in Bishnupur, Imphal East and Thoubal districts on Thursday.

A militant belonging to the Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) was nabbed from Maibam Chingmang in Bishnupur district. The insurgent, identified as Leishangthem Hiran Singh (40), was involved in extorting the common people.

A member of KCP-PSC (Politburo Standing Committee), identified as Likmabam Amujao Meitei alias Lakpa (27), was apprehended

from Sawmbung Pourabi area in Imphal East district, it said.

Two militants of the KCP (Taibanganba) group were nabbed from Langthabal Khunou area in Thoubal district. They were identified as Loitongbam Boyai Singh (45) and Khumanthem Dhanabir Singh alias Naobi (28).

Security forces, meanwhile, also seized 12 firearms and cartridges during search operations in Jiribam, Imphal West and Bishnupur districts on Thursday, the statement added.

Two self-loading rifles and INSAS rifles each with magazines loaded with a total of 40 cartridges, two SMG carbines without magazines, eight bulletproof plates,

seven bulletproof vests, camouflage clothing and other items were seized from a vacant quarters in Langol Housing Complex in Imphal West district, it said.

Three INSAS rifles and three magazines and two SLR rifles and magazines each were seized from Chingdong Leikai in Jiribam district.

A 303 rifle with magazine and 16 cartridges, one 12-bore cartridge and other items were seized from a hill in Haotak Awang Leikai under the jurisdiction of Kumbi police station in Bishnupur district, it said.

Security forces also dismantled a bunker at Ponlen in Kangpokpi district, it added. (PTI)

## Be Humble, lead simple life: Scholar to students in Manipur



**IMPHAL, March 28:** Noted scholar of Manipur, Dhanabir Laishram told students to be humble and lead a simple life. He was speaking at a one-day seminar on "career choice cum awareness" on CUET recently at Liangmai Baptist Centre Church (LBCC), Kanglatongbi, some 20 km north of Imphal. The event was organised by Liangmai Naga Katimai Ruangdi, Manipur.

Speaking as a resource person, Dhanabir Laishram spoke about the potentials and interests of students. He emphasized the importance of reading books and time management. Dhanabir encouraged the gathering to be trendsetters. He then stressed on how to study and what to read.

On the occasion, Mathiuchonbou Rimal, president, LNK, acknowledged the congregation and the dignitaries present. He emphasized the importance of education, highlighting that the right time to choose a career is at the high school stage.

Also speaking as a resource person, Rakesh Konjengbam, founder of Ingenix Educare, shared insights on the New Education Policy (NEP) and raised awareness about CUET. He advised students on choosing the right stream and highlighted how advanced technology demands adaptability and clarity of goals. He emphasized the importance of identifying individual strengths and weaknesses.

Renee Newmai, SDO, exhorted the students to pray whenever in doubt. She emphasized the need to combat negativity in society and encouraged students to introspect on the event to bring positive changes in their personalities. She appreciated the LNK for initiating such a program aimed at building the careers of the youth.

Many leaders and parents also attended the program, while students actively participated in the interaction session with the resource persons. Students from Olivia Higher Secondary School, Green Tree Academy, and Chil Chil Higher Secondary School took part in the event. Rev. Mathiuchonbou Thiumai, pastor of LBCC, blessed the students. (NNN)

## Amendment to Meghalaya Minor Mineral Concession Rules urged in Meghalaya

**SHILLONG, March 28:** The Voice of the People Party (VPP)-led Executive Committee (EC) in the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) recently assured to pressurize the state government on the need to bring necessary amendment to the Meghalaya Minor Mineral Concession Rules (MMMC), 2016 to address the problems faced by small-time miners, who are practicing traditional mining in Meghalaya.

"I assure the house that EC will try to find out ways and means especially on how to put pressure on the state government for bringing necessary amendments to address the problems faced by small-time miners and also to ensure that such mining activities do not affect the environment," KHADC chief Shemborlang Rynjah said while replying to a motion moved by Leader of Opposition Titostarwell Chyne.

He said that the EC will also submit its suggestions on the matter.

"The council had earlier suggested the need to include the word 'traditional mining' in the MMC, 2016 which I feel is very important," Rynjah said adding, "I feel there will be more destruction caused to the environment through the use of heavy machineries but traditional mining is something which will not only slows down the environmental degradation, it also gives a lot of employment opportunities to the people." (NNN)

## AI-enabled cameras in all towns, cities to strengthen security in Arunachal

**ITANAGAR, March 28:** The Arunachal Pradesh government will install AI-enabled cameras in all towns and cities of the state in a phased manner to enhance public safety, Home Minister Mama Natung said.

In an interview with PTI, he said the state government has already initiated the process of installing AI-enabled CCTV cameras at 22 check-gates to prevent the movement of unwanted elements and restricted items along the inter-state boundaries with Assam and Nagaland.

He said the government is committed to enforcing a strict law and order mechanism to ensure the safety and security of the residents and several initiatives have been taken to strengthen the police force.

"We will install state-of-the-art AI-enabled traffic cameras and CCTV cameras in all cities and towns in a phased manner to enhance public safety and security," Natung said.

The government has recently granted 'Special Grade' promotions to 3,558 personnel of the Arunachal Pradesh Police, Arunachal Pradesh Police Battalion (AAPBn), Indian Reserve Battalion (IRBn), and Fire and Emergency Services to boost their morale, he said.

The state cabinet had approved the proposal on October 28 last year, granting the promotion to police constables, head constables, and assistant sub-inspectors (civil police, APPBn, and IRBn), including MT (motor transport) and telecommunication wings of the police department.



Natung said that the state budget has proposed infrastructure upgrades at the Second Armed Police Battalion Headquarters at Aalo in West Siang district, along with the establishment of a state-of-the-art forensic centre at the Police Training Centre in Banderdewa, near here.

"The government plans to establish new fire stations in all districts in a phased manner by 2029. This year, fire stations will be set up in Wakro, Chowkham, Hayuliang, Mebo, Kimin, Deomali, Miao, Lungla, and Kalaktang," he said. The minister emphasised that police personnel would be trained under Mission Karmayogi to implement the three new criminal laws, focusing on justice rather than retribution.

Addressing the drug menace, Natung said that under the Mukhya Mantri Nasha Mukti Yojana, the government is taking a multi-faceted approach to combat drug abuse, including treatment and rehabilitation.

"We have established five drug de-addiction centres and constituted the Arunachal Pradesh Drug De-Addiction Society. Additionally, the 2025-26 budget proposes setting up a well-equipped de-addiction and rehabilitation centre in the Itanagar Capital Region for

long-term treatment and rehabilitation," he said.

The government also plans to strengthen addiction treatment facilities in all government hospitals across districts, he said.

Arunachal Pradesh ranks among the top three states facing substance abuse issues, a concern raised by public representatives, community-based organisations, and residents as a major impediment to the state's holistic development, the minister noted.

Natung urged all stakeholders to collaborate with the government in eradicating drug and substance abuse, stating that the government alone cannot combat the menace.

Regarding manpower shortages at police stations, particularly in the eastern districts of Tirap, Changlang, and Longding, he said that the state cabinet sanctioned 3,000 police personnel posts last year.

Once the recruitment process is completed, the manpower requirement in many police stations will be met, he asserted.

In August last year, Natung submitted a proposal to Union Home Minister Amit Shah on the Tirap-Changlang-Longding Package 2.0 Action Plan to strengthen the state police in the insurgency-hit districts.

He added that the government is planning to provide allowance to police personnel for purchasing uniforms, with the amount directly to be credited to their bank accounts.

This initiative is part of broader efforts to improve facilities for the police force, including women officers, he added. (PTI)

## Team of Special Grade officers meet DGP in Arunachal



**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, March 28 :** A team of Special grade officers who has been recently promoted on Friday has met the Director General of Police (DGP) Anand Mohan, IPS at Police Headquarter (PHQ) in city and lauded the efforts made by the Pema Khandu led government for supporting the cause of police force of state.

The Special grade officer while felicitating the host of top cops at PHQ has a meeting on the occasion and thanked the team efforts of the PHQ in getting a special grade promotion to more than three thousands police personnel who has been serving the state for more than 20 to 40 years in state.

We are really happy to see the commitment made by the present government in supporting the police force with special grade promotion. It was only possible as the present government has fulfilled the commitment made to the police force. We are thankful to the entire officers and leaders of state government led by head of government Chief Minister Pema Khandu, Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, Home & Border Affairs Minister Mama Natung, Advisor to Home Minister, team off officer form Home Department/ PHQ, media and all. We thanks from core of our heart for fulfilling our desire, the SG Officers said.

The DGP Anand Mohan while congratulating the entire police force on the special occasion has appreciated the promotion action of the state government in approving and putting the commitment and fulfilling the desired promotion to more than three thousand police force from various wings including civil police, IRBn, APPBn, Fire & Emergency services etc, he said.

IGP Taba Tusar, Apur Btlin, Takhe Ringu, DIGP, AIGP and other senior officers were also felicitated on the occasion.

## Seminar on Indian and western perspectives

**IMPHAL, March 28:** A two-day national seminar on "Dialogues on Values: Indian and Western Perspectives" commenced recently at the Court Hall of Manipur University in Imphal.

Organised by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), New Delhi, in collaboration with the Department of Philosophy, Manipur University, the seminar aims to foster intellectual exchange between Indian and Western philosophical traditions.

Vice-Chancellor of Manipur University Lokendra Singh, in his inaugural speech, focused on the idea of Enlightenment and Christian Ethics, exploring the impact of Western philosophical traditions on global capitalism and its economic influence.

He also delved into how "non-Christian Eastern countries", like India, have navigated economic modernisation and industrialisation, despite the lingering effects of colonialism. (NNN)

**SUPPLY, ERECTION, TESTING & COMMISSIONING WORKS**

**Tender Notice No.: DY/CEE/CON/RE-11/MLG/06/2025** Dated: 25-03-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work. **Tender No.:** EL-CON-15-2024-25-MLG; **Name of Work:** Supply, erection, testing & commissioning of 88 HP Air conditioning works at Indoor stadium at Maligaon. **Tender Value :** ₹42,23,224/-; **Bid Security :** ₹4,500/-; **Date & time of submission of tender at 14:30 hrs. on 16-04-2025 and opening at 15:30 hrs. on 16-04-2025** For complete information and tender document of e-Tender will be available in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in).

**DEE/CON/HQ, Maligaon**

**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY Construction Organization**  
Serving Customers With A Smile

**YARD IMPROVEMENT AT LUMDING DIVISION**

**E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/23 of 2025** Dated: 26-03-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of Item:** Yard Improvement Lumding-Furkating Jn. Section Chongajan, Naojan, Sarupathar, Barpathar, Bhilgaon Stations by CTR (P) 60Kg at Chongajan Yard (km. 279/6-280/4 L/1 & L-3)/(1.6 Km) Naojan Yard (Km. 287/1-287/9)/(L-1 & 1-3)/(1.6 Km), Sarupathar Yard (Km 295/9-296/8)/(L-1)/(0.9 Km), Barpathar Yard (Km. 305/1-306/0)/(L-1,L-2 & L3)/(2.7 Km.), Bhilgaon Yard (Km. 313/1-313/9)/(0.8 Km.)(Total 7.6 Km) & BG Through Turnout Renewal 1 in 12, 1 in 8.5 & Derailing Switch at Chongajan (4 sets Point No.102, 104, 122, 124), Naojan (4 sets Point No.102, 104, 112, 114), Sarupathar 4 sets (Point No.13X, 14X, 13,14), Barpathar 10 Sets(11, 11A, 12, 12A, 13, 13A, 14, 14A, 17,17X), Bhilgaon 2 sets (13A, 14A) total 24 Sets under the jurisdiction of Sr.DENIV/Lumding. (Two Packet system). **Tender Value:** ₹13,20,14,067.82/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹8,10,100/-; **Date & time of closing of Tender: 15.00 hrs. of 22-04-2025 & opening at 15.00 hrs. of 23-04-2025.** The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 22-04-2025 in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

**DRM (W), Lumding**

**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
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## State round of Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament held in Nagaland assembly

### 643 youth registered for the district-level round

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, March 28:** The state round of the Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament 2025 was held at the Nagaland assembly secretariat in Kohima on Thursday.

Addressing the programme, Nagaland assembly deputy speaker S Toiho Yephtho, who was the special guest of the event, said the Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament serves as a powerful platform for the youth to voice their concerns, challenge existing norms, and propose innovative solutions for the progress of the nation.

He called the participants the torchbearers of change and urged them to utilise their passion, intellect, and vision to contribute to the nation's future.

"The Viksit Bharat mission is not just a goal, but a call to action," Yephtho stressed.

He said it was an endeavour that requires

the participation of every citizen, especially the youth, to shape a prosperous and developed India.

He further exhorted the youth to respect all cultures and beliefs, and to relentlessly pursue justice, equality, and innovation to address the challenges the country faces today.

Joh Makhabo, director, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), also addressed the gathering, highlighting the initiative's alignment with the Viksit Bharat 2047 framework envisioned by the Government of India.

He said 643 youth registered for the district-level round, with 150 participants each from the nodal centres in Mokokchung, Kohima, and Dimapur selected for the state round.

These participants competed in a physical presentation competition, and the top

10 participants from each centre were chosen for the state-level competition.

Makhabo further informed that the top three participants from the state-level round would represent Nagaland at the National Youth Parliament to be held from April to April 3 in Parliament House, New Delhi.

He acknowledged the continuous efforts of NYKS in conducting Youth Parliament and declamation programmes, many of which have led to national accolades for the state's youth.

The distinguished jury panel for the competition included deputy speaker Yephtho, adviser to school education and SCERT Dr Kekkrielhoulie Yhame and MLAY Lima Onen Chang.

The event was attended by students from various schools and colleges across Nagaland.

No. BDB/Tender/46/2023-24/4622

Date:28/03/25

### SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER.

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs.8.25(Rupees eight & twenty five paise) only with a validity period of 180 days which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors of class-I (A,B & C), Class-II & Class III category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under Cultural Affairs Deptt. BTR during the financial year 2024-25 as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00PM on 22/4/25 and will be opened on the next date (as on 23/4/25) & place at 2.30 PM.

Sl. no.	Name of activity.	Est'd. Value (in Lakhs)	Tender Value (in Lakhs)	EMD/Bid Security. (in Rs.)	Cost of Tender paper (in Rs.)
1.	"Const. of prayer hall at Dahalahabi for Sri Sri Ganesh Mandir, Bhergaon".	6.00L	6,00,000/-	(for 6,000 S/T, S/C) 12,000/- (for OBC/General)	180
2.	"Const. of open Cultural Stage at Mahaliapara village, Bhergaon".	7.00L	7,00,000/-	(for 7,000 S/T, S/C) 14,000/- (for OBC/General)	210
3.	"Renovation of Dahalahabi (Notun Basti) Cultural Stage Bhergaon".	5.00L	5,00,000/-	(for 5,000 S/T, S/C) 10,000/- (for OBC/General)	150
4.	"Const. of open Cultural stage at Khangkhramari, Panishehi, Bhergaon".	10.00L	10,00,000/-	(for 10,000 S/T, S/C) 20,000/- (for OBC/General)	300

Pre-bid date and Time : on 01/04/2025

Last date & time of bid submission: upto 22/04/2025

Date & Time of bid opening: on 23/04/2025

Time of completion of Works : 6 months

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 1/4/25 to 23/4/25 up to 1.30 PM. In the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of demand draft/bankers cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary ,BTC Kokrajhar payable at Kokrajhar.

Sd/-Block Dev.officer  
Block Development Officer,  
Bhergaon

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1684



# ‘TVK would be the true rule of the people’ 2026 polls will be a contest only between TVK and DMK, says Vijay

**CHENNAI, March 28:** Founder of the fledgling political party TVK, actor Vijay on Friday claimed the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls would be a “different election,” and the contest will be only between his party and the ruling DMK.

In its first ever General Council held here, Vijay-led Tamizhaga Vettri Kazhagam urged the Centre to withdraw the Waqf Bill, alleging it would take away the rights of Muslims and also wanted the NDA government to give up taking up the delimitation exercise. Ruling DMK and other political parties except the BJP in the state are also opposed to the Centre on these issues.

In his address, Vijay targeted Tamil Nadu’s ruling DMK over dynasty politics, safety of women and children, law and order and the BJP-led Centre over issues including delimitation and 3-language policy imposition.

“Honourable chief minister of monarchy,” Vijay said slamming DMK over dynasty politics and ridiculed the CM, saying Stalin pronounced his full name Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin with valour and self-respect and that is not sufficient; it must be seen in action and in governance.

While Stalin often blamed the BJP-led regime at the Centre as “fascist,” Vijay alleged the DMK regime was not any less and shared the same fascist characteristic.

“Who are you to stop (place a) me from meeting my party workers and the people,” he asked the CM and added that if he decides to meet them he would do so by violating the restrictions.



However, he is keeping calm as he respects the law. Recently, Vijay was not allowed by authorities to enter villages like Ekanapuram that are opposed to Parandur airport project and he addressed them in a place close to the village and expressed his support to people challenging the project.

Also, Vijay promised his support to the working classes including the government employees and reiterated that his party would oppose projects that adversely impact natural resources and agriculture.

In 2026, “Tamil Nadu would witness a different election, unseen so far and the contest would be only between the TVK and the DMK,” he said.

Giving an “assurance,” Vijay said when the TVK forms the government, which

would be the “true rule of the people,” and one that “shares power” with allies, it would ensure 100 per cent safety to women and law and order shall be strictly maintained. Focus would also be on areas including education and health care and “our target is to ensure everything to people in equal measure and in an easy way.”

The AIADMK is the principal opposition party of the state and BJP-led by K Annamalai is also continuing its assertive style of politics.

Hitting out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Vijay said the Centre takes GST collections from Tamil Nadu, but does not make fund allocations to the state in the Union budget and funds are not released for education.

“Imposition of 3-language policy, and attempting to reduce Parliamentary seats through delimitation,” were the other accusations the TVK chief made against the Centre.

Opposing the “one nation one election,” he urged PM Modi to “handle Tamil Nadu carefully as it is one state that has given several people a run for their money, please do not forget.”

Support to 2-language policy, finding a permanent solution to the travails of state’s fishermen, opposition to Parandur airport were among the issues that were covered in resolutions that were passed.

The Waqf Bill, by creating new conditions, took away the powers of Muslims in related matters and also trampled on their existing rights and hence it should be taken

back by the Centre, TVK said in a resolution passed at the general council meeting here, chaired by Vijay. Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka have passed resolutions against the Waqf amendment bill and the Centre should take into consideration the representation of the state governments also and the minorities should not be put into fear.

The general council gave full powers to Vijay to take all “election related decisions,” with Assembly polls just a year away.

On the proposed delimitation, Vijay’s party cited “information” that the number of seats for northern states would go up several times and for southern states including Tamil Nadu the count would go down. “People of Tamil Nadu consider this as a punishment for properly following family planning scheme of the Union government,” the party alleged and wanted the Centre to drop the delimitation move. Further, the party said that “543 Lok Sabha constituencies” should continue indefinitely and that is the stand of the TVK.

The venue of the meeting had a huge backdrop of Fort St George, the colonial era power hub and which now houses the Tamil Nadu Secretariat, symbolising the party’s goal to “capture power” in 2026.

Senior leader Aadhav Arjuna proposed addressing Vijay as “Vetri Thalaivar” (Victorious chief) and it was unanimously seconded by party workers. Vijay had all along been addressed as Thalappathi (commander) by his fans and party workers. The TVK chief had lunch together with women’s wing office-bearers. (PTI)

## Sacrifices of martyrs protect freedom that we take for granted today: Priyanka



**WAYANAD (KERALA), March 28:** Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said on Friday that the sacrifices of martyrs protect the freedom that we take for granted today.

She was speaking at the inauguration of ‘Smriti Mandapam’ built at Edavaka panchayat in this hill district, in memory of ‘Veer Javan’ Thalachira Janeesh, an army man who lost his life during an anti-terrorist operation in Kashmir.

The Wayanad MP on the second day of her three-day visit to her constituency, added that when a family member is martyred, that sadness stays with the family members for the rest of their life.

“But you get comfort from the support of the community, you get love from the people around you, and from those who care to remember him,” she said.

Thalachira Janeesh, who joined the army at the age of 20 was martyred in 2003 during an anti-terrorist operation in Rajouri district of Kashmir and he was awarded the Sena Medal posthumously in 2004.

“Even 22 years later, his mother still has tears in her eyes because we can never give back what she lost. As a mother and daughter of a martyr myself, I fully understand the depth of her pain,” Priyanka said.

Memorials like this are important to remind us that our freedom, democracy, and way of life come at a great cost, made possible by the sacrifices of brave heroes, she said.

roes, she said.

“When Mahatma Gandhiji used to talk about freedom, he talked about the freedom of each and every Indian. A strong, vibrant and effective Panchayat system is his dream. It was a dream that my martyred father Rajiv Gandhi attempted to fulfil when he passed the Panchayati Raj Act during his tenure,” she added.

“Here in Kerala, our panchayats are an example for the whole of India,” Priyanka claimed.

She hailed the Edavaka panchayat which has been declared zero waste panchayat terming it a ‘biggest achievement in today’s age’.

She also congratulated the Harita Karma Sena members stating that like our great martyrs, their service to society also strengthens democracy and strengthens India.

Earlier on the day, Priyanka laid the foundation stone of various developmental projects of Thavinjal Grama Panchayat at Thalappuzha here.

She said that the Thavinjal panchayat has a lot of scope for tourism as it has natural beauty and a lot of assets in that way.

“I am very happy to see projects like this which will help you to attract more tourists and build the tourism industry here,” she added.

She also hailed the waste recycling system of the local body.

“I am also delighted to see the work you are doing for waste recycling. Very often tourist places are littered with garbage, and we forget that we need to preserve these places. But you are doing a very good work in waste recycling,” she added.

MLAs IC Balakrishnan MLA and T Siddique also attended the programme.

Priyanka will also attend the inauguration of 50 acre Katunayikka Unnathi Cultural Centre at Vadakkannad, the inauguration of the ATTOI (Association of Tourism Trade Organisations India) Tourism Convention at Saptia, Sultan Bathery, and the inauguration of the newly constructed college ground at MAMO College Manassery, Makkam today. (PTI)

## AAP, Congress anti-Dalit parties: BJP

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** The BJP on Friday called AAP and the Congress “anti-Dalit”, alleging that the Arvind Kejriwal-led party under-utilised Dalit welfare schemes’ funds in Delhi while the Congress government in Karnataka has introduced 4 per cent quota for Muslims to take away the rights of the Scheduled Caste (SC) members. There was no immediate reaction from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress to the BJP’s charge.

Addressing a press conference here at the BJP headquarters, party national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said the erstwhile government of AAP in Delhi allocated ₹ 70 crore for the implementation of the Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas scheme in 2022-23 but did not utilise any amount from the earmarked fund. In the 2023-24 Budget, it reduced the budgetary outlay on this head to ₹ 20 crore and utilised just ₹ 1 lakh of the allocated fund, he added.

Citing other examples, Bhatia said the erstwhile AAP government allocated ₹ 65 crore for improvement of Dalit ‘bastis’ (settlements) in the city in the 2020-21 Budget but utilised only ₹ 50 lakh, less than 1 per cent. On the contrary, “outright dishonest” Kejriwal spent crores of rupees in advertisement, he charged.

Bhatia said Kejriwal had promised to appoint a deputy chief minister in Punjab from the Dalit community but he is yet to fulfil it.

“This is the proof of his anti-Dalit mindset,” he charged, adding, “Both AAP and the Congress are anti-Dalit.” The BJP spokesperson alleged that the Congress’ anti-Dalit face stood exposed with its government in Karnataka recently introducing 4 per cent reservation for Muslims in civil works in the state.

“We want to know from Rahul Gandhi whether he reads the Constitution of India and takes its oath, or the Constitution of some other country, may be Italy,” he said and asked the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha to tell where it is written in the Indian Constitution that reservation in civil works can be provided on the basis of religion. (PTI)

## Kerala BJP leader rues campaign against him after apology to CPI(M) leader

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 28:** Kerala BJP vice president B Gopalakrishnan on Friday took strong exception to the CPI(M)’s campaign against him following his public apology to former minister P K Sreemathi to settle a defamation case filed by the latter against him.

In a Facebook post, Gopalakrishnan said the CPI(M) cadres were spreading canards about his expression of regret and targeting him on social media.

“My apology comes out of my generosity as a public servant and my commitment to uphold dignity in politics. I was not forced by anyone to express regret,” he said in the post.

“I tendered an apology as part of



my dignified political stance to set an example in Kerala politics. I had only repeated a charge against Sreemathi made by a late political leader and I apologised as I could not substantiate it,” he said.

“Senior CPI(M) leader Sreemathi had directly told me that a woman’s dignity was damaged. She was also advised by her

lawyer that the defamation case would not stand and they could settle the case seeking an expression of regret,” Gopalakrishnan said.

The allegation against Sreemathi was that her son was the director of a fraudulent company called Medical Service Corporation and that she had made a dishonest transaction during her tenure as state health minister between 2006-11.

“When the case was settled on Thursday, Sreemathi requested me to express my regret publicly before the media, to which I agreed,” he said in the post.

Those who do not know all this are spreading canards on the social media by misrepresenting facts, he

said.

Gopalakrishnan had on Thursday publicly apologised to P K Sreemathi for the defamatory remarks he made against her during a TV debate in 2018.

“I regret the mental distress caused to Sreemathi Teacher. I have no evidence to substantiate my claims,” Gopalakrishnan told reporters on Thursday, standing alongside Sreemathi.

The issue started with a defamation complaint filed by Sreemathi before the Kannur judicial first class magistrate court.

Gopalakrishnan had later moved the High Court seeking to quash the case, where a settlement was reached on Thursday following his apology. (PTI)

## Rahul Gandhi to visit Patna on April 7 to attend symposium on ‘safeguarding Constitution’

**PATNA, March 28:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will be in Bihar early next month to take part in a symposium on “safeguarding the Constitution which is under attack from the Narendra Modi government at the Centre”, a senior party leader said on Friday. The announcement was made by AICC secretary Sushil Kumar Pasi at a press conference where the state unit president Rajesh Kumar and Congress legislature party leader Shakeel Ahmed Khan were also present.

“Jannayak (people’s hero) Rahul Gandhi will be in Patna on April 7. He will interact with social activists at Samvidhan Suraksha Sammelan which is being organised at Shri Krishna Memorial Hall in the city, to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi’s Salt Satyagraha,” Pasi said. He, however, ducked queries as to whether the date has been chosen because it coincides with Ram Navami, a festival that the BJP has been known to celebrate boisterously.

“Rahul Gandhi agrees to visit places whenever he is invited. As far as the BJP is concerned, it is a party that does not believe in secularism, which is one of the ideals on which our Constitution is based. The party is hostile towards all minorities, not just Muslims,” Pasi alleged.

Significantly, it will be the third Bihar tour of Gandhi this year. He had taken part in similar symposiums in January and February.

Rajesh Kumar, the BPCC chief who took over the post only last week, disclosed that the party will ensure that its “visibility was commensurate with its reach” in Bihar, where workers have been asked to ensure that their vehicles carried the Congress flag.

“We are also mounting a ‘Har Ghar Congress ka Jhanda’ campaign. Our workers will try to encourage families to put up the party flags atop their houses,” said Kumar, who, however, parried questions on apparent confusion in the party over accepting RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav as the chief ministerial candidate for the assembly polls due later this year.

While AICC Bihar in-charge Krishna Allavaru has said the decision “will be taken at an appropriate time”, Rajya Sabha MP and former state president Akhilesh Prasad Singh has been claiming that “there is no confusion that Tejashwi will be the face of INDIA bloc”.

Rajesh Kumar said, “It will suffice to say that the INDIA bloc will contest the assembly polls unitedly. Further details will be shared when the time comes.”

The Dalit leader also accused the BJP of practising “untouchability”, blaming the party for an incident in Saharsa district where a temple was reportedly washed with ‘Ganga Jal’ shortly after offering of prayers by young leader Kanhaiya Kumar who is on a statewide padayatra. (PTI)

## CM Rekha Gupta slams AAP’s governance, vows transparent administration under BJP regime

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta laid out her vision for the national capital while launching a sharp attack on the previous AAP government, accusing it of prioritising propaganda over governance. She pledged to bring transparency and efficiency to Delhi’s administration.

Speaking at the Times Now Summit 2025, Gupta talked about her political journey, recalling how she started as a student leader at Delhi University before rising through the ranks of municipal politics.

She said that she never expected to become the chief minister and her primary goal had always been to serve as an MLA.

However, when the opportunity came, she accepted the responsibility with dedication.

Hitting out at AAP’s “much-publicised education reforms”, she called them an “unguided missile” and alleged they lacked structure and real impact. She dismissed schemes like the Happiness Curriculum, Deshbhakti Curriculum, and Business Blasters as “publicity-driven initiatives that did little to improve actual learning”. She alleged that Rs 72 crore was spent on the Happiness Curriculum and another ₹ 80 crore on advertising it, while classrooms

remained in poor condition.

She announced plans to align Delhi’s education system with the National Education Policy (NEP) and introduce structured coaching for competitive exams like NEET, JEE, CLAT, and CA to ensure students from government schools have equal opportunities.

Similarly, on healthcare, Gupta criticised AAP’s Mohalla Clinic model, calling it a “poorly planned initiative” that lacked adequate infrastructure.

She promised a shift towards strengthening hospitals and medical institutions rather than relying on what she described as a “fragmented approach to healthcare”.

Regarding the CM house built during Arvind Kejriwal’s tenure, she said, “I haven’t been allotted a house yet. I’m currently running my office on the street in front of my home, meeting the public there, sitting on a chair in the lane. But the reason for not moving into that house... I feel that the crores of rupees spent on that house do not justify a chief minister sleeping on a luxurious bed. Instead, that money could have built homes for those still sleeping under flyovers today.” (PTI)



## ‘Unruly’ Gujarat Cong MLA evicted from assembly after he corners govt over illegal mining

**GANDHINAGAR, March 28:** Gujarat Congress MLA Vimal Chudasama was evicted from the state assembly on Friday after he rushed into the well of the House claiming the BJP government was not taking action against people involved in illegal mining.

The legislator from the Somnath seat was escorted out of the assembly by sergeants without using force after Speaker Shankar Chaudhary ordered his eviction for squatting inside the Well and displaying a poster with a message critical of the government over the illegal mining issue.

After the Question Hour, Chudasama, without seeking the Speaker’s consent, got up and started speaking about what he called rampant illegal mining of limestone in Chorwad town of Junagadh district.

The opposition MLA main-

tained that despite his repeated representation inside and outside the House, government officials were not taking any action against “mining mafias” active in Chorwad.

When the Speaker asked him to obey laws and seek permission before raising any issue, the two-time MLA rushed into the Well and sat there as a mark of protest.

The lawmaker pointed out that though he had given “proof” to establish the wrongdoing, Finance Minister Kanubhai Desai on Thursday informed the assembly that nothing illegal was found.

When Chudasama did not return to his seat and started waving a poster carrying a message against the BJP government, Chaudhary asked sergeants to take him out.

When he was being evicted, the Speaker remarked that the Congress legislator was doing “drama” to gain “media publicity”. (PTI)

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Asserting that delay in constituting inquiry and prosecution wings of the Lokpal hampers its ability to function efficiently, a Parliamentary Panel has asked the government to take urgent steps to form the two key divisions within a period of six months.

Recruitment of qualified personnel, including investigators, legal experts, and prosecutors, may be given top priority, the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice said in its 145th report, tabled in Parliament on Thursday, on the Demands for Grants (2025-26) pertaining to the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

A law governing the anti-corruption ombudsman -- The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013 -- came into force on January 1, 2014. However, it began functioning only on March 27, 2019, following the appointment of its chairperson and members.

To discharge its statutory functions, Section 11 of the Act obligates the Lokpal to



constitute an inquiry wing to be headed by a director of inquiry for the purpose of conducting preliminary inquiry into any offence punishable under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, alleged to have been committed by the specified public servants and functionaries.

The Lokpal Act also has a provision for the constitution of a prosecution wing headed by the ‘director of prosecution’ for the prosecution of public servants found guilty of corruption.

The DoPT informed the Committee that the constitution of the inquiry wing and

prosecution wing of Lokpal is under consideration, the report said.

Pending their constitution, the functions related to these wings are carried out through other agencies like the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), it said.

The Committee noted the delay in constituting the inquiry and prosecution wings of the Lokpal “which hampers its ability to function independently and efficiently as mandated by the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013”.

Currently, reliance on external agencies like the CVC and CBI for investigations and prosecutions can lead to procedural delays, coordination challenges, and potential conflicts of interest, it said.

The absence of dedicated wings weakens the Lokpal’s institutional framework and affects public trust in its ability to handle corruption cases effectively, the report said.

“The Committee, therefore, recommends that the department may take urgent steps to constitute the inquiry and prosecution wings

of Lokpal, preferably within a period of six months. The structure, staffing, and jurisdiction of these wings should be well defined,” it added.

Until these wings become fully operational, a dedicated coordination mechanism may be set up with the CVC and the CBI to streamline the ongoing cases, the panel said.

The panel, headed by BJP Rajya Sabha member Brij Lal, also recommended a structured mechanism to ensure timely submission of comments by public servants and competent authorities for in-time completion of preliminary inquiries under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

“A fixed timeline may be enforced strictly for response submission, with automatic escalation for non-compliance. Digital platforms should be implemented for secure and real-time submission of comments to minimise procedural delays. A dedicated monitoring unit within the Lokpal may track compliance, issue reminders, and report persistent delays,” it said. (PTI)

## Take steps to form Lokpal’s inquiry, prosecution wings within 6 months: Parliamentary Panel to govt



## HUMAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

# No plans to amend Wildlife Act to give more power to states, govt tells RS

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** The Centre is not considering any amendment to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, to give states more power to deal with wild animal attacks, the government has informed Parliament.

In response to a question by CPI-M Rajya Sabha member V Sivadasan, Union Minister of State for Environment Kirti Vardhan Singh said that the protection of wildlife, including human-wildlife conflict management, is primarily the responsibility of state and Union Territory governments under the Act.

The minister said Section 11(1)(a) of the Act empowers the chief wildlife warden to grant permits for the hunting of animals listed in Schedule I if they become dangerous to human life or are incurably diseased.

Section 11(1)(b) allows the chief wildlife warden or any authorised officer to grant permits for hunting wild animals listed in Schedule II, III, or IV if they become dangerous to human life or property or are disabled or dis-



eased beyond recovery.

Sivadasan had sought details of requests made by states to amend the Act and its rules.

Asked if the Union government intended to amend the Act to give states more autonomy in handling wild animal attacks, the minister said, "Currently, no amendment in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 Act has been proposed."

Sivadasan represents Kerala, which has repeatedly requested the Centre to declare wild pigs as "vermin" in the state.

The Kerala government argues

that damage to crops and human-wildlife conflict have been rising due to wild boars.

An estimated 344 people lost their lives in incidents of human-wildlife conflict in Kerala between 2021 and 2025, Environment and Forest Minister Bhupendra Yadav informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Replying to supplementaries during the Question Hour, he said 180 deaths were due to snake bites, 103 due to elephants and 35 due to wild pigs.

The ministry has advised the

Kerala government to use the provisions under Section 11 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Section 11(1)(a) and Section 11(1)(b) empower the state chief wildlife warden to allow selective hunting. This is different from declaring an animal as "vermin" under Section 62 by the central government.

Once declared "vermin", the species loses all legal protection, allowing unrestricted hunting, unlike the case-by-case permission granted under Section 11.

In 2021, the Centre had said that declaring wild boars as "vermin" in Kerala would do more harm than good.

The Kerala government later issued an order allowing farmers to kill wild boars using licensed guns in the presence of a forest guard.

This special order was extended for another year from May 17, 2022.

Last year, the Kerala Assembly passed a resolution urging the Centre to declare wild boars as "vermin" and amend the Act to reduce human-animal conflict. (PTI)

## Body of fourth cop sighted as security forces resume anti-terror operation in J&K's Kathua

**JAMMU, March 28:** The body of another policeman was sighted using a drone on Friday near the spot where a gunfight took place earlier in a remote forested area in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.

This is the fourth cop to be have died in the gunfight in which three terrorists are also confirmed to have been killed, officials said.

Heavy firing and deafening sounds of explosions continued for the second day as police assisted by the Army and CRPF moved this morning from different directions, after a night halt to sanitise the Safiyan area, they said.

On Thursday, three suspected Pakistani terrorists of proscribed Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) outfit and an equal number of policemen were found dead after the day-long gunfight while one policeman was reported missing. Seven others, including a deputy superintendent of police, were injured in the gunbattle.

The officials said the security forces resumed the operation with the first light of the day, having the primary focus to retrieve the bodies of the deceased, finding a missing policeman and neutralising any other threat.

They said the joint security parties are moving cautiously to the targeted area as two more terrorists are believed holed up there. They were also presumed dead earlier but their bodies could not be sighted by the drones.

The operation, centred near Jakhole village in the Ghati Juthana area of Rajbagh, against the terrorists started around 8 am on Thursday amid intensified operations led by police against the ultras who had recently infiltrated from across the International Border in Hiranagar sector, the officials said.

However, it was not immediately clear whether it was the same group that had been evading an earlier cordon in Sanyal forest of Hiranagar or another batch of infiltrated terrorists.

Three terrorists were killed in the onslaught led by the Special Operations Group (SOG) of the Jammu and Kashmir Police and assisted by the Army and CRPF.

Adding to the tension, five police personnel, including a Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO), were reportedly trapped near the gunfight's location, adjacent to a rivulet concealed by dense foliage.

However, the SDPO -- a DSP rank officer -- was evacuated in an injured condition from the scene late Thursday evening, while three of his personal security officers were found dead while another body of a policeman was sighted this morning.

Besides the SDPO, three more policemen were admitted to Kathua hospital and their condition was stated to be stable. Two army personnel were also injured in the operation.

Earlier, a group of terrorists was intercepted on Sunday evening within a 'dhok', a local term for an en-



closure in a nursery, in Sanyal village near the International Border with Pakistan in the Hiranagar sector. A subsequent search operation, involving the police, army, NSG, BSF and CRPF, utilised advanced technical and surveillance equipment to track down and neutralize the terrorists.

Despite the massive search operation, the terrorists managed to escape the initial cordon, the officials said, adding it is assumed that the same group could have been possibly spotted near Jakhole, approximately 30 km from the initial encounter site.

The search teams discovered evidence on Monday, including four loaded magazines of M4 carbine, two grenades, a bulletproof jacket, sleeping bags, track-suits, food packets, and materials for constructing improvised explosive devices (IEDs) near the Hiranagar encounter site.

The terrorists were moving through the forest area towards the Billawar side when a police party headed by a SDPO moved in after getting specific information but came under heavy firing, resulting in the day-long gunfight.

Reinforcements from the police, army, and CRPF were immediately deployed to the area, while the special forces of the army were also air-dropped to neutralise the terrorists.

Police believe the terrorists infiltrated on Saturday, possibly via a ravine route or a newly constructed tunnel from across the border.

Director General of Police, Nalin Prabhat and Inspector General of Police (Jammu Zone) Bhim Sen Tuti have been overseeing the anti-terrorist operation from Kathua for the past four days, the officials said.

The People's Anti-Fascist Front, a proxy outfit of Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), claimed responsibility for the encounter.

Army's rising star corps, whose troops are involved in the operation, lauded the police personnel involved in the operation.

"Rising Star Corps salutes the valor & indomitable spirit of the brave (J&K) Police personnel who made the supreme sacrifice fighting valiantly during the ongoing OP (operation) Safiyan in Kathua. Their courage and dedication will always be remembered," the Army said in a post on X. (PTI)

## Bengaluru woman murder: Husband 'main suspect,' attempted suicide, say police



**BENGALURU, March 28:** The husband of a 32-year-old woman, whose body was found in a suitcase in the city, seems to be the main suspect in the case and was now undergoing treatment in Pune after suicide attempt, police said on Friday.

The body of Gauri Khedekar was found on Thursday with severe injury marks and stuffed inside a suitcase here. She is a native of Maharashtra.

Her husband Rakesh Rajendera Khedekar fled to Pune after the

crime where he allegedly attempted suicide by consuming poison, police said.

He has been detained in connection with the murder and is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital in the Maharashtra city.

Addressing a press conference here, City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said the police have registered a case in this regard and it is seen that the woman's husband only is the main suspect. He had flown out of the city earlier.

"He was found admitted in a hospital in Pune. Apparently, it is said he had consumed poison in a suicide attempt. He is in the hospital and our team has already contacted Pune police," he said.

According to him, a team of Bengaluru Police have gone to Pune, and as and when he is discharged from the hospital, he will be brought here for interrogation.

Marital dispute is said to be the reason behind the murder.

"Relatives of the deceased have come to Bengaluru and further details will be sought from them," he added.

Earlier, the police control room was alerted by the house owner at around 5.30 pm on Thursday.

The woman and her husband, who works as a project manager in an IT firm here, moved to Bengaluru last month and were living in a flat at Doddakammanahalli village in Hulimayy police station limits.

The victim's body was found dumped in the suitcase inside the bathroom of the flat. There were stab injuries on her body.

The exact motive behind the murder will be ascertained after the accused is brought here and interrogated, a senior police official said.

Responding to reports that the man had informed his wife's parents about killing her, the officer said, "The matter is under investigation and these details need to be verified." The woman had a Bachelors degree in Mass Media and her husband was working from home, police said.

Forensic experts visited the spot and collected samples, police said. (PTI)

## Delhi Police nabs six illegal Bangladeshi migrants

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Six suspected illegal Bangladeshi migrants, disguised as transgender women to avoid detection, were arrested from Delhi's Jahangirpuri area, a police official said on Friday.

They underwent "minor surgeries" and "hormonal treatments" too to change their appearance and blend into the local transgender community, the official said.

Police said they were found using a banned application to communicate with their family in Bangladesh.

All six migrants were handed over to the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) in R K Puram for further deportation proceedings.

The arrests were made on Thursday during a 10-day surveillance drive targeting illegal Bangladeshi migrants in some areas.

"Acting on a tip-off, a police team of Foreigners Cell was formed. We got to know that some illegal Bangladeshi nationals were disguising themselves as transgender individuals and engaging in begging at traffic signals to evade suspicion," said the police officer. (PTI)

## Pune Porsche crash: 2 police officers likely to face the axe for shoddy probe

**PUNE, March 28:** Two Maharashtra Police officers are likely to face dismissal for alleged negligence in the investigation of last year's fatal Porsche crash, where a drunk minor driver killed two tech professionals, a top official said.

Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar said a proposal was sent to the Maharashtra Home department on Thursday "seeking dismissal of these two suspended cops."

A Porsche car, allegedly driven by a 17-year-old boy in an inebriated condition, had fatally run over two motorcycle-borne techies in the Kalyani Nagar area in the early hours of May 19 last year.

Inspector Rahul Jagdale and assistant police inspector Vishwanath Todkari, attached to Yerawada police station, were suspended for late reporting of the incident and dereliction of duty at the time. (PTI)

## Words in Imran Pratapgarhi's poem don't promote disharmony, hatred: SC

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** The Supreme Court on Friday said words in Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi's poem did not promote disharmony or hatred or ill-will but encouraged people to desist from resorting to violence and face injustice with love.

Pratapgarhi was booked in Gujarat's Jamnagar for allegedly posting an edited video of a provocative song.

The video has the recitation of a poem and it was alleged the spoken words of the poem incite people of a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said on a plain reading of the poem, it had nothing to do with any religion, caste, community or any particular group.

"The poem's words do not bring about or promote disharmony or feelings of hatred or ill-will. It only seeks to challenge the injustice made by the ruler. It is impossible to say that the words used by the appellant disturb or are likely to disturb public tranquility," the bench said.

The court went on, "By no stretch of imagination, does it promote enmity between different groups. We fail to understand how the statements therein are detrimental to national unity and how the statements will affect national unity. On its plain reading, the poem does not purport to affect anyone's religious feelings."

Referring to Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, the court said neither clause (a) nor clause (b) of the provision are attracted.

The bench observed Pratapgarhi was not accused of organising any exercise, movement, drill or similar activity.

"There is no allegation against the appellant that he uttered the words in any place of worship or in any assembly engaged in the performance of religious worship or religious ceremonies," the court added.



He put a video of a mass marriage function, and in the background, the words were uttered, therefore, Section 196 had no application, it said.

The Congress MP challenged the January 17 order of the Gujarat High Court which dismissed his petition for quashing the FIR filed against him, saying investigation was at a nascent stage.

On January 3, Pratapgarhi was booked for the alleged provocative song in the backdrop of a mass marriage function he attended in Jamnagar.

Among other sections, Pratapgarhi, national chairman of the Congress' minority cell, was booked under Section 196 (promoting enmity between different groups on the basis of religion, race, etc.) and 197 (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integrity) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The 46-second video clip, uploaded by Pratapgarhi on X, showed him being showered with flower petals as he walked waving his hands and a song playing in the background which the FIR alleged had lyrics that were provocative, detrimental to national unity and hurt religious feelings. (PTI)

## Patna HC dismisses petitions seeking cancellation of PSC exams over 'paper leak'

**PATNA, March 28:** In a setback to hundreds of job aspirants demanding cancellation of Bihar Public Service Commission exams, the Patna High Court on Friday ruled there was "no definitive evidence of malpractice" in the tests that were conducted in December last year.

A division bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Ashutosh Kumar made the observation while dismissing a bunch of petitions challenging the Combined Competitive Exams (CCE) (Preliminary) held on December 13 last year at more than 900 centres across the state.

The bench, which also included Justice Partha Sarathy, asked the commission to "carry out the mains examination, ensuring that the process is peaceful, fair and transparent".

"We are of the view that the prayers made on behalf of the petitioners cannot be acceded to," the court said, adding that "there appear to have been lapses but those are not of the kind and magnitude which would discredit the purity and fairness of the examination".

The CCE prelims had run into a controversy on account of a "boycott" of the tests by hundreds of candidates, all of whom had been assigned the Bapu Pariksha Parisar in the state capital.

The candidates, who had alleged that the question paper was "leaked", appeared for their tests weeks later when the administration dispersed them across a dozen exam centres across the city.

However, this was resented by several other candidates who alleged that they were being denied a "level playing field" and that there were complaints of irregularities at more than 100 examination centres.

The protesters, who staged an indefinite dharna to press the demand for re-examination, received support from leader of the opposition Tejashwi Yadav and his allies in the INDIA bloc.

Soon afterwards, Jan Suraj Party founder Prashant Kishor jumped on the bandwagon, pledging legal assistance to the protesters, and going on a "fast unto death" which was called off within a fortnight by the 47-year-old leader upon the advice of doctors monitoring his health.

Among the lawyers arguing on behalf of the petitioners was senior lawyer and Jan Suraj Party's state vice president Y V Giri.

Advocate Ashok Kumar Dubey, who was assisting Giri, told reporters "a decision on whether or not to challenge the order would be taken after a perusal of the bulky

judgement", which ran into more than 70 pages.

Dubey, however, pointed out that the court has suggested a number of "corrective measures" the commission would henceforth be expected to take.

The court advised the commission to set up a "high-level committee, comprising experts who would ensure a review of security measures and overall management of the examination".

Also, the commission has been asked by the court to "make structural changes for addressing the vulnerabilities in the process of examination".

"A dedicated wing should be created to register complaints during the examination process at all stages. Higher technology of digital watermarking and tracking be adopted", the court added in its observations.

A key feature of the protests was the active participation of coaching institute owners, many of whom ended up being booked by the administration for incitement to violence.

One of the observations made by the court was that "coaching centre owners ought to be more responsible in their conduct, which is expected of them". (PTI)

## AI-based GPT to offer real-time validated health content to counter misinformation



**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Humeta.AI, a specialist health communication GPT would deliver credible, real-time and regulatory-compliant information in a landscape overwhelmed by misinformation, said its developer, an artificial intelligence health content platform.

It offers real-time, multi-format, multi-lingual, and validated content thereby transforming healthcare communication, Dr Swadeep Srivastava, Founder and Managing Director, HealthPresso said in a statement.

It is powered by a large healthcare knowledge graph, incorporating over

1.5 million research articles and aligning with global health standards set by WHO, FDA, EMA among others, the statement said.

Healthcare professionals, marketers and institutions spend nearly 40 per cent of their time creating and publishing content, which diverts resources from patient care, research and innovation, Srivastava said.

"With limited tools for real-time, patient-friendly and compliant health information, the need for a robust AI-driven solution has never been greater," he said.

Humeta.AI is designed to serve

every stakeholder in the healthcare ecosystem, including doctors and healthcare professionals, healthcare brands and pharma marketers, medical institutions and associations, regulatory bodies and policymakers.

It is also India's first WhatsApp-based automated health marketing content generator and publisher, enabling health brands, healthcare professionals and marketers to engage physician communities with real-time and credible content daily, Srivastava said.

Daleep Singh Manhas, Co-founder and CEO, HealthPresso, emphasised

the impact of AI on healthcare professionals.

"Doctors and healthcare professionals often struggle to balance patient care with content creation and professional outreach. Humeta.AI offers an intuitive, AI-powered solution that significantly reduces the time spent on content generation while maintaining accuracy and compliance.

"This is more than a tool. It's a game-changer that allows healthcare professionals to focus on what matters most -- patient care -- while effortlessly staying engaged with their communities," he said. (PTI)

## NHRC seeks action taken report from Odisha govt, UGC, NAAC over Nepalese woman's death in KIIT

**BHUBANESWAR, March 28:** Finding gross negligence on the part of the authorities over the suicide of a 20-year-old B Tech student from Nepal at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) here, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sought an action taken report from the Odisha government, UGC and NAAC within four weeks.

The NHRC, which had sent a team to KIIT to conduct an on-the-spot probe into the death of Computer Science student Prakriti Lamsal earlier this month, uploaded the case status on its website on March 27 and stated that the rights panel has sought the report from Odisha's chief secretary, collector and district magistrate of Khurda district, commissioner of police, and chairpersons of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).

During the visit, the NHRC team found that the deceased woman had lodged a complaint with KIIT's International Relations Office (IRO) on March 12, 2024, months before taking the extreme step on February 16, 2025, the commission said.

She had named a male engineering student who had allegedly blackmailed her, it said.

"It is evident that the conduct of the IRO and university officers/disciplinary committee and college authorities (is) sufficient to show that there was gross negligence and omission on their part -- IRO and university authorities -- which may (be) treated (as) amount to (an) act of abetment to suicide... which finally resulted in her suicide," the status report of the rights panel said.

The report also stated that the university officials have admitted to the fact that almost 1,000-1,100 students left their hostels on February 17, 2025 (a day after the girl's death) whereas almost 180 women students left their hostels in such haste that could have led to some other untoward incident but the college authorities did not bother about the safety of women students and they were thrown out of the campus.

"Regrettably, the university was unrepentant and even had the audacity to reply that there had been no merit in the allegations. This manifests sheer insensitivity, if not downright arrogance," it said.

Keeping in view of the findings, the commission issued a direction to the chief secretary of Odisha and the collector and district magistrate of Khurda to submit an action taken report. (PTI)



# Coke Studio Bharat drops 'Holo Lolo': A modern take on Assam's musical heritage

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 28:** Coke Studio Bharat, the iconic stage celebrating the confluence of diverse musical styles, presents the second track of its third season 'Holo Lolo', a rhythmic dive into the world of a phandi (elephant trainer). Through a fusion of folk and contemporary sounds, Coke Studio Bharat brings this timeless connection to life, crafting a vivid sonic and visual experience. Voiced by Shankuraj Konwar and Shalmali Kholgade, the song blends Assam's regional essence with Hindi, capturing the deep bond between the phandi and his hathi saathi. Echoing solitude, longing, and nature's calling, the deep-rooted traditions of Assam's Moran community paint the tale of a phandi who roams the dense jungles and rolling hills for months, seeking pasture for his lifelong companion, his elephant. As they journey together, he pours his heart into songs, sharing whispers of love for someone who once waited in the valley. Coke Studio Bharat reimagines this poignant saga from the village of Torani with Holo Lolo, infusing it with evocative tunes and striking visuals. By weaving together folklore passed down through generations with a modern



landscape, the track bridges the past and present, resonating with today's audience while preserving the soul of an enduring legacy. Shankuraj Konwar said, "Bringing Holo Lolo to life has been an honor. Regional music is now at the forefront, and Coke Studio Bharat is making it happen by embracing India's rich traditions. It's a tribute to Assam's history, and I'm grateful to be part of a platform that gives regional artists a national stage, carrying our roots and music across the country." Shalmali Kholgade said, "Folk music has a timeless soul, and Holo Lolo beautifully blends Assamese heritage with a contemporary sound. Coke Studio Bharat is creating a space where folk music not only thrives but also resonates with a wider audience, giving traditional sounds a fresh identity while delivering what listeners seek today."

Shantanu Gangane, IMX (Integrated Marketing

Experience) Lead, Coca-Cola India, added, "Music has the power to make history sing, and that's exactly what Coke Studio Bharat is doing. Season 3 is about more than just songs - it's about reintroducing India to its own stories. Holo Lolo carries the depth of Assam's heritage and gives it a new voice, proving that tradition isn't meant to be remembered - it's meant to be relived. With Shankuraj and Shalmali onboard, we are making sure these powerful stories don't fade but rise."

Coke Studio Bharat Season 3 pushes the boundaries of musical storytelling, blending powerful visuals with rich narratives to create an immersive experience. With a deep-rooted focus on India's cultural soundscape, this season captures the emotions of life. As the season unfolds, stay tuned for more stories, more voices, and more music that evolves, inspires, and connects audiences across the country.

## HRITHIK ROSHAN TO MAKE DIRECTORIAL DEBUT WITH 'KRRISH 4', YRF COMES ON BOARD AS PRODUCER

**MUMBAI, March 28:** Superstar Hrithik Roshan is set to make his directorial debut with "Krrish 4", the next installment in his blockbuster superhero franchise, the makers announced on Friday.

The much-anticipated film will be produced by Yash Raj Films (YRF) in association with Rakesh Roshan's Filmkraft Productions and is scheduled to go on floors early next year. Hrithik, who has headlined all three previous films in the franchise, takes over the directing duties from his father Rakesh Roshan. "I'm passing the baton of the director of 'Krrish 4' to my son, Hrithik Roshan, who has lived, breathed and dreamt about this franchise since its inception with me! Hrithik has a clear and a very ambitious vision of taking Krrish's journey forward with the audience for the next decades. I couldn't be more proud to see him wear the director's hat for a film that means the world to us as a family."

"Krrish" has entertained audiences the world over and Hrithik will now reveal the next chapters of this superhero saga and take the vision I created so many years ago to greater heights," Rakesh Roshan said in a statement. The director, also known for directing several successful films including "Khoon Bhari Maang", "Karan Arjun" and "Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai", welcomed Yash Raj Films' head Aditya Chopra to the franchise.

"It was he who convinced Hrithik to sit in the director's chair. Adi and Yash Raj Films have the knowledge, understanding and technological might to produce this film and add great value to this project. Hrithik and Adi coming together as a producer-director pair with me behind them is a rare and deliciously creative combination! I'm sure they will turn 'Krrish 4' into a theatrical experience that has never been made in India. (PTI)

## Payal Kapadia developing two films set in Mumbai



**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Filmmaker Payal Kapadia says she is planning two films in the follow-up to "All We Imagine As Light", her surrealist drama that was one of the most celebrated films of 2024 and won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival.

The two projects along with "All We Imagine As Light" will form a triptych, all set in Mumbai, Kapadia told entertainment news outlet The Hollywood Reporters in Hong Kong, where the movie won the best film at the 18th Asian Film Awards.

"I have two new films in mind. Together with 'All We Imagine as Light', they will form like a triptych. Not a trilogy, because that would imply that they are a connected story. They will be different pieces, all set in Mumbai," Kapadia said. "All We Imagine As Light", an official India-French co-production, follows the story of two Malayali women Prabha (Kani Kusruti) and Anu (Divya Prabha) and their friend and cook Parvati (Chhaya Kadam) as they navigate love, longing and loss in Mumbai. The film created history last year when it became the first Indian movie to win the Grand Prix award at the Cannes Film Festival. It was followed by nominations at major award ceremonies, including Golden Globes where the film received nods for Best Motion Picture Non-English Language and the Best Direction. Though Kapadia didn't reveal much about her new ventures, she said she will continue to tell stories of women through her work. (PTI)

## Mohanlal-Prithviraj film 'L2: Empuraan' earns ₹ 22 cr on day one, says trade expert

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Actor Prithviraj Sukumaran's directorial "L2: Empuraan", starring Mohanlal, earned ₹ 22 crore across India on its opening day, according to trade tracking website Sacnilk.

"L2: Empuraan", which released in theatres on Thursday, is the second installment of the action franchise "Lucifer". Malayalam cinema star Mohanlal reprises his role of Stephen Nedumpally aka Khureshi-Abraam from the previous movie. According to Sacnilk's early estimates, the film collected ₹ 19.45 crores in Malayalam, ₹ 1.2 crores in Telugu, ₹ 80 lakh in Tamil, ₹ 50 lakh in Hindi, and ₹ five lakh in Kannada. The film team's are yet to share the official box office figures. On Wednesday, the makers

claimed that "L2: Empuraan" had collected ₹ 80 crore through pre-sale reservations alone.

Previously, the highest opening collection for a Malayalam movie in India was Prithviraj's "Aadujeevitham" (2024), which amassed over ₹ 7.6 crores nett on day one. And before that, Mohanlal's national-award winning film "Marakkar: The Lion of the Arabian Sea" earned ₹ 6.8 crore nett when it was released in 2021. Touted to be one of the costliest productions of Malayalam cinema, "L2: Empuraan" is produced by Antony Perumbavoor, Gokulam Gopalan and Subaskaran Allirajah. The film, written by Murali Gopy, features an ensemble cast including Prithviraj, Tovino Thomas, Abhimanyu Singh, Manju Warrier, Jerome Flynn and Eriq Ebouaney. (PTI)



## Blenders Pride Fashion Tour Redefines AT-LEISURE with 'Play En-Vogue' Concept in Guwahati

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 28:** Blenders Pride Fashion Tour wrapped up this edition with an unforgettable showcase in Guwahati, transforming the city into a playground of high fashion with its innovative "Play En-Vogue" concept. The event reimaged AT-LEISURE with a refined edge against the stunning backdrop of Guwahati's vibrant and scenic Greenwood Resort, featuring bold, experimental collections from designers Nitin Bal Chauhan, Abhishek Patni of NoughtOne, and Pawan Sachdeva, with the charismatic Ishaan Khatter as the showstopper.

In collaboration with the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), Blenders Pride Fashion Tour redefined India's fashion landscape with groundbreaking showcases. This synergy peaked in Guwahati, setting new benchmarks and cementing the tour's status as an industry trendsetter.

The designers revolutionized AT-LEISURE through experimental silhouettes, vivid colors, and statement pieces featuring oversized fits, asymmetrical cuts, and bold graphics, offering a fresh take on sophisticated comfort.

What truly set this showcase apart was its unconventional runway presentation. Showstopper Ishaan Khatter dazzled in Pawan Sachdeva's design, while KRSNA and KARMA delivered electrifying performances in Abhishek Patni - NoughtOne's and Nitin

Bal's creations, respectively, elevating the event to new heights.

Chief Marketing Officer and Head of Global Business Development at Pernod Ricard India Kartik Mohindra said, "With Guwahati, we concluded the most iconic edition of Blenders Pride Fashion Tour yet. Throughout each city, we had reimaged creative boundaries through groundbreaking fashion showcases featuring visionary designers and showstoppers. However, our 'Play En-Vogue' finale in Guwahati represented the pinnacle of our vision, where fashion, art, and spontaneity converged in unexpected ways. As this edition came to an end, every experience had highlighted fashion's dynamic evolution, solidifying 'The One and Only' platform as the ultimate convergence of in-

novation and iconicity like never before."

Designer Nitin Bal Chauhan, sharing his thoughts on the show, said, "Blenders Pride Fashion Tour proved to be a powerful platform for storytelling through fashion. With 'Play En-Vogue,' we challenged conventional norms by blending high fashion with artistic elements. This showcase provided an opportunity to push boundaries, and seeing the audience embrace this bold experimentation was truly exhilarating." Designer Abhishek Patni, Founder of NoughtOne, expressed, "At NoughtOne, we had always believed in redefining contemporary fashion by merging streetwear influences with high-end aesthetics. Blenders Pride Fashion Tour provided the perfect platform to bring our vision of cutting-edge, bold, and unconventional AT-LEISURE to life, creating an experience that was as dynamic as the designs themselves."



## Marcus Rutherford on playing Perrin in 'The Wheel of Time': It's a journey that mirrors my own

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** Actor Marcus Rutherford, who plays Perrin Aybara in Prime Video's fantasy series "The Wheel of Time", says it is a luxury to explore a character's arc over multiple seasons.

Headlined by Oscar nominee Rosamund Pike, "The Wheel of Time" is based on Robert Jordan's bestselling fantasy book series and follows a world where magic exists but can only be wielded by certain individuals.

It revolves around Moiraine Damodred (Rosamund Pike), a member of the Aes Sedai, who embarks on a journey with five young villagers—one of whom is prophesied to be the Dragon Reborn, a figure destined to either save or destroy the world.

The show recently returned with its third season on Prime Video.

"I think to get the opportunity to do and play with that source material, but to get that time to explore a character who has an arc that might span over three seasons, I think that's a real luxury in TV at the moment," Rutherford told PTI in a virtual interview.

To build a character from season one and see it evolve over the next few seasons requires a great deal of effort and time, he added.

"All those moments and choices back in 2019-20, they're kind of paying off now. So it really kind of dawned on me how fortunate we've been to play with these characters and have that amount of time to kind of see their arcs and journeys through," Rutherford said.

The actor said as Perrin has grown in the series, he has noted a growth in his performance as well.

"I feel confident in what he's doing and what I'm kind of doing with the character. I think that's all kind of like mirroring one another through season one, two, and now three to get to a point where he's kind speaking openly. He's got people looking at him. There's leadership."

"Back in like 2019 and 2020, that might have been quite a big task for me, maybe as an actor. But I think that kind of journey with the character and myself has been, interestingly, quite mirrored," he added. (PTI)



# Semi-final berth at stake as Bengaluru FC host Mumbai City FC in knockout match

**BENGALURU, March 28:** Former Cup winners Bengaluru FC, powered by the evergreen Sunil Chhetri, would look to secure a place in the Indian Super League semi-finals when they host Mumbai City FC in a high-stake knockout clash here on Saturday.

The veteran forward Chhetri, who recently came out of International retirement, has already converted four penalties this season and could become the first player to score 10 goals against Mumbai City FC in ISL history.

Chhetri has scored eight goals in ISL playoffs -- more than any other player in the competition's history -- as he would once again look to make a difference.

With goals in three of his last four playoff appearances, the Indian legend remains a major threat to the Islanders' backline.

Bengaluru finished third in the league standings with 38 points from 24 matches, courtesy of 11 wins and five draws. Mumbai City FC, on the other hand, managed to scrape into the playoffs with a sixth-place finish after a decisive 2-0 victory over the Blues on the final matchday.

The top two teams -- Mohan Bagan Super Giant and FC Goa this season -- at the end of the League stage will automatically qualify for the semi-finals. Teams finishing between third and sixth will feature in a single-leg knockout to determine the other two semi-finalists.

NorthEast United and Jamshedpur FC finished fourth and fifth in



the league stage and they face against each other on Sunday in Shillong to seal the last remaining semifinal spot.

Historically, Mumbai City FC have dominated this fixture in recent times, winning four of their last five matches against Bengaluru.

However, the hosts will take

confidence from their dramatic penalty shootout victory over the Islanders in the 2022-23 semi-finals, the only previous playoff meeting between the two sides.

Mumbai City have been rock-solid at the back, keeping four consecutive clean sheets against Bengaluru FC while scoring eight times in those matches.

Having recorded the second-most clean sheets this season (10), head coach Petr Kratky will rely on his defensive setup to frustrate Bengaluru's attack.

Bengaluru FC, on the other hand, have averaged a shot every 35.2 passes in ISL 2024-25, the highest ratio among all teams this season.

Mumbai City FC will need to disrupt their rhythm and deny them space in key attacking zones.

Mumbai City FC have won each of their last four playoff matches -- the longest such streak in ISL history. A victory on Saturday would extend that record and send them into the semi-finals yet again.

Kratky already has three playoff wins under his belt. If his team wins, he will tie Sergio Lobera for the second-most playoff wins in ISL history (four), trailing only Antonio Lopez Habas (six wins).

In terms of head-to-head record, Mumbai City are way ahead with 10 wins from 18 meetings, with Bengaluru FC managing six to their name. The remaining two were draws.

Bengaluru FC head coach Gerard Zaragoza exuded confidence in his team's ability to deliver under pressure.

"It's a completely different game. We are talking about playoffs at Kanteerava. It's an all-or-nothing game, and believe me, we know how to play these kinds of matches," Zaragoza said.

Mumbai City FC head coach Petr Kratky acknowledged his team's progress and preparation.

"For me, this is a completely different competition. We are playing for the ISL Cup. We have reflected on what's worked and what hasn't, and we've worked hard to fix our weaknesses," he said. (PTI)

## NBA and FIBA to take next steps toward adding a new European league, sides announce

**NEW YORK, March 28:** The NBA may soon be significantly expanding its presence in European basketball, in the form of partnering with FIBA on a new league that the sides have been talking about for many years.

Specifics are few, with the initial target -- for now -- being that it would be a 16-team league. But the announcement made Thursday by NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and FIBA secretary general Andreas Zagklis is a major step forward after a long process of the sides going back and forth with ideas about what might work.

"We feel now is the time to move to that next stage," Silver said, noting that NBA owners offered "enthusiastic support" for such a move.

It's a notion that has made sense for some time, particularly with the growth of the game in Europe and development of stars hailing from that part of the world.

About one in every six current NBA players hail from Europe, including Denver's Nikola Jokic (Serbia) and Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo (Greece) -- who have combined for five of the last six MVP awards -- along with the Los Angeles Lakers' Luka Doncic (Serbia) and San Antonio's Victor Wembanyama (France).

"Basketball is the No. 2 sport in Europe. It's widely popular. Hundreds of millions of fans. Roughly 15% of the players in the NBA right now are from Europe. Five out of the last six of our MVPs have been European," Silver said.

"But there's a huge gap, I think, between the amount of interest in the sport and the development in terms of how we operate a league here in North America."

The league would likely use FIBA rules, such as a 40-minute game instead of the NBA's 48-minute model, Silver said. But much of the other details -- who, when, where -- will be determined in the months ahead.

"FIBA has been running competitions for almost seven decades, since the 1957-58 season, and cer-

tainly we have seen great product," Zagklis said.

"We have seen great players. But at the same time, we have come to the conclusion that the popularity of the sport and the success that we've had with the national team competitions is not matched by fan interest and a commercial impact commensurate to that success."

The NBA and FIBA, the sport's global governing body, were in discussions for some time about adding either an annual competition in Europe or having an NBA-operated league there. It was a topic at a Board of Governors meeting this past September, one where Zagklis took part.

Zagklis was back for this meeting, and clearly things were trending this way since at least last summer if not even longer.

"Coming out of the most successful World Cup and Olympics ever, we also believe it is the right time to take the next step for club basketball," Zagklis said.

In January, speaking at the NBA Paris Games -- when the league took advantage of the trip to France to meet with European stakeholders on the topic of the future of basketball on that continent -- Silver said he believes the NBA remains "on track" in the process of expanding its footprint in Europe. That was also when he said the league's governors would be briefed further at the March meeting.

"The response we've gotten from the marketplace is very positive," Silver said.

Zagklis said FIBA's leadership also unanimously agrees that it's the right time to partner with the NBA on a new league.

"Our role as a federation is to unite the basketball ecosystem," Zagklis said.

The new league -- which would likely carry some sort of NBA branding, given how recognizable the league and its logo are -- would be part of the current European club system, and teams would also play in their respective national leagues. (AP)

## Boxer Nishant eyes Olympic success through Pro stint

**GREATER NOIDA, March 28:** Indian pugilist Nishant Dev believes that his stint in the physically-demanding professional circuit will help him develop endurance, which will be key when he takes another shot at fulfilling his Olympic dream at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

Dev turned professional earlier this year, owing to his close loss in the Paris Games quarterfinals and the state of flux surrounding boxing's Olympic future.

In amateur boxing, a bout lasts a maximum of nine minutes with three rounds of three minutes each whereas in Pro boxing, the bouts can stretch to even 12 rounds.

"One of the biggest reasons to go professional was that my endurance and stamina was low."

"To improve that, I joined professional boxing, so that I am used to playing more rounds in pro and when I come back to amateur boxing, I can handle three rounds," Dev said on the final day of the women's National Championships here.

The 2023 World Championship light middle-weight (71kg) bronze medallist, Dev, has been one of India's most consistent boxers in recent years.

He has signed a three-year contract with Matchroom Boxing, which will conclude a year before the LA Olympics, where he hopes to stand atop the podium.

"Nearer to the Olympics my contract ends. So I will come

back to India and play the qualifiers," Dev said now that boxing has returned to the Olympic roster.

BFI President Ajay Singh has also kept the door open for Dev's return to the national team.

"We will choose the best boxers for the Olympics amateur or pro. Nishant is certainly one of the best that we have in this country," Singh said.

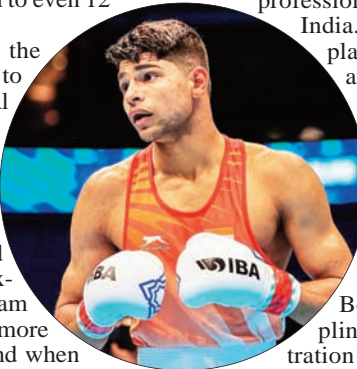
Dev also aspires to fight for the World Boxing Council (WBC) belt like legends Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson.

"I want to create a legacy. There is no world champion in professional boxing from India. But I want to

play for the belt after I become the Olympic champion and I want to fight for the belt in India. Bring professional boxing to the country."

The Haryana Boxer is still grappling with the frustration of two controversial split-decision losses -- against USA's Omari Jones at the first World Olympic Qualifiers in Italy and Marco Verde in the Paris Games quarterfinals. "People say that you won the first round and lost the third round (to Verde). But I watched the video 100,000 times and I didn't feel like I lost. Even in the last round, he clinched 10-12 times. The referee didn't see that, turned a blind eye. There was partiality."

The 24-year-old hopes the new world governing body -- World Boxing will address the sport's scoring system. (PTI)



## Chelsea rallies past Man City to reach Women's Champions League semis

**LONDON, March 28:** Chelsea staged a big first-half comeback to march into the semifinals of the Women's Champions League with a 3-0 victory over Manchester City.

Sandy Baltimore scored early in the all-England quarterfinal at Stamford Bridge before Nathalie Björn and Mayra Ramirez netted in a five-minute span to overturn a 2-0 deficit from the first leg and set up a last-four matchup against defending champion Barcelona.

"We were never in doubt," Chelsea captain Millie Bright told TNT Sports. "We had full confidence in ourselves. We could have had way more than three goals. Unbelievable mentality and desire to come back. A true Chelsea performance."

Baltimore gave Chelsea a 1-0 lead on a rebound with a left-footed, one-timed strike after a low shot from Lucy Bronze hit the post in the 14th.

Björn headed in to double the advantage in the 38th before Lauren James set up Ramirez, whose shot beat goalkeeper Khara Keating and put Chelsea ahead 3-2 on aggregate.

Last week, City had ended Chelsea's unbeaten run with a 2-0 victory to become the first team to defeat Chelsea under coach Sonia Bompastor -- in her team's 29th game of the season. Barcelona remained on course for a third straight Women's Champions League title after routing Wolfsburg 6-1 in the second leg of their quarterfinal encounter.

Forward Salma Paralluelo



and Clàudia Pina each scored twice as Barcelona reached the semifinal on a massive 10-2 aggregate score.

The Catalan powerhouse has scored a total of 36 goals in eight games in the competition this season.

Barcelona won 4-1 in the first leg last week in the first meeting of the two teams since the Spanish side beat Wolfsburg 3-2 in the 2023 Champions League final. It was nowhere near that margin again at the Estadi Johan Cruyff.

Paralluelo completed a fast move with a clinical left-footed low finish from the left corner of the area 10 minutes in. Only 10 minutes later, Esmee Brugts cut back for her from the left to add the second from inside the

box before dancing with her smiling teammates in celebration. Brugts made it 3-0 with a powerful drive from some 20 meters (yards) to beat goalkeeper Anneke Borbe.

Pina controlled the ball with her left foot before unleashing a right-footed strike from the edge of the area to add the fourth in the 62nd, less than four minutes after coming on as substitute.

Only then did Wolfsburg respond, when substitute Lineth Beerensteyn scored with her first touch of the ball.

But Pina curled in a free kick for her second and seventh of the campaign in the 77th and Maria León netted the sixth from a long-distance free kick in stoppage time. (AP)

## Barcelona beat Osasuna 3-0 to extend La Liga lead

**BARCELONA (SPAIN), March 28:** Ferran Torres and Dani Olmo scored early goals to lead Barcelona to a 3-0 win over Osasuna and extend its lead of the Spanish league.

Coach Hansi Flick rested Robert Lewandowski until the final stretch, when the Poland star came on and headed in a cross by fellow substitute Fermin López.

It was Lewandowski's league-leading 23rd goal of the season.

The game had been originally scheduled for March 8 but was postponed after a first-team doctor of Barcelona died hours before kickoff.

The victory moved Barcelona three points ahead of Real Madrid and seven points ahead of Atletico Madrid with 10 rounds remaining.

Torres culminated a team passing move in the 11th minute when he scored from a low cross by Alejandro Balde.

Frenkie de Jong played Balde clear before the left back found Torres for the striker's 14th goal of the season across all compe-

titions despite playing most games as a second-half substitute for Lewandowski. Torres also hit the crossbar with a free kick late in the first half.

"I try to make the most of my minutes," he said. "I don't consider myself a super sub. I am prepared to play whenever the coach needs me."

Olmo doubled the lead in the 21st after converting a penalty on a second try that he had earned when fouled by goalkeeper Sergio Herrera. Herrera saved his initial penalty but Olmo made good on a second attempt after Osasuna midfielder Jon Moncayola invaded the area early.

Olmo left the game a few minutes later with an apparent leg injury.

Osasuna's top scorer Ante Budimir, who came from playing with Croatia, went on for the final half hour but was unable to threaten in attack.

Barcelona extended its unbeaten run in 2025 to 19 straight games across all competitions. (AP)

## SHIKHAR DHAWAN'S LIFE LESSONS HAVE TRANSFORMED ME, SAYS ASHUTOSH SHARMA

**KOLKATA, March 28:** Ashutosh Sharma will forever remain indebted to his former franchise Punjab Kings' skipper Shikhar Dhawan, whose "life lessons" will stay with him "forever".

The 26-year-old played a sensational unbeaten innings of 66 off 31 balls, smashing five fours and five sixes to steer Delhi Capitals in a thrilling chase of 210 against Lucknow Super Giants despite being 65/5 at one stage. After the victory, Ashutosh dedicated his Player-of-the-Match award to Dhawan, acknowledging the impact the veteran left-hander has had on his career.

Ashutosh, who has been picked by DC for INR 3.8 crore

at the mega auction, first crossed paths with Dhawan during his stint with Punjab Kings, where he found not just a teammate but a mentor, who had a massive influence in his approach to the game.

"He (Dhawan) was very happy with my knock. He always tells me to stay down to earth and humble. He hasn't taught me much about skills, but his lessons on life, mindset, and approach to the game have changed my life a lot," Ashutosh said.

Reflecting on Dhawan's influence during his stint with Punjab, he acknowledged the veteran batter's guidance.

"He's kind of a mentor. Ever since our first camp in Punjab,

he's been a mentor to me. And that's when my journey started."

"After that, I worked on mentally. Not on my skills, because everyone's skills are different. But he asked me to work on my mindset, how to deal with yourself, how you manifest yourself, all this has helped me a lot."

For the Railwayman, sticking to the process is the most important thing.

"I am very clear in my thoughts. I always focus on my work. The process is important to me. If you follow the process well, the results will come. That's what I believe in," the 26-year-old said during the JioStar - Delhi Capitals Press Room on Friday. Following his heroics, Ashutosh celebrated with a



'switch hit' gesture -- a homage to Delhi Capitals' mentor Kevin Pietersen who was watching from the dugout.

"When the batting started, he was telling me again and again

that you can do it, you can do it. And I felt really good. So, I thought, let's finish this game and celebrate like KP."

The former England captain, who joined the franchise before

IPL 2024, has played a pivotal role in instilling confidence in the young batter, particularly in finishing matches under pressure. "They (Dhawan and KP) tell me a lot of things -- how to approach the game, their attitude towards it, and how to handle pressure situations. The key lesson I've learned is to remain calm in crunch moments and keep my head clear," he added.

Ashutosh has also had the privilege of interacting with MS Dhoni during a match against Chennai Super Kings last season and he said getting a advice from the 'Captain Cool'.

"Yes, I did talk to him. When we had a match against CSK, I talked to him about the situation, how you would bat, what you

think. He told me a lot of things. It's a secret."

"You learn a lot from those legends of the game. How they approach the game, how they put everything into their game. I feel very happy and grateful that I play with all of them," he added. The dynamic hitter also shared insights into his meticulous preparation, revealing that he had been practising range-hitting in the off-season as it has helped him counter wide yorkers effectively.

"Yeah, I've practiced a lot for that. Whenever we don't have a season or matches, I practice range hitting for 2-3 hours. With the side cover and spinners, alone in the center of the wicket. It helps me a lot." (PTI)



# Skipper Pandya's comeback to boost MI, Siraj's form concerns Titans

**AHMEDABAD, March 28:** Skipper Hardik Pandya's much-anticipated comeback after serving a one-match ban will lend the required balance to Mumbai Indians' line-up when they take on an equally desperate Gujarat Titans here on Saturday as both teams are chasing their first victory in the ongoing edition of the IPL.

Mumbai could not break their long-standing jinx of losing their IPL opener as Chennai Super Kings comfortably won by four wickets while Gujarat Titans lost a high-scoring game to Punjab Kings by 11 runs.

With nearly a week's gap between the first and second games, the MI team spent a few days at Reliance's Jamnagar facility where the whole unit relaxed and engaged in team bonding activities.

It is still early days in the tournament and MI's struggle without their pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was apparent and missing regular skipper Pandya in the opening game only made the matter worse.

In Indian cricket, Pandya is the only pure pace bowling all-rounder, who can make a complete difference with either of his skill-sets.

His comeback means that Robin Minz possibly would have to sit out but MI's batting on a slightly tacky Chepaup surface didn't inspire much confidence.

But on Saturday evening in Ahmedabad, the conditions for batting will be much better after 475 runs cumulatively were scored in the opening match between Punjab Kings (243) and Titans (232).

And on a track which is a batting paradise, a serious question mark remains on Mohammed Siraj's effectiveness. He gave away 54 runs in the opening game and was taken to cleaners by the Punjab Kings batters.



With not many senior Indian pacers in the GT ranks, it will be a strategic call that home team head coach Ashish Nehra will fret upon. The pressure to contain runs as well as take wickets is way too much on Kagiso Rabada and Rashid Khan.

In fact, if one revisits the opening games of both teams, it was evident that both are struggling with perfect combination of foreign recruits.

In case of MI, the issues have compounded because India's current T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav has not been in form for a year now and former skipper Rohit Sharma's current form is also inconsistent to put it mildly.

Pandya's inclusion obviously adds firepower to batting and he can also open the bowling if necessary. He can also bowl those wide yorkers at the death overs, which Vyshak Vijaykumar of Punjab Kings executed effectively.

One of MI's main problems is wicket-keeping as they rely heavily on Ryan Rickleton. Robin Minz, who played as a batter looked out of place even though it was just the first game.

It will also be a test for rookie left-arm wrist spinner Vignesh Puthur, who got three CSK wickets on a helpful track. At Motera, the ball won't grip as much as it did at Chepaup and the turn will also be minimal. How

the youngster is managed by his skipper is a big question.

For Titans, skipper Shubman Gill's season with the willow will be an indicator as to how the team performs eventually.

In the opener, the manner in which Vyshak bowled only one type of deliveries -- wide yorker or wide low full-toss -- to Sherfane Rutherford's arc, the home team coaching staff would feel that Glenn Phillips could be a better choice going forward, considering he also bowls off-spin.

But it is the bowling that will give Gill nightmares as most Indian bowlers -- Siraj, Prasidh Krishna and veteran Ishant Sharma are one dimensional hit-the-deck bowlers. No pacer except Rabada has subtle variations in his armoury.

**Teams:**

**Gujarat Titans:** Jos Buttler, Shubman Gill, Sai Sudharsan, Glenn Phillips, Shahrux Khan, Washington Sundar, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan, Ravishrinivasan Sai Kishore, Kagiso Rabada, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Ishant Sharma, Jayant Yadav, Mahipal Lomror, Karim Janat, Kulwant Khejroliya, Anuj Rawat, Gerald Coetzee, Sherfane Rutherford, Manav Suthar, Kumar Kushagra, Arshad Khan, Gurnoor Brar, Nishant Sindhu

**Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Robin Minz, Ryan Rickleton (wk), Shrijith Krishnan (wk), Bevon Jacobs, Tilak Varma, Naman Dhir, Will Jacks, Mitchell Santner, Raj Angad Bawa, Vignesh Puthur, Corbin Bosch, Trent Boult, Karn Sharma, Deepak Chahar, Ashwani Kumar, Reece Topley, VS Pannemsa, Arjun Tendulkar, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Jasprit Bumrah.

Match Starts 7:30 PM. (PTI)

## BCCI's Centre of Excellence set to get new spin bowling coach replacing Bahutule

**NEW DELHI, March 28:** The BCCI's Centre of Excellence (COE) will soon have a new spin bowling coach, replacing Sairaj Bahutule, who resigned earlier this year to join the IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals.

The COE, which has shifted to its new location in Bengaluru, was earlier known as National Cricket Academy (NCA).

Since Bahutule left, the post lay vacant and now the board has invited applications for a role which will be "integral to the development and performance enhancement of India's spin bowling talent across all formats and age groups including India Senior Teams (Men & Women), India A, U-23, U-19, U-16, and U-15 squads and State association players training at the BCCI COE."

As per job requirement, the spin bowling coach will report to VVS Laxman, Head, Cricket at COE.

"The Spin Bowling Coach will work closely with the Head Cricket, BCCI COE, to design and deliver specialized coaching programs and assist in performance monitoring."

"The role also involves working closely with Selectors, National and State Coaches, Performance Analysts, and Strength & Conditioning experts to develop high-performance training plans," the BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia was quoted as saying in a media release.

Among the key responsibilities of the new spin bowling coach, the most important will certainly be the rehabilitation and match fitness certification of injured cricketers under the aegis of COE.

The mandatory requirements also include planning and executing training sessions, one-on-one technical coaching, individual roadmap for players with tangible (measurable) objectives.

The coach also needs to be technically savvy with knowledge of biomechanics and ability to decipher the data stored in GPS devices.

The qualification demands the incumbent to be either a former India player or a first-class cricketers with 75-match experience. Previous experience of being part of high performance coach will be given credence. A BCCI level 2 or 3 certification is also necessary. (PTI)



## Djokovic beats Korda, advances to semifinals in push for 7<sup>th</sup> Miami Open title

**MIAMI GARDENS (FLORIDA), March 28:**

Novak Djokovic is finding a higher gear in South Florida after a sluggish start to 2025. Djokovic, gunning for his seventh Miami Open title, dispatched American Sebastian Korda 6-3, 7-6 (7-4) Thursday in one hour, 24 minutes in a quarterfinal match that was postponed from Wednesday night because the women's quarterfinal between Jessica Pegula and Emma Raducanu ran past 11 p.m. and would have begun at about midnight — against new ATP rules.

Djokovic advanced to Friday's semifinals and will face Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov. Djokovic is 12-1 against the 33-year-old Dimitrov, who reached the tournament finals in 2024.

Djokovic, who won all six of his titles at the tournament's previous venue at Key Biscayne, is going for his 100th professional title. "I'm getting great support," Djokovic said. "I feel I have a really good chance to go all the way here. ...I'm playing the best I have in some time." With the Hard Rock Stadium fans cheering the 37-year-old and chanting his name despite him facing an American opponent, Djokovic rallied in the second set from 4-1 and 5-2 down to win in a tiebreaker.

He served an ace on match point and finished with an 83 first-serve percentage against the 24th-seeded Korda. The 37-year-old Serbian let out a yell after the victory and strummed his racket like a violin.

"One word — serve," Djokovic said when asked the key to his second-set surge. "I was serving very well — best serving performance in a long time."

The men's leader in Grand Slam titles at 24 has been out of form this year, starting with an injury retirement at the Australian Open in January. Earlier this month, Djokovic lost his first match at Indian Wells

to Botic van de Zandschulp.

Korda, son of Grand slam champion Petr Korda who grew up at the Bradenton, Florida, tennis academies, had beaten a top-10 opponent in Stefanos Tsitsipas earlier in the tournament and played at a flawless level to build a 4-1 second-set lead before Djokovic found his game.

In the first women's semifinal, No. 1 seed Aryna Sabalenka routed sixth-seeded Jasmine Paolini 6-2, 6-2 in 71 minutes to advance to her first Miami Open final.

Paolini, the 2024 French Open finalist, spent some of the afternoon smirking at Sabalenka's deft shot-making, saying at one juncture "What a day."

Sabalenka, of Belarus, was efficient in converting four of her five break points and pounded 31 winners to just 12 unforced errors.

When Paolini tried to mount a comeback in the second set, closing to 4-2 and up a double-break point at 15-40, Sabalenka hit three open-court winners and an ace to close the game.

Paolini, in her best showing at the Miami Open, couldn't match Sabalenka's brilliance. The Belarusian hasn't dropped a set so far.

"I think I was so focused and everything went smoothly," Sabalenka said. Sabalenka will face the winner of Thursday night's semifinal between Jessica Pegula and Alexandra Eala of the Philippines. Asked if she would watch the match or go out in Miami, where she now lives, Sabalenka said, "I usually go for dinner, but other than that, it's always tennis on my TV, actually. I'm actually enjoying, like, watching tennis lately. That's crazy. I'm getting old."

In the day's first men's quarterfinal, unseeded teenager Jakub Mensik beat 17th-seeded Arthur Fils 7-6 (7-5), 6-1. The 19-year-old Mensik advanced to his first semifinal at an ATP 1000-point level event. (AP)

## It's fascinating to bat alongside Pooran: Marsh

**HYDERABAD, March 28:** Mitchell Marsh finds it "fascinating" to watch Nicholas Pooran send the ball soaring into the stands and is relieved that he does have to bowl at the West Indies dasher, who just slaughters the rival bowling attacks.

Pooran was the star of the Lucknow Super Giants' easy chase against Sunrisers Hyderabad as he scored 70 off just 26 balls. He also had a fruitful stand with Marsh, who chipped in with 52 off 31 balls.

The duo also scored half-centuries in the opening game against Delhi Capitals and shared the highest stand (for second wicket) in both games.

"The only word I have for it is 'fascinating'. I've played against Nicky for a long time, and usually, I've been on the receiving end of such innings," Marsh said at the post-match press conference.

"Being on the same team, I feel a great connection with him as a bloke and as someone who I'm going to hopefully bat with a lot," Marsh added.

When Pooran is in his elements, Marsh feels no need for extra communication.

"There wasn't much chat, to be honest. When someone's in the zone like he was, you just try to build a partnership and keep going. He was almost unstoppable tonight."

Asked whether it was a bold call to chase, Marsh said, "I'm not part of those discussions, but I don't think it was a risky decision."



Batting first and defending against them would have been just as bold.

"No matter who you play, you need to execute well across 40 overs to win in the IPL. We felt chasing was the right approach on this pitch, and it worked out well for us."

Marsh didn't forget to praise young pacer Prince Yadav, who repeatedly landed the blockhole deliveries troubling a star-studded Hyderabad batting line-up that managed only 190 for 9 on a placid track after scoring 286 in the previous game.

Prince not only dismissed Travis Head but also had a hand in running out Heinrich Klaasen as he finished with impressive fig-

ures of 1/29 in 4 overs.

"Really proud of Prince. He bowled with great control. A long tournament like this tests a team's depth, and it was impressive to see him step up so early in the season."

Deservingly, Shardul Thakur got the Player of The Match award for his four wickets and Marsh couldn't have been more generous in his praise.

"Shardul was outstanding. He set the tone right away and showed his experience, especially when Travis and Abhishek were putting us under pressure. It was a well-rounded performance from us."

"I'm really proud of how our bowling unit stepped up today. We executed our plans well. Five years ago, if a team scored 190,

you wouldn't say you bowled brilliantly."

"But that's how the game has evolved. I do hope we see a 300-run total in the IPL this season just not against us," Marsh, who is nicknamed 'Bison' in the Australian cricket fraternity said.

Sunrisers Hyderabad wicket-keeper-batter Heinrich Klaasen admitted that his team fell short of a competitive total, making it difficult to challenge their opponents.

"A score of 210-220 would have been par on this wicket," Klaasen said, reflecting on the team's batting performance.

He pointed out that losing wickets at crucial moments disrupted their momentum. "We kept losing wickets at the wrong times, and that's something we need to address. We'll make sure it doesn't happen too often in the future."

The South African batter also said SRH do not take any opposition lightly.

"Every team is playing quality cricket. Especially on a pitch like this, any batting unit can put the opposition bowlers under pressure."

"Credit to the opposition they bowled well in the middle overs and took early wickets, which hampered our momentum. But that's part of the game. Losing one or two wickets early made it difficult to keep the scoring rate up. On a good batting track like this, our total simply wasn't enough." (PTI)

## Autopsy expert says Diego Maradona was in agony in the hours before his death

**Buenos Aires (Argentina), March 28:**

One of the forensic experts responsible for performing Diego Maradona's autopsy said the Argentine soccer great suffered agony for at least 12 hours before he died and noted that "any doctor" should have noticed symptoms several days earlier.

Carlos Cassinelli, director of Forensic Medicine at the Scientific Police Superintendency, on Thursday provided details of the autopsy performed the day of Maradona's death — Nov. 25, 2020 — during home hospitalization in a house located in the Buenos Aires municipality of Tigre.

"The heart was completely covered in fat and blood clots, which indicate agony," the specialist said during the homicide trial for seven health professionals.

The autopsy concluded that Maradona died from acute pulmonary edema secondary to congestive heart failure.

"This is a patient who had been collecting water over the days; that's not acute. This was something that was foreseeable," Cassinelli said. "Any doctor examining a patient would find this."

According to the prosecution, the accused professionals — a neurosurgeon, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, doctors, and nurses — who were caring for Maradona during his convalescence failed to provide adequate medical care, which allegedly led to his death.

During the investigation, several witnesses testified that they noticed Maradona's face and abdomen were excessively swollen.

Among those on trial are Leopoldo Luque, Maradona's personal physician for the last four years of his life, and psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov, who prescribed medication that Maradona took until the time of his death. (AP)

## Lack of fear factor in batters resulting in higher Power Play scores: Parthiv Patel

**AHMEDABAD, March 28:** Gujarat Titans' assistant coach Parthiv Patel on Friday said the lack of "fear factor" in batters has resulted in raising the Power Play score "benchmark" in the Indian Premier League.

Recalling that 45 was the ideal Power Play score for IPL teams during his playing days, the former India wicket keeper-batter Patel said sidearm throw specialists have also helped the batters adjust to the pace.

"There is no doubt about that. That planning

has gone (high). I mean, in the first year when I started opening, our thinking was (to score) 45 runs; if we get 45 for one, it will be a good power play (score)." Patel told the media here ahead of GT's clash against Mumbai Indians on Saturday.

"Then it went on to become 50, (then) 55, (then) 60. Having said that, we still have to look at the conditions. If you're playing in Chennai, 150 was good enough. That's why you don't expect a team to score 70, 80 (in

Power Plays)," he added.

He said the desired mark in Power Plays has now been moved up.

"But when you're looking at all the games, generally you tend to think that 70 is the benchmark. What kind of conditions we are playing in, that matters the most, but that benchmark has definitely gone higher than 45 for sure," he said.

Patel said training against side-arm throw specialists has also helped the batters. (PTI)

## Fans' obsession for Dhoni is strange, does not serve the game well: Rayudu

**CHENNAI, March 28:** Former India batter Ambati Rayudu says the phenomenal support Mahendra Singh Dhoni enjoys from the CSK fans has gradually morphed into an unhealthy obsession which is daunting for other batters to handle as the crowd is always anticipating their early dismissal so that they can see their 'Thala' bat.

Rayudu said the fans' support is first for Dhoni and then for Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and probably in future it may hurt the team's branding which has always revolved around one man.

"It is quite daunting if you're a newcomer. It's quite loud. The support is phenomenal. But, as you go on and play, then you realise they are MS Dhoni fans before they are CSK fans," Rayudu told ESPNcricinfo.

"It is quite evident, and rightly so, because that's the way the team has been set up and built over the years. He's rightly

named Thala (leader) and he has been calling the shots in CSK, and it's come to a stage where people are madly in awe and in love of what he's done for CSK."

The 43-year-old Dhoni, who retired from international cricket in 2020, began batting lower down the order in the IPL and also quit captaincy last year to facilitate a smooth transition.

He comes to bat at either number seven or eight, and gets hardly 10-15 balls in a match, curtailing his crease time considerably.

Since he does not bat for a long time, the fans go berserk when the charismatic former India captain starts his walk to the crease.

Rayudu said it's been happening for quite a few years now, and several players have felt it even though they have not said it openly.

"...but internally, a lot of people used to feel that the crowd even though we



also love MS Dhoni, and they also love MS Dhoni and we want to see him bat, but sometimes when you, as an individual, are going out to bat they are shouting

from the crowd to literally asking you to get out. Or they are anticipating or expecting you to get out."

"So it is quite strange, and I don't think

it actually serves the game well to be very honest. All the (other) players are giving their best for the team as well and they have put in a lot of sacrifice to be where they are. When things like that happen from their own crowd, I feel, maybe it can be avoided."

Rayudu said there is nothing wrong about a player's superstar status but hinted that after Dhoni hangs his boots, the side will struggle to pull crowd.

He also said the fans need to root for other key members such as Ravindra Jadeja.

"(CSK) have not built up any other guy in the franchise to pull the crowds, because it has always revolved around MS Dhoni. That might come back to maybe bite them in terms of branding or getting the crowds in. So they will have to really think out of the box to make something happen."

"It is hard to challenge the number of

fans that are present there and ask them to support your players."

"But that's what any good crowd would generally do - support the team, support the players, and especially Jadeja, who has done so well in the recent past for the franchise, who has won some crucial games."

Rayudu said Dhoni has not addressed this aspect in the past but only he can do it.

"I don't know if it's the right thing to do for him as well. Because all of them are rooting for the franchise as well. Maybe he thought it was prudent not to. It's just the culture."

"We are in awe of these superstars. I don't think it should change, but there should be a balance, especially in a team game. Because there are also other individuals who are affected by it. The best person who can address that is Dhoni himself." (PTI)