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www.thehillstimes.in

THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXVI

Issue No. 056

RNI-ASSEN/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 2025

PAGES 12

PRICE ₹ 8

PM Modi has hands-on approach to resolve Manipur issue: Kiren Rijiju

NEW DELHI, March 7: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a hands-on approach to finding a long-term solution to the problem faced by the people in Manipur, Union minister Kiren Rijiju said on Friday.

Speaking at the India Today Conclave, Rijiju said he was hopeful of peace returning to Manipur soon as the government has a focused approach to finding a solution to the problem which is a result of ethnic violence between two communities.

Rijiju also dismissed the opposition clamour for Modi's visit to Manipur.

"What do you mean by the prime minister visiting a place where there is a problem? The prime minister should know the problem. That is more important. Visiting and making a statement is another thing. This is the only prime minister who has gone to the root to ensure that the problem that is faced by the people of Manipur

will be settled and solved forever," the minister said.

He said that on earlier occasions when thousands of people were killed in Manipur, only a joint secretary official would make a day-long visit to the state.

Rijiju said home minister Amit Shah had stayed in Manipur for four days and made an appeal for peace. "I am very hopeful that with the hands-on approach of the prime minister and the home minister, we all are equally focussed in addressing the issue," the minister said.

Rijiju said after the imposition of the President's Rule in Manipur, the Governor has already made an appeal for laying down of arms. "Arms are being surrendered .. good news is coming," said Rijiju, the Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs.

Rijiju said that the reason why the BJP has flourished in the northeast in the past decade is because everyone (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Delay in submission of UCs affecting fund release: Patowary

Oppn demands special package for 'chars' to address development gaps

GUWAHATI, March 7: Opposition parties of Assam on Friday demanded a special package for 'chars' (riverine vegetative islands), maintaining that residents of these areas lack adequate education, healthcare and other basic facilities.

The government, however, claimed that "development and welfare of char areas are being pursued through various schemes and there was no need for a special package."

Congress MLA Abdul Batin Khandakar had moved the resolution in the Assembly urging the government to grant special package to mitigate the development disparity of the char areas.

Claiming that the char areas, inhabited mostly by Bengal-Muslims, "lack adequate basic facilities," Khandakar said there was a need to "increase literacy rate in these parts and ensure more economic activities."

He said high population growth rate is also an issue in the char areas, with "low literacy rate being a prime reason for it."

Another Congress legislator, Abdur Rasheed Mandal, said there is an "urgent need for a survey of the char areas and special budgetary allocation for undertaking development activities."

Supporting him, AIUDF legislator Ashraf Hussain pointed out that the last socio-economic survey was done in 2003.



"Conducting the survey is not a very difficult task. A group of MLAs can get it done with administrative support from the government," he said.

Rafiqul Islam, also from the AIUDF, said lack of land rights in char areas remain a pressing problem.

"The government has said that survey of land will be done under Basundhara 4.0. But

only survey is not enough. Land allotment has to be made. And if it is done, half of the problems of the people of these areas will be solved," he asserted.

To address the issue of low literacy and inadequate healthcare facilities, Islam advocated granting special allowance to government officials posted in these departments in char, remote and hill areas.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, replying on behalf of the Minority Affairs minister, said, "Funds for some Central schemes for minorities were being held up as submission of a large number of utilisation certificates (UCs) were pending since 2008."

"We have been working overtime to get the UCs and many have been submitted over the last three years, leading to release of money by the Centre. Once more UCs are submitted, more funds will come," he added.

Patowary said there are varied reasons for non-submission of UCs, many of which are peculiar to the char areas which annually face flood and erosion problems, and the state has requested the Centre for special consideration.

He elaborated on various work being undertaken for minority welfare, including in char areas, in education, health and other sectors.

The minister maintained that there was no need for any special package for char areas as the regular schemes and programmes were ensuring development in these parts.

Following the minister's reply, Khandakar withdrew the resolution, urging the government to "especially focus on high school drop-out rate and create awareness on population control in the char areas." (PTI)

ITT Delhi, ArSRIM partner to empower SHG women in Arunachal

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 7: The Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (ITT Delhi) and the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (Ar-SRLM) have signed an MoU to launch a project focused on empowering Self-Help Group (SHG) women entrepreneurs in Arunachal Pradesh, said an official statement on Friday. The initiative will strengthen (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gaurav bats for strengthening of Assam's higher education

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 7: Gaurav Gogoi, Member of Parliament (MP) for Jorhat and deputy leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, emphasised the need to enhance the higher education sector in Assam and across India.

His comments came in response to concerns over the significant

number of students leaving Assam — and even going abroad — to pursue higher education.

According to Gogoi, one of the key reasons students go abroad for higher education is the lower cost of education.

"When the Russia-Ukraine war broke out, it was found that a large number of Indian students, includ-

ing many from Assam, were studying medical science in Ukraine," he added, while responding to a query during an interactive youth programme titled Bartalap, held at the Jorhat Science Centre and Planetarium auditorium on Thursday evening. Gogoi also pointed out that during the Covid-19 pandemic, it became clear (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Guwahati Police question Ranveer Allahbadia

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia, who has been embroiled in controversy following his obscene comments on the "India Got Latent" show, underwent marathon questioning at the Crime Branch in Guwahati on Friday.

Allahbadia landed in Guwahati on Friday and headed directly to the Crime Branch office. To avoid con-

frontation with the media, security personnel rushed him inside.

The YouTuber was questioned by the police for at least four hours. After the interrogation, Allahbadia was allowed to leave but was informed that he would need to appear for a second round of questioning once the investigation team issues a fresh summons. Joint Commissioner (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Cong will follow 'all democratic routes' to oppose Waqf bill'

NEW DELHI, March 7: Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh on Friday said his party will follow "all democratic routes" to oppose the Waqf (Amendment) Bill when it comes up for passage in Parliament and asserted that the INDIA bloc is against the "content, intent and extent" of the proposed legislation. Ahead of the start of the second half of the Budget session, Ramesh (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Government of Assam
Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture Department




GRANTS-IN-AID DISTRIBUTION CEREMONY

To

All Bathou Mahasabha, Garchuk, Guwahati (Rs.5.50 Crores)

198 Places of Worship of Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture (Rs. 5 Lakhs each).

36 Places of Worship of Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture (2nd installment of Rs. 5 Lakhs each) &

6 Apex Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture organisations (2nd installment of Rs. 10 Lakhs each)

Chief Guest: DR. RANOJ PEGU

Minister

Education And Tribal Affairs (Plains) Departments

Assam

In august presence of S.JT. JOGEN MOHAN

Minister

Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture, Hill Areas, etc. Departments

Assam

DATE: 9th March, 2025 || Time: 1.30 PM

VENUE: Gauhati Medical College Auditorium, Bhangagarh, Guwahati

An initiative to protect, promote and preserve the Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture

DR HIMANTA BISWA SARMA

Chief Minister

Assam

HDFC Bank, Indian Army & CSC Academy expand Project NAMAN to 26 locations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: HDFC Bank, India's leading private sector Bank, India Army and CSC e-Governance have renewed the MoU to expand Project NAMAN – A Tribute to Veterans to 26 Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV) locations, said an official statement on Friday.

As per the statement, the project NAMAN is designed to provide support and services to Army Veterans, their families and next of kins.

These CSC Centres, which will be operated by Army Veterans or their families or next of kins are dedicated to offer pension related services, Government to Citizen (G2C) services and Business to Consumer (B2C) services at their doorsteps within defence establishments itself.

"A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was renewed between HDFC Bank Limited (under Parivartan



programme), Indian Army's Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV) and CSC Academy," the statement added.

The MoU was signed by Satyen Modi, executive vice president and business head, Alternate Banking Channels & Partnerships - HDFC Bank, Pravin Chandekar, CEO-CSC Academy and

Brigadier, Directorate of Indian Army Veterans in the presence of Smita Bhagat, group head - HDFC Bank, Sanjay Rakesh, chairman - CSC Academy, lieutenant general, DG (DC&W)-Indian Army and esteemed dignitaries from the Indian Army, HDFC Bank and other senior officials.

In the second phase, the project will be expanded to 26 DIAV locations across Rajasthan, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Meghalaya, Bihar, Odisha and New Delhi.

The first phase of the project was flagged off in September 2023 with the establishment of Common Service Centres (CSCs) at 14 DIAV locations.

HDFC Bank under its Parivartan programme, supports in building economic inclusiveness for defence service veterans and their next of kin. Similar to the 14 DIAV locations, the new centres will also provide skill development and training across financial products and services, helping the veterans and their next of kin to be financially independent.

The individuals managing the CSCs will be paid a monthly monetary grant for initial 12 months.

Bimal Auto Agency opens its new Maruti Suzuki True Value Outlet at Adabari

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: Bimal Auto Agency, a prominent Maruti Suzuki dealership in Northeast India, has expanded its footprint with the inauguration of a new Maruti Suzuki True Value outlet in Adabari, Guwahati.

The opening ceremony was graced by executive vice president - True Value Aditya Aggarwal and Assistant vice president - True Value Pankaj Prabhakar marking a significant milestone in the dealership's commitment to providing quality pre-owned vehicles to the region.

The newly inaugurated True Value outlet is strategically located opposite the Adabari Bus Stand on AT road, making it easily accessible for customers seeking certified pre-owned Maruti Suzuki vehicles.

Speaking on the occasion partner Rohit Sarawgi and Amit Sarawgi said with the inauguration of this new outlet, Bimal Auto Agency continues its mission to provide quality vehicles and exceptional service to the people of Assam, reinforcing its position as a trusted name in the automotive industry from more than three decades.

Birla Opus paints launches first-of-its-kind paint studio

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: Birla Opus Paints, part of Grasim Industries under the Aditya Birla Group, unveiled its first-ever Birla Opus Paint Studio on Friday.

Being an industry-first experience centre that will redefine how customers explore and choose colours, this milestone symbolizes the brand's commitment to transforming the paint and décor industry through innovation, premium offerings, and a truly immersive customer experience.

"The centre, launched today in Gurugram, features 170+ products, with a selection of exclusive options for the consumers and is a significant step in the company's growth strategy, aimed at expanding its retail footprint across India," an official statement said.

It further said that with a focus on experiential retail, the company plans to open additional experience centres in New Delhi, Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Surat, in the coming months, all with an aim to become India's second-largest decorative paints brand.

Commenting on the launch, Rakshit Hargave, CEO of Birla

Opus Paints said, "Today, as we unveil our first Birla Opus Paint Studio in Gurugram, we are taking a decisive step to redefine how India experiences colours. Consumers in India are open to explore newer and more profound options while purchasing products or availing services. Realising this shift in consumer behaviour, we at Birla Opus Paints are creating immersive spaces that empower homeowners to craft their own stories."

He added, "This experience centre is a testament to our enduring commitment to excellence, innovation, uncompromising quality and our belief that every home deserves a personalized touch. We are offering all 170+ products in this centre and with a few more exclusive options as well, allowing customers to engage with our paints, designer finishes and wallpapers in an entirely new and unique way. We aim to make painting more than a simple task, turning it into an art of transforming spaces that reflect individual stories. This expansion marks a key step in our journey to becoming India's second-largest decorative paint brand, ensuring innovation, convenience, and excellence for customers."

Arika Group's 'Archak Electronics' opened in KAAC



HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 7: Arika Group, a Noida based Indian consumer electronics and electrical brand has opened its world showroom 'Archak Electronics' here at Rongkhelan market on Thursday (March 6), trading in electronics and electrical items ranging from Led TV, Led lights, home appliances, fans and coolers.

It will be the first showroom of the Company in the Northeast region as a super stock point for Assam and Northeastern states.

The chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang inaugurated the showroom in the presence of chairman, KAAC, Raju Tisso; MLA Dorsing Ronghang, former MP Horensing Bey and dignitaries.

Speaking on the occasion CEM Ronghang said, "I am happy to see that more and more young entrepreneurs in our district have come forward to set up businesses. It is great indeed that people like Francis Timung and his family members have taken up new ventures in business by having close coordination with Arika Group in dealing with their brands. I wish him all the success as he embarks on this new exciting venture."

Speaking about the Company the State Head for Assam and Northeast India, Paul Marak said Arika Group Arika group came into existence in year 2014 and is part of a larger group with businesses spanning into various industries i.e. construction, Hospitality, Real Estate, food Processing, Telecom and few more with footprints from period 1956.

US wants macro, grand trade pact with India; not 'product-by-product': Lutnick

NEW DELHI, March 7: The US on Friday pitched for a macro, large and grand trade agreement with India, and not 'product-by-product' arrangement to boost bilateral ties between the two countries. US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said India needs to open its agriculture market, emphasising that it can not be 'off the table' when the country is negotiating with its largest trading partner.

"Because India is so gigantic, and the US is so gigantic, the right way to do it (trade pact) is a macro, and that's why we think we can get it done. The US is interested in doing a macro, large-scale, broad-based trade agreement with India that takes everything into account and that I think it can be done."

"...it's time to do something big, something grand, something that connects India and the US together, but does it on a broad scale, not product-by-product, but rather the whole thing. Let's bring India's tariff policy towards America down," he said at the India Today Conclave. In the agriculture sector, he said the Indian market for agriculture has to open up, and it can not just stay closed. "Now, how do you do that? And the scale by which you do that? Maybe you do quarters. Maybe do limits. You can be smarter when you have your most important trading partner on the other side of the table. You can't just say...it's off the table. That's just not an attractive way of doing business," Lutnick said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

PM Modi has hands-on

is "attracted to what Prime Minister Narendra Modi has to offer for the future of the region". Taking a dig at the Congress, Rijju said what could not be done in 65 years, the BJP has done in 10 years. (PTI)

Gaurav bats for strengthening

that many Indian students were studying various courses in China. "In both Ukraine and China, the cost of higher education was much cheaper than in Indian institutions. Many students also go to Taiwan for the same reason," he noted.

Furthermore, Gogoi observed that a significant number of bright teachers and research scholars from India are attracted to foreign educational institutions due to the lucrative salary packages, fellowships, stipends, and better academic environments and opportunities offered abroad.

"Educational institutions in foreign nations receive funding from both government and private sectors. The higher education sector in India should be given more focus on the government's priority list," he added.

In response to a query about the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across industries, Gogoi acknowledged that AI is part of emerging new technologies globally and should not be opposed.

He mentioned that when computers and the internet were first introduced, there were similar fears about them causing unemployment. However, over time, people learned to use these technologies in daily life.

To tackle unemployment, Gogoi stressed the need to boost labour-intensive industries such as handloom, textiles, apparel, tourism, hospitality, shoes, and pharmaceuticals, by providing skill development training to youth.

He also emphasised that steps to improve the state's 200-year-old tea industry should be high on the agenda, as this industry employs a large number of people.

Additionally, Gogoi reiterated the importance of improving air and road connectivity to Upper Assam areas. He stated that he has been urging the central government to introduce regular daily flights between Delhi and Jorhat.

The MP also mentioned his past meetings and letters to Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, urging immediate steps to improve the deplorable condition of the stretch of NH 715 (formerly NH 37) between Jorhat and Dibrugarh, and to expedite the completion of the four-lane project for this highway.

Guwahati Police question

Ankur Jain led the police team in questioning Allahbadia, whose comments on the YouTube show sparked an uproar on the internet.

"He reached the Crime Branch office around 12:30 PM, and the interrogation lasted for over four hours. He cooperated with the police and answered all our questions," Jain told reporters after the interrogation.

Allahbadia was scheduled to appear before the police on March 4, but he failed to attend. Earlier, the Guwahati Crime Branch also questioned another YouTuber, Ashish Chanchlani, who became embroiled in the same controversy due to his comments during an episode of the show. Jain also informed that police yet receive responses from other individuals involved in the investigation. Meanwhile, the Gauhati High Court on Friday granted anticipatory bail to Chanchlani.

The high court had on February 18 granted interim bail to Chanchlani in the case.

"After going through the case diary, the high court granted anticipatory bail to the petitioner," his advocate Joyraj Borah told PTI.

Along with Borah, Chanchlani's counsels Hiranya Kumar Nath, Apoorv Srivastava and Avinash Lalwani argued that their client appeared before the investigating officer and cooperated in the case as per the previous directions of the HC.

The bench of Justice Mridul Kumar Kalita pronounced the anticipatory bail by turning the interim relief absolute.

The FIR was registered by the city police on February 10 under the Bhartiya Nyay Santhia (BNS), IT Act, Cinematograph Act and Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act.

Chanchlani on February 27 appeared before the Guwahati Police, which quizzed him for several hours.

Several FIRs were lodged across the country over controversial comments made in the show on parents and sex. (With inputs from PTI)

Cong will follow 'all democratic

said there will be "extensive consultation" among INDIA bloc parties to jointly oppose the bill and the leaders of opposition in both Houses of Parliament will coordinate with INDIA parties on the issue soon.

In an interview with PTI, Ramesh said the Waqf (Amendment) Bill will probably come in the second half of the Budget session and that "there is absolutely no doubt" that the Congress is going to oppose the bill and so will many other political parties.

"I think the entire political spectrum of the INDIA political parties are opposed to the content, intent and extent of the bill. The manner in which the bill was bulldozed through made a mockery of Parliament's joint committee process," he alleged.

"The Waqf (Amendment) bill is controversial and it is going to be opposed lock, stock and barrel," the Congress' general secretary in-charge communications said.

He asserted that the Congress will oppose the bill "tooth, nail and hammer" because it was the most unnecessary and the manner in which Parliament's joint committee functioned was "undemocratic".

"Some witnesses were called selectively, some witnesses were not called. Most importantly perhaps for the first time in parliamentary history a joint committee had submitted a report on a bill without a clause-by-clause discussion on the bill," Ramesh said. Ramesh said he had been a member of the JPC on the data protection bill that was chaired by a BJP MP but despite of that a clause-by-clause discussion was done.

The Congress is in touch with INDIA bloc parties and Leader of Opposition and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge as well as LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi will in the next couple of days be talking to all opposition leaders, he said.

"On this, all opposition parties are united. Privately even the TDP and the JDU MPs are very uneasy with the bill but they have their compulsions. They seem to have gone along because they were browbeaten by the BJP to support this bill," he claimed.

Ramesh said he does not know what JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar and TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu would do but there "real face will be revealed".

"I don't know what is going to happen when they will list the bill but I am sure they will list it, whether they pass it in the din or not I have no idea, but we will follow all democratic routes to oppose this bill," he said.

Talking about the upcoming second half of the Budget session, he said there will be a discussion on various ministries on the demands for grants. "Both in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha at least five ministries will be taken up. We have given our list of ministries -- home, education, social justice, railways and health. That is going to be decided very shortly, our suggestions have already gone," Ramesh informed.

Then there will be a debate on the finance bill and there will be a debate on the appropriation bill, he said.

The 31-member panel on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, after multiple sittings and hearings, had suggested several amendments to the proposed legislation even as the opposition members disagreed with the report and submitted their dissent notes.

The panel's 655-page report was submitted to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on January 30.

The joint committee of Parliament had adopted the report that contained changes suggested by members from the ruling BJP by a majority vote of 15-11. The move prompted the opposition to dub the exercise an attempt to destroy Waqf boards.

The Bill was referred to the joint committee of Parliament on August 8, following its introduction in the Lok Sabha by Union Minority Affairs minister Kiren Rijju.

Asked about the differences among INDIA bloc parties in assembly polls held after the Lok Sabha elections, Ramesh said it was not "unnatural" as the INDIA group was formed to fight the Lok Sabha election and not to fight the state assembly elections. "When we formed the INDIA bloc we knew that we were fighting the Left in Kerala, we were fighting TMC in West Bengal... So, INDIA group was for the Lok Sabha election, it was not for fighting assembly elections. But we had state-level alliances. We had an alliance with DMK in Tamil Nadu, we have a long-standing alliance with the NCP (SP) of which Shiv Sena (UBT) has been a part since 2019, we have been in alliance with RJD for many years in Bihar, we have been in alliance with JMM in Jharkhand," he said.

"But the INDIA group was for the Lok Sabha polls so I am not surprised or disappointed that we fought each other in the state assembly polls that is the nature of the INDIA alliance," Ramesh asserted.

He said the INDIA bloc will be coordinating closely in the upcoming second half of the Budget session.

The first half of the Budget Session was held from January 31 to February 13. The second half starts on Monday and will conclude on April 4. (PTI)

IIT Delhi, ArSRLM partner to

value chains and promote sustainable development by equipping women with essential business skills, financial literacy, and digital tools.

Arunachal Pradesh boasts a vibrant SHG ecosystem, with over 1.3 lakh members actively engaged in diverse entrepreneurial ventures, including handicrafts, agriculture, and food processing.

Despite their significant progress, SHGs face challenges such as limited market access, financial exclusion, and information asymmetry, hindering their growth potential.

"To address these challenges, IIT Delhi's Department of Management Studies has developed a structured curriculum comprising workshops, mentorship, and hands-on learning modules, initially targeting 100 SHG businesswomen. The program will include sessions on value chain analysis and product development to help women entrepreneurs transition towards formal business structures and increase their market competitiveness," the statement added.

At the MoU signing ceremony, Sonal Swaroop, IAS, secretary, Rural Development & vice chairperson, ArSRLM, emphasised the initiative's alignment with ArSRLM's mission, stating, "Empowering women entrepreneurs through skill development, digital tools, and market access is key to transforming rural livelihoods. This project will enable SHG members to engage more effectively with financial and commercial networks and integrate into value chains for increased economic opportunities"

Women envoys from 9 countries hail diverse workforce at Adani's clean energy, other projects

KHAVDA/MUNDRA, March 7: A delegation of women envoys from nine countries, including those from Luxembourg, Romania and Slovenia, took stock of Adani Group's renewable energy and other projects in Gujarat and lauded female workforce participation at these facilities. While interacting with women engineers at Adani Green Energy's 30-GW clean energy plant at Khavda in Kutch district, the delegates emphasised how implementation of diversity at workplaces is key to the economic growth of a country.

During their tour to the facility on Wednesday, ahead of the International Women's Day, the seven ambassadors and two high commissioners also interacted with women members of Self Help Groups (SHG) supported by Adani Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the ports-to-energy conglomerate.

"The ambassadors saw firsthand how the renewables project is integrating cutting-edge technology with sustainable development, including the Energy Network Operations Centre (ENOC) overseen by women engineers," the Adani group said in a statement.

At Mundra Port, which handles nearly 11 per cent of the country's maritime cargo and 33 per cent of its container traffic, the visiting envoys explored the Electronics Manufacturing Cluster (EMC) in the Mundra Special Economic Zone (SEZ), where global players are investing in advanced manufacturing.

The delegation members included Ina Krisnamurthi, Ambassador of Indonesia to India; Marje Luup (Estonia); Diana Mickeviciene (Lithuania); Ana Taban (Moldova); Mateha Vodeb Ghosh (Slovenia); Sena Latif (Romania); and Peggy Frantzen (Luxembourg). Besides, Seychelles High Commissioner Lalatiana Accouche and Lesotho High Commissioner Lebogang Valentine Mochaba were also part of the delegation. "It was impressive to see the workforce of the Adani Foundation. We saw young engineers just recruited from the campus and brought to laboratories here. They are contributing to their family welfare but... to the whole social and economical development of India. It is a very good news for the whole world," Romanian ambassador Latif told PTI while sharing her experiences. (PTI)

Women investors making smart moves for financial security: Survey

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: Women investors are making strategic and substantial investments, taking steps toward securing their financial future, said a survey.

The survey was done on investment patterns of 1 lakh women investors from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 by PhonePe Wealth. This International Women's Day, PhonePe Wealth highlights the steady rise in women's participation in Mutual Funds on its platform, along with their growing commitment and contribution amounts.

The data for the period mentioned above reveals that the average Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) contribution from female investors is approximately 22% higher than male investors, while their average lump sum investments surpass those of men by approximately 45%. This data provides a different perspective on women's approach to financial markets and risk.

"We acknowledge the increasing participation of women investors and their evolving role in the financial landscape," said Nilesh D Naik, head of Investment



Products, Share.Market (PhonePe Wealth).

He further added, "Our data shows that women investors are both participating and actively investing. Today, we believe that women investors are financially aware and independent, diversifying their portfolios, and investing with a long-term vision and the notion of women being financially conservative is a thing of the past."

As per the survey, around 90% of women investors begin with Systematic Investment Plans, demonstrating preference for dis-

ciplined, long-term investing. Women investors maintain an average SIP transaction value of ₹1300, approximately 22% higher than men.

Women exceed the average lump sum investment by approximately 45% as compared to male investors. Women are playing a pivotal role in driving financial inclusion, with a prominent share from Maharashtra (20%), Karnataka (12%), and Uttar Pradesh (9%) leading the growth.

Approximately 72% of women investors come from B30 (Beyond

Top 30) cities, highlighting the increasing reach of Mutual Funds beyond major metros. Cities like Varanasi, Ranchi, Dehradun, Guwahati, and Vadodara are seeing increasing participation from women investors, highlighting their involvement in wealth creation.

Nearly 50% of women investors hold contra / value funds. Other popular investment categories are flexi-cap, mid cap, small cap, and thematic funds. This diverse fund selection reflects their understanding of portfolio diversification, strategic investing, and calculated risk-taking.

Around 74% of women investors are 35 years or younger, with the largest segment (29%) aged 26-30 years. Women largely invest between 9 AM and 4 PM, with 44% of transactions occurring during this window.

The evolving investment behavior of women is reshaping the financial industry, making it essential to prioritize their needs. PhonePe Wealth supports this by providing resources and tools to facilitate investors to manage their investments and plan for the future.

Firstcry.com opens store in Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, March 7: Firstcry.com, India's largest retailer of baby and children's products on Friday has been inaugurated at Boro-doi Market complex located at block Tiniali Margherita under Tinsukia district, catering to children up to 6 years old.

This is the first branded showroom for children of our country, offering a wide range of products at affordable prices.

The showroom was inaugurated by Protim Gogoi executive magistrate Margherita Co-District administration, in presence of firstcry.com franchise co-owners Manash Jyoti Gogoi and Lakhyadeep Das and other renowned and dignitaries persons of Margherita.

Manash Jyoti Gogoi said, "For the first time firstcry.com franchise store has been opened at Margherita, so that customers can purchase it with affordable price, as we are also planning to open more other store rooms which will generate employment opportunities for local educated youths of Margherita Co-District area." Firstcry.com is a well-known brand with over 400 outlets across India, offering a vast collection of kids products including fashion wear, footwear, toys, study materials and more.

Initiative aimed to provide high-quality generic medicines at affordable prices to the public

Prime Minister Bharatiya Janaushadhi Kendra inaugurated in Chirang

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: The Prime Minister Bharatiya Janaushadhi Kendra (PMBJK) at Runikhata Shantipur SS Ltd in Chirang was inaugurated on Friday by Member of Parliament Jayanta Basumatary.

The event was graced by the presence of deputy commissioner of Chirang, Jatin Bora, along with other dignitaries and officials.

Among the distinguished guests were OSD to chief executive member, Bodoland Territorial Region, Sangrang Brahma; CHD, co-operation department, Jayanta Kherkatary; DRCS Chirang, Kohinoor Narzary; and officials from the health department.

The Prime Minister Bharatiya Janaushadhi Kendra (PMBJK) initiative aimed to provide high-quality generic medicines at affordable prices to the public.



These centers played a crucial role in reducing healthcare expenses for economically weaker sections by offering medicines

that are 50-90% cheaper than branded alternatives. Established under the Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana

(PMBJP), these Kendras ensure that essential medicines, surgical items, and healthcare products are available at subsidized rates while maintaining stringent quality standards.

With the opening of this Janaushadhi Kendra, the residents of Shantipur and surrounding areas will benefit from cost-effective healthcare solutions, strengthening the government's vision of affordable healthcare coverage in rural areas.

The department of co-operation, Bodoland Territorial Region, was also actively working on establishing more Janaushadhi Kendras across BTR to ensure that affordable medicines reach every corner of the region. This initiative aligned with the broader mission of improving health infrastructure and accessibility, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Adulterated Boondi with poisonous colours flourish at Dhubri market

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, March 7: As the holy month of Ramadan continues, concerns have been raised over the sale of adulterated Boondi, a popular Indian snack made from fried chickpea flour in the markets of Dhubri district.

As per reports, unscrupulous traders in various markets across Dhubri district are using the Raja Rani brand non-edible, poisonous colors to enhance the appearance of the sweetened Boondi, posing a serious threat to public health.

Boondi, widely consumed during Ramadan for its sweet and savory variants, is being sold in adulterated form in markets such as Fakirganj, Airkata, Whab Bazar, Porab-hita, Raduram Chariari, Salkata, Chirakuti, and Medortari.

The use of non-edible artificial colors can lead to severe health issues, including food poisoning, organ damage, and long-term complications. Despite the growing concern among consumers, the Dhubri district food inspector has reportedly failed to take action against these illegal activities.

Market-goers and local residents have expressed frustration over the lack of inspections and enforcement measures to curb the sale of such adulterated food products. Health experts warn that consuming food items containing toxic industrial-grade colors can have severe consequences.

Such chemicals are not meant for human consumption and can lead to gastrointestinal disorders, kidney and liver damage, and even carcinogenic effects with prolonged exposure. Residents and consumer rights groups have urged the food safety department and local authorities to conduct urgent inspections and raids in the affected markets.

They demand strict penalties for traders involved in food adulteration and public awareness campaigns to educate people about the dangers of consuming chemically treated foods. With Ramadan being a time of devotion and fasting, the sale of contaminated food poses a significant threat to both religious observance and public health.

Authorities must take immediate steps to prevent further distribution of adulterated Boondi and ensure the safety of consumers across Dhubri district.



Jirsong Asong, NABARD celebrates International Women's Day

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 7: Jirsong Asong, in collaboration with NABARD, organised an event to celebrate International Women's Day under the theme "Accelerate Action" recently.

The programme aimed to recognise and empower women by providing a platform to share their experiences, discuss opportunities, and encourage entrepreneurship and financial independence. The event began at 11:00 am with a warm welcome address by Fr Thankachen, director of Jirsong Asong, who emphasised the importance of empowering women in various sectors. This was followed by a soulful opening song performed by members of Gauri Self-Help Group (SHG).

A special session was dedicated to celebrating the success stories of inspiring women leaders, including Lucia Teronpi, president of DDKNA, Minoti Teronpi from Udoys SHG, and Melina Teronpi from Theang SHG.

They shared their journeys of overcoming challenges, achieving financial independence, and leading their communities toward self-reliance. Their stories inspired the audience, highlighting the role of

perseverance in women's empowerment.

Following the success stories, esteemed guest speakers from NABARD, AGVB, and RESTI shared their expertise on financial inclusion, training, and support systems available for women's economic empowerment.

K Vaiphei, district development manager (DDM) of NABARD, spoke on the role of NABARD in women's empowerment through financial assistance and self-help group (SHG) promotion.

He explained how NABARD provided financial literacy programs, microfinance support, and livelihood development projects to uplift women in rural and semi-urban areas. He encouraged women to actively participate in SHGs and take advantage of government schemes designed to support their businesses and income-generating activities.

Tapas Kumar Sarmah, regional manager of Assam Gramin Vikash Bank (AGVB), addressed the gathering on loan opportunities for SHG women and financial inclusion. He elaborated on various loan schemes, interest rates, and government subsidies available for women entre-

preneurs. He emphasised the importance of financial independence and how easy access to credit can help women expand their businesses and improve their standard of living. He also shared success stories of women who had taken microloans and successfully grown their enterprises, inspiring the attendees to explore similar opportunities.

Dasarath Brahma, director of Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RESTI), focused on the significance of skill development and entrepreneurship training for women. He highlighted the various training programs offered by RESTI, including tailoring, handicrafts, poultry farming, organic farming, food processing, and other vocational skills that enable women to become self-reliant. He stressed the importance of practical training combined with financial support, ensuring that women are equipped not only with skills but also with access to resources that can help them establish and sustain their businesses. He encouraged women to enroll in these programs and assured them of ongoing support from RESTI in their entrepreneurial journey.

CEM Boro interacts with aspiring engineers in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 7: A one-day workshop with bright young minds of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) under the Bodofa UN Brahma Super 50 Mission (Engineering) was organised on Friday being held at the District Library complex, Dimalgaon in Kokrajhar.

The event was organised by the department of education, government of Bodoland Territorial Region to interact with bright young aspiring engineers from the region. Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, graced the occasion as chief guest, and addressed the occasion.

He was accompanied by additional DGP, Hiren Chandra Nath.

CEM Pramod Boro stated that the government of BTR has laid stress on providing opportunities to the young to build their career

bringing good career in the region by setting up coaching camps for the competitive examinations for engineering, medical studies etc.

He has urged the talented youth to make the most of this flagship initiative and build a promising future for themselves and BTR.

"I am much glad to address the bright young minds of BTR at the Bodofa UN Brahma Super 50 Mission (Engineering) workshop, organised by the department of education, BTR. As BTR moves toward rapid transformations, engineers will be at the forefront of progress. I urge our talented youth to make the most of this flagship initiative and build a promising future for themselves and BTR," Boro said.

Additional DGP Hiren Chandra Nath (IPS) also shared inspiring & motivational insights with our aspiring engineers.

Awareness programme

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, March 7: An awareness campaign on the Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament (VBYP) 2025 was successfully conducted at Rabindranath Tagore University (RTU) in the Bharat Tirtha Conference Hall on Thursday. The event was organized under the aegis of the Viksit Bharat @2047 Cell of RTU in collaboration with Nowgong College Autonomus (University), the nodal institute for the VBYP initiative. The gathering, which included teachers, students, and prominent academic leaders, was addressed by Dr. Bhuban Chutia, the Program Coordinator of VBYP 2025 from Nowgong College. Dr. Chutia elaborated on the objectives of the Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament 2025, emphasizing its importance in promoting active youth engagement in national policy discussions and governance.

Youth mysterious death sparks outrage at Puranigudam

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 7: A shocking and mysterious death of a young man identified as Pranab Jyoti Bora of Muhani in Puranigudam area, has sent shockwaves throughout the Puranigudam area in Nagaon district on Friday here. Bora's lifeless body was found in a suspicious condition at the front lawn of a neighbor's house in the early hours of this morning after going to attend a wedding ceremony at Baropujia in Morigaon district last evening.

According to local sources, Bora, a resident of Muhani village in Puranigudam area, had attended a wedding ceremony at Baropujia area in Morigaon district last night and was expected to return home. However, his body was found at the front lawn of a neighbor's house, sparking widespread outrage and suspicion. The local Puranigudam as well as Samaguri police rushed to the spot and sent the mortal remains to Nagaon Civil Hospital for post-mortem. Local residents as well as other family members of the deceased youth have raised suspicions about the circumstances surrounding his death.

The victim youth was a well-known and respected member of the community, actively involved in various social and cultural organisations. He was also a member of the Indian National Congress and held the position of Vice-President of the Youth Congress Committee of Samaguri constituency. The police have assured that a thorough investigation will be conducted to uncover the truth behind Bora's mysterious death. The incident has left the entire community in shock, and demands for justice are being made. Meanwhile superintendent of police, Nagaon Swapnani Dekha while addressing a press conference at Samaguri this afternoon here, said that as per statement of the physician who conducted autopsy of the youth, the youth might have died of cardiac arrest. But the exact reason of his death would be cleared by its PM report only. Dekha said further adding that the police had already launched investigation into the entire episode and would leave no stone unturned to unearth the real scene behind his suspicious death.

SBI distributes cheque amongst SHGs in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 7: The State Bank of India (SBI), Kokrajhar branch on Friday celebrated the International Women's Day with cheque distribution ceremony and free health camp at the bank complex premises in Kokrajhar.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, the State Bank of India, Kokrajhar branch organised a cheque distribution ceremony for Self Help Group (SHG) borrowers.

In addition to that, a Free Health Camp was also set up for the borrowers and all the women customers inside the Bank premises, done in collaboration with joint director of Health Services, Kokrajhar. A total of 70 women customers and staff members availed the benefit of the health camp.

Forest officials seize 4 illegal earth-loaded vehicles in Dhubri

HT correspondent

DHUBRI, March 7: A team led by Safiqur Rahman, range officer of the Forest Check Station in Dhubri, seized four illegal earth-loaded vehicles on Friday. Illegal earth excavation has been a growing concern in Assam, leading to environmental degradation, deforestation, and loss of natural resources. The operation was carried out with the assistance of forest department staff as part of ongoing efforts to curb illegal earth excavation and transportation in the region. According to officials, the vehicles were detected during a routine patrol and were found transporting earth without proper authorization bearing registration AS-17B-5324, AS-17C-5099, AS-15AC-0956 and AS-14AC-1549.

The forest department has taken custody of the vehicles, and further legal action will be initiated against those involved in the illegal activity. "We are committed to cracking down on such unlawful practices that harm the environment. Strict action will be taken against violators as per the law," said Rahman. Authorities have urged citizens to report any suspicious activities related to illegal excavation and transportation to help preserve the ecological balance. Further investigations are underway to identify the people behind the illegal transportation, and necessary legal proceedings will follow.

NFR initiative leads to over 100 stolen cell phone recoveries

Rightful owner overjoyed finding the lost



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, general manager of Northeast Frontier Railway officially handed over 100 recovered mobile phones to the rightful owner and more cell phones

to the owners in a special ceremony held on Friday at NFR Headquarters at Maligaon.

The recovered phones were traced and retrieved by the Cyber Cell of the Railway Protection Force (RPF) under Northeast Frontier

Railway, using the advanced Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) Portal developed by the department of Telecommunications (DoT).

During the ceremony, general manager, Shrivastava commended the Cyber Cell team for their tireless efforts, emphasising the importance of such initiatives in ensuring passenger trust and safety within the railway network. The ceremony highlighted the technological prowess and swift action demonstrated by the Cyber Cell/RPF/NFR, as well as Indian Railways' commitment to passenger safety, technology adoption and service excellence. NFR holds the distinction of being the first zonal railway in India to gain access to the CEIR facility, further underlining its proactive approach in leveraging technology for passenger benefit.

The Cyber Cell of RPF/NFR has traced out 470 phones missing/stolen cell phones and 102 phones were recovered so far. Notably, 99 of the recovered phones have already been returned to their owners. So far, 21 criminals and receivers of stolen phones have been apprehended under this initiative. RPF of NFR is always committed and focussed on combining technology with proactive policy to enhance the overall travel experience for railway passengers.

Kidney transplantation saves lives of two critically ill patients Swagat Super Speciality successfully facilitates organ donation

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: Swagat Super Speciality Hospital, Maligaon, successfully facilitated the retrieval and transplantation of two kidneys from a deceased donor, marking one of the first such collaborations between a private healthcare institution and public medical authorities in the region. The organs saved the lives of two critically ill patients awaiting transplants.

The donor Uttam Dey, tragically passed away, but his family's compassionate decision to donate his kidneys and liver turned grief into hope. While the liver was deemed unsuitable for transplantation, the kidneys were swiftly retrieved during a late-night surgery on February 28, 2025. The organs were transported via a police-escorted green corridor in the early hours of March 1 to Gauhati Medical College, where the transplant team of Urology Department was on standby and the two prepped recipients received the life-saving transplants. Both patients are now recovering, with the kidneys functioning optimally.

Led by Subhash Khanna, head of surgical disciplines, and Dr Ayushman Khanna, a multidisciplinary team of over 15 specialists executed the complex retrieval process. The effort included liver transplant experts Dr Amitabh Goswami, Dr Vikas Moond, Dr Ashutosh Kumar, Dr Gulab Singh Patel, Dr Ashwin R Krishnan and Dr Vibha Varma, and urology team was led by Dr Pushkal Bagchi and Dr Debanga Sarma



along with Dr Hiranya Deka and Dr Sandeepan Borthakur. The anesthesia team was headed by Dr Shabbir Khan. Several key persons of Swagat management were involved in the process and that included COO Jahidur Rahman and Transplant Coordinator Ms. Sirajun Nessa and Operation Manager Mr. Bikash Baruah who ensured seamless coordination.

Khanna highlighted the historic nature of the procedure: "This is the first time a private hospital in Guwahati has retrieved organs from a deceased donor under the government's framework. It underscores the power of collaboration in advancing healthcare."

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Life is given to us, we earn it by giving it
-Rabindranath Tagore

International Women's Day

Going back to history, the idea to make it an international possibility, initiative came from Clara Zetkin, a communist activist and advocate for women's rights. In 1910, she raised it at an International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. Her suggestion was unanimously backed by the 100 women from 17 countries, who were present there at the conference. The first International Women's Day was celebrated in 1911, in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. It was a phase when Russia was preparing for the first Socialist Democratic revolution to build up a new society. Kollontai, Elena, Stosama, Nadezda Krupskaya were among those Communist leaders who prepared the blue print of the women's movement and were discussing the practical aspects of it. Voting rights for women and many other issues were discussed. In fact the first salvo of the revolution came from the women workers only just before the February revolution. Clara Zetkin's original idea for an international celebration was not tied to a particular day. The date of March 8 was selected after Russian women demanded "bread and peace" during a war-time strike in 1917. Four days into the strike, the Tsar was forced to abdicate. According to the Julian calendar which was then in use in Russia, the women's strike had begun in February and in the Gregorian calendar used in much of the rest of the world, that date is March 8.

International Women's Day is a national holiday in many countries. In China, many women are given a half-day off work, as advised by the State Council. Thousands of events take place globally, including marches, talks, concerts, exhibitions and debates. In Italy, IWD is called Festadella Donna, and mimosa blossoms are a popular gift. Flower sales in Russia typically double around International Women's Day. In the US, March is Women's 'History Month'. In India, women were actively taking part in the freedom struggle and also for their own cause. National Federation of Indian Women was organised only after independence, 1954. The year 2025 is a turning point in the global pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment, as it marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, China, by 189 governments, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains the most progressive and widely endorsed blueprint for women's and girls' rights worldwide.

The Day for Women in fact assimilates many other aspects of life since they are the ones always involved at the centre. The call, therefore, is to unite and join to celebrate International Women's Day under the theme: "For All Women and Girls: Rights, Equality, Empowerment". To promote gender equality, systemic barriers have to be addressed, patriarchy has to be dismantled, entrenched inequities have to be transformed, and voices of marginalized women and girls, including young people has to be listened before its final precipitation into an act, to ensure inclusivity and empowerment. It is also important to redefine power structures by ensuring access to education, employment, leadership, and decision-making spaces and to prioritize opportunities for young women and girls to lead and innovate.

Despite significant progress for women's rights since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the world is experiencing new and overlapping crises and the erosion of rights. This International Women's Day, it is imperative for women to march forward for their rights as the world cannot afford a step back.

To celebrate the Day, there are three colours suggested by IWD to wear and these are white, purple, and green. The colours have their own significance, like purple is for justice and dignity, green for hope and white represents purity. All these colours were also used by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). It was a group in UK in 1903 to fight for women's vote. The International Women's Day website has chosen the theme "Inspire Inclusion". It says organisers and events aim to "break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and create environments where all women are valued and respected."

How can women be empowered in the era of 'sex objectification'?

By: Dr. Satyawan Saurabh

Today, there is a growing trend of objectifying women in entertainment media. In Indian films, social media, music videos, and television, women are often depicted as mere sex objects. This phenomenon represents a significant harm to society, as it perpetuates harmful stereotypes. Many films and songs objectify the female form, following a predictable pattern. An entire generation has been influenced to believe that life is what is shown on screen. As a result, women are often objectified during "item dances" at village fairs, local theater, and various art forms, which are attended by men of all ages. Advertisements in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the Internet, billboards, and flyers often portray women in a sexualized manner, with the aim of attracting female customers. In Indian society, there is a prevailing belief that women are naturally weak. Research on social media shows that girls are sexualized more often than boys, increasing the pressure on teenage girls to fit into typical sexual narratives. For example, there is a deodorant ad that depicts a woman as a 'sex object', suggesting that she is attracted to a man simply because he uses that particular brand. This representation turns women into objects that do not have their own identity. Such portrayals in advertisements are not only degrading but also undermine the true status and dignity of women.

Cases of violence against women and girls are on the rise in India, reflecting a disturbing mindset that seeks revenge against them. This trend reinforces harmful patriarchal stereotypes that exist in society. The phenomenon of "self-objectification" makes women experience negative emotions such as shame and anxiety, which can cause them permanent psychological damage. Unfortunately, mass media in India has largely failed to address issues affecting women or empower them to advocate for their rights and achieve equality. Instead, women often find

themselves focused on conforming to ideal body images portrayed in the media, neglecting their own physical and mental well-being. The objectification of women in the media has a clearly harmful effect on society. To combat this, we need to increase social support and initiatives aimed at reducing the objectification of girls and women. It is important to establish and enforce laws that promote gender equality by eliminating discrimination against women. This includes promoting media awareness, encouraging parent and family involvement in media consumption, ensuring religious sensitivity, positive representation of girls in the media, teaching youth life skills, and advocating for egalitarian gender norms within comprehensive sex education. Only through these efforts can we truly discuss women's empowerment in an era marked by sexual objectification.

Recently, the 'Boys Locker Room' incident surfaced on social media, where pornographic images of underage girls were shared through leaked conversations from a certain group. It is important to recognize that this incident is not just an isolated incident of young boys promoting rape culture; rather, it reflects a deeper issue within our societal outlook. Over the past few years, there has been a rise in reports of cyberbullying and harassment. In view of this situation, we urgently need strong legislation that criminalizes cyber violence against women and girls. Without a dedicated law, the existing IT Act and IPC only serve as temporary measures, proving inadequate to deal with the scale of these issues. The IPC was established much before the digital age, and the IT Act was primarily created to promote e-commerce rather than address the unregulated online environment. Hence, creating a law that specifically targets cyber abuse, harassment, and violence against women will significantly contribute to turning the conversation towards safety and equality.

A time to accelerate women's progress and potential

International Women's Day is celebrated every year to promote women's participation in every field and to make women aware of their rights. This year's theme is "Accelerate Action" i.e. a strong and effective push to achieve their goals. This theme tells us that women need to work very hard and fast on themselves. Women have as much contribution in the development of family, society, country and world as men. However, women do not get as much respect, opportunity and freedom as men. But in the process of building a new empowered India, women are making an unprecedented contribution to nation building by crossing the four walls of home and family. Whether it is a woman President of India, Chief Minister in Delhi and West Bengal or Finance Minister at the Center, women are playing a big role from sports to entertainment world and from politics to military and defense.

It is not about Indian or non-Indian women, but about the attitude towards her. There is a need to change this viewpoint; there is a need to end the neglect and harassment of women in the entire world. This day will be meaningful only when women are not only made a part of development but also an environment is created that puts an end to the atrocities and tragedies of tearing apart their existence and identity.

On Women's Day, women related issues like the status of women, increasing incidents of female foeticide, increasing number of boys compared to girls, illiteracy and exploitation of women in villages, safety of women, incidents of rape with women, obscene acts and especially the crimes against them should be brought into discussion once again and a meaningful environment should be created. With events like Women's Day, all the government efforts and a pang of social public awareness, a thought arises in the mind that how long will a woman remain an object of enjoyment? How long will her life remain surrounded by dangers? How long will she keep burning in the blazing fire of rape, molestation, foeticide and dowry? How long will her existence and identity keep being torn apart?

The irony is that events like Women's Day are becoming a means of misusing women instead of giving them due respect and honour. It is not my job to give an emotional expression to the infinite compassion and heart-rending pain reflected in women's lives. But even today, their condition in some societies is pitiable and worrisome. I don't know whether all women experience this situation themselves or not. But no en-



lightened woman can be happy with the slavery and inferiority complex of her caste. It is absolutely necessary to develop a resistance consciousness to end the meaningless traditions and feelings of inferiority that have been going on for centuries.

Until a woman's rebellious consciousness against injustice is awakened, she cannot understand her existence in the right way. As long as the body has the capacity to resist the germs of diseases, it does not get infected. But as soon as the resistance power weakens, diseases attack from all sides which not only weaken the body but also make it hollow. Therefore, the women's society has to practice living an awakened life by developing its resistance power. It has to understand its traditional importance and power. In the Vedic tradition, women have been worshipped in the form of Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Buddhist followers in the form of eternal power wisdom and in Jainism in the form of Shrutidevi and Shasan Devi.

According to popular belief, by worshipping the mother, a person gets long life, fame, heaven, glory, virtue, strength, prosperity, livestock, happiness, wealth etc., then why is woman disrespected? Women have the most honorable and respectable place in the world. Woman is the axis of the earth. She is the source of affection. She is the great temple of auspiciousness. She is the pillar of the family. She is the message of purity. The security, coolness and peace that

are felt in her loving shade is not even found on the snow-clad mountains of the Himalayas.

The adornments of womankind are simplicity and purity. Ornaments made of gold, silver, diamonds; pearls etc. can only cover her natural beauty, but cannot enhance it. The combination of Satyam, Shivam Sundaram can be achieved not by artificial resources but by enhancing the infinite stage.

The famous poetess Mahadevi Verma had rightly said- 'Woman is the symbol of Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram.

In her, the form of woman is truth, affection is Shiva and motherly love is beautiful. Then why is the woman who possesses these unique and ideal qualities deceived and looted again and again? What kind of society is being formed in independent India, in which the attempts to snatch the freedom of women and the violent and tragic incidents related to it have shamed us all again and again.

World Women's Day is an occasion to introspect on the situations of injustice against women, to purify the ego in which the male society wants to establish its existence by pushing the superiorities into oblivion. Women's eras have been changing. Sometimes they have got opportunities to move ahead in the open directions of development with full speed, and sometimes their every step has been stopped by the snakes of doubt. Sometimes they have got full social respect, and sometimes they have been

standing on the margins of society and suffering the helplessness of being a woman. Sometimes they remain at the center of the family and run the entire family, and sometimes they become inactive after being neglected and harassed in their own family. To bring harmony in these inconsistencies, women will have to move towards a definite goal. In the changing environment, modern women should always remember this sentence of Maithili Sharan Gupta - "Aanchal mein hai doodh". Save her honor and do not tarnish motherhood by committing a heinous act like foeticide. Rather, become a bridge that can join the broken, turn the halting and lift the falling. Water the tiny sprouts and plants with an ideal lifestyle so that they can prove their usefulness by becoming a tree with a hundred branches.

'Yatra poojyante naryastu tatratra namante devata'- Where women are worshipped, gods reside there. But today we see that women are being insulted everywhere. Considering them as an object of pleasure, men are using them in their own way, which is a matter of great concern. There is a saying that women are not born, they are made and many people with orthodox beliefs consider women to be a man's crop. Due to lack of protection of law, women have been losing the battle at the end of the struggle. That is why today's women do not need a margin, but a full page. The entire page, as many men get. In ancient times, Indian women were given special respect. Countless Indian women like Sita, Sati-Savitri have proved their special place. Apart from this, during British rule, there were women like Rani Lakshmbai, Chand Bibi, etc. who rose above all their traditions and left an indelible mark on the pages of history. But with the change of time, it was seen that after many attacks on the country, the condition of Indian women also started changing. With the coming of the British and Muslim rule, the condition of Indian women became very worrying. Day by day she had to face neglect and contempt. Along with this, social evils in Indian society like Sati Pratha, child marriage, pardah system and our traditional conservatism also played an important role in making Indian women poor and weak. But now we have celebrated the Amrit Mahotsav of Independence, in the Amrit Kaal, the life of women should also become Amrit, only this can give real meaning to celebrating International Women's Day. (The author is a journalist and columnist based in Delhi who can be reached at latitgarg11@gmail.com)

IWD 2025: Accelerating action for a gender-equal future

By: Dipak Kurmi

International Women's Day (IWD), commemorated annually on March 8, is not merely a celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women but a powerful clarion call for action toward gender equality. With its roots tracing back to the early 20th century, IWD has evolved into a global movement that unites individuals and organizations under a shared vision of inclusivity, equity, and empowerment. In 2025, the theme "Accelerate Action" underscores the urgency to dismantle systemic barriers and hasten progress toward a just and equal world.

The Need for Speed: Breaking Barriers to Equality

Despite the significant strides made over the years, gender parity remains an elusive goal. According to the World Economic Forum, at the current pace, full gender equality will not be achieved until 2158, spanning nearly five generations. This projection serves as a stark reminder that while progress has been made, it is neither sufficient nor swift enough. The 2025 IWD campaign emphasizes the need for collective, decisive, and immediate action to break the structural and institutional barriers that impede women's advancement.

'Accelerate Action' is more than a theme—it is a call to amplify efforts across all sectors, from politics to business, education to healthcare, and culture to sustainability. The campaign urges society to recognize, support, and elevate initiatives that drive tangible progress for women and girls worldwide. By ensuring that financial, social, and institutional resources are effectively leveraged, we can create an ecosystem that fosters gender equality at an accelerated pace.

Empowering the Champions of Change

One of the most effective strategies to expedite gender equality is to support those already championing the cause. Across the globe, grassroots movements, community-led organizations, and philanthropic institutions tirelessly work to empower women and girls. The 2025 IWD campaign places a strong emphasis on supporting these initiatives through IWD Giving, positioning March 8 as one of the most impactful fundraising days of the year.

Financial support, however, is only one aspect of this empowerment. Social and institutional backing is equally crucial. Elevating the visibility of these organizations, amplifying their voices, and integrating their initiatives into mainstream policies can dramatically accelerate the progress toward gender equality. The movement calls upon businesses, governments, and individuals to contribute meaningfully, ensuring that the change-makers receive the necessary resources to continue their invaluable work.

The Power of Individual Actions

While large-scale institutional support is indispensable, individual contributions remain equally vital in achieving gender equality. Every person has a role to play in challenging stereotypes, confronting biases, and fostering inclusive environments. The IWD 2025 theme urges individuals to take proactive steps in their personal and professional lives to advance the cause of gender equality. Key areas of focus include:

1. Economic Empowerment: Advocating for equal pay, supporting women entrepreneurs, and fostering inclusive workplaces.
2. Education and Training: Ensuring access to quality education, particularly in STEM fields where women remain underrepresented.

International Women's Day serves as a reminder that the struggle for gender equality is far from over. As Eleanor Roosevelt famously remarked, "Too often, the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men." This must change. The inclusion of women in decision-making processes, policy formulation, and governance is not just beneficial—it is imperative

3. Leadership and Decision-Making: Encouraging female representation in politics, business, and community initiatives.

4. Health and Well-being: Championing women's access to healthcare, reproductive rights, and informed decision-making.

5. Creative and Cultural Representation: Elevating women's contributions in arts, media, and sports to foster a diverse cultural landscape.

6. Sustainability and Food Security: Engaging women in environmental and agricultural initiatives to drive long-term change.

A Century of Struggle and Progress

The origins of International Women's Day trace back to the early 1900s when suffragists and labor activists fought for women's rights, particularly voting rights and fair labor conditions. Over the decades, feminist icons such as Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, and Gloria Steinem have propelled the movement onto the global stage, broadening the discourse on gender equality.

From the first organized women's strike in New York in 1857 to Clara Zetkin's proposal for an International Women's Day in 1910, the journey of IWD is marked by pivotal moments. The recognition of IWD by the United Nations in 1975 further solidified its status as a global movement. Today, it is a platform for advocacy, activism, and systemic change, embraced by governments, corporations, and civil societies worldwide.

Women's Empowerment in India: A Historical and Contemporary Perspective

India's history is adorned with legendary women who have defied societal norms to carve a space for themselves. From Gargi, the ancient sage who challenged philosophical doctrines, to Rani Lakshmbai, Sarojini Naidu, Savitribai Phule, and PT Usha, Indian women have long been at the forefront of change.

In modern India, women have breached traditional bastions and excelled in diverse fields, in-

cluding diplomacy. Once considered the exclusive domain of men, foreign relations now witness a growing number of women Ambassadors and High Commissioners, bringing new perspectives, problem-solving skills, and conflict resolution strategies to the table.

However, gender disparities persist. Women account for only 14% of India's Parliament, despite their significant participation in grassroots governance through Panchayati Raj institutions. The 2023 Women's Reservation Bill, which mandates 33% representation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, is a landmark step toward increasing female political participation. Once implemented, the number of women in Parliament will rise from 82 to 181, fundamentally altering the landscape of women's empowerment in India.

Shifting the Narrative: Women as Agents of Change

The narrative around women is evolving. Society is beginning to recognize that women are not mere victims of oppression but active agents of change. Gender justice is no longer an abstract concept; it is a tangible demand for equal rights, representation, and opportunities. The growing participation of women in governance, corporate leadership, and entrepreneurship is a testament to this shift.

Women's economic engagement in India surged from 22% in 2022 to 37% in 2023, reflecting a positive trend. The textile sector alone employs over 2.5 million female workers, demonstrating the significant role women play in India's industrial and economic landscape. Moreover, women entrepreneurs are reshaping industries, breaking stereotypes, and driving innovation.

Despite these advances, challenges remain. Women's workforce participation in Indian Railways, for example, stands at a mere 6-7%. However, trailblazers like Jaya Varma Sinha, the first female Chairperson & CEO of the Railway Board, and over 800 women loco pilots are paving the way for greater inclusivity in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

The Road Ahead: A Collective Commitment

The pursuit of gender equality is not an isolated endeavor but a collective mission. The degree of gender parity within a society often correlates with its level of development and modernity. Societies that embrace gender equality tend to exhibit stronger social cohesion, economic prosperity, and lower discrimination levels.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi aptly stated, India must transition from "development driven by women" to "development led by women." Initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have played a crucial role in promoting education for girls, but further efforts are needed to close the literacy gap, combat violence against women, and ensure full and equal citizenship.

International Women's Day serves as a reminder that the struggle for gender equality is far from over. As Eleanor Roosevelt famously remarked, "Too often, the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men." This must change. The inclusion of women in decision-making processes, policy formulation, and governance is not just beneficial—it is imperative.

History has shown that change is possible when women are empowered to lead. As we celebrate IWD 2025, let us renew our commitment to accelerating gender equality, fostering inclusivity, and building a future where every woman has the opportunity to thrive. The time for action is now. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiiglpd@gmail.com)

The Significance of International Women's Day

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

International Women's Day, observed every year on March 8, is a global occasion that highlights the achievements, struggles, and aspirations of women across the world. It serves as a reminder of the long-standing fight for gender equality and the need for continuous efforts to ensure women's rights in every sphere of life. More than just a celebration, this day is a powerful call to action, urging societies, governments, and individuals to address the barriers that prevent women from enjoying full equality. Its significance goes beyond mere acknowledgment, as it provides a platform to reflect on the progress made, the challenges that remain, and the necessary steps to achieve a truly inclusive society.

The origins of International Women's Day can be traced back to the early 20th century when women across different nations began organizing protests and movements to demand fair wages, voting rights, and better working conditions. The first National Women's Day was observed in the United States in 1909, and soon after, the movement gained international momentum. In 1910, at the International Socialist Women's Conference in Copenhagen, the idea of a globally recognized Women's Day was proposed, leading to its first official observance in 1911. Over time, it evolved from a day of protest into a widespread celebration of women's contributions to society while maintaining its role as a platform for advocacy and reform. The United Nations officially recognized International

Women's Day in 1977, further cementing its importance as a worldwide event dedicated to gender equality.

The significance of International Women's Day lies in its ability to unite people around a common cause—gender equality. Despite the progress made over the decades, women continue to face systemic discrimination, violence, and limited opportunities in many parts of the world. In several countries, women still lack basic rights such as access to education, economic independence, and freedom from forced marriages. Even in more progressive societies, issues such as the gender pay gap, underrepresentation in leadership, and gender-based violence remain pressing concerns. By shining a light on these challenges, International Women's Day serves as a reminder that the fight for women's rights is far from over and that collective action is needed to bring about real change.

One of the most critical aspects of gender equality is economic empowerment. Women's participation in the workforce has increased significantly over the years, yet disparities persist in terms of wages, leadership opportunities, and financial security. The gender pay gap remains a significant issue, with women earning less than men for the same work in many industries. Additionally, women face difficulties in accessing credit and business opportunities, limiting their ability to achieve financial independence. International Women's Day highlights these economic inequalities and calls for policies that promote fair wages, workplace equality, and support for



women entrepreneurs. Ensuring that women have equal access to economic opportunities is not just a matter of justice but also a necessity for overall social and economic growth.

Education is another fundamental area where gender disparities continue to exist. Millions of girls around the world are still denied access to quality education due to poverty, cultural barriers, or conflict. Without education, women remain trapped in cycles of poverty, unable to improve their circumstances or contribute to their communities. International Women's Day emphasizes the importance of investing in girls' education, as it has been proven to have far-reaching benefits. Educated women are more likely to participate in the workforce, make informed health decisions, and contribute to the development

of their societies. Governments and organizations must prioritize policies that ensure every girl has the opportunity to receive an education, regardless of her background or geographical location.

Violence against women remains one of the most urgent human rights issues globally. From domestic abuse to human trafficking, gender-based violence affects millions of women and girls each year. Many women suffer in silence due to social stigma, lack of legal protection, or fear of retaliation. International Women's Day serves as a platform to raise awareness about these issues and advocate for stronger laws and support systems to protect survivors. Ending gender-based violence requires not only legal reforms but also a shift in societal attitudes that perpetuate harmful gender norms. It is essential to

challenge cultural and institutional biases that allow violence against women to persist and to create a world where women can live free from fear and harm.

Political representation is another crucial aspect of gender equality. Women remain significantly underrepresented in government, policymaking, and corporate leadership roles. While some progress has been made, the percentage of women holding influential positions remains low in many countries. Women's voices must be included in decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities. International Women's Day encourages the participation of women in politics and leadership by promoting initiatives that support female leaders and dismantling barriers that prevent women from holding positions of power. A balanced and inclusive

leadership structure leads to more effective governance and policies that reflect the needs of all members of society.

The role of men in achieving gender equality cannot be overlooked. International Women's Day is not just a day for women; it is a day for everyone who believes in fairness, justice, and equality. Men play a crucial role in challenging gender stereotypes, supporting equal opportunities, and advocating for women's rights. True progress can only be made when both men and women work together to break down societal norms that reinforce discrimination. Encouraging male allies to be actively involved in discussions about gender equality helps create a more inclusive and supportive environment for change.

International Women's Day is also a celebration of the achievements and contributions of women in various fields. From science and technology to arts and social activism, women have made remarkable strides despite facing numerous challenges. Recognizing these achievements serves as an inspiration for future generations and reinforces the importance of equal opportunities for all. The stories of trailblazing women who have defied societal expectations and paved the way for others remind us that progress is possible when determination and resilience meet opportunity.

As the world continues to face new challenges, the relevance of International Women's Day remains stronger than ever. The theme for 2025, "For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment.," un-

derscores the need for an inclusive approach that ensures no woman or girl is left behind. The fight for gender equality is not just about addressing individual issues but about creating a society where women have the freedom to make choices, pursue their ambitions, and live with dignity. It requires continuous advocacy, policy changes, and collective effort from all sections of society.

The true significance of International Women's Day lies in its power to inspire change. It is a reminder that gender equality is not a distant goal but an ongoing process that requires commitment from individuals, communities, and governments. Every action taken to support women's rights, whether big or small, contributes to the broader movement toward a fairer world. By standing together and demanding equality, societies can ensure that the future is one where opportunities are not determined by gender but by potential and ambition.

As March 8 approaches each year, the message of International Women's Day resonates across the globe: the fight for gender equality is not over, and every step toward progress matters. The day is not just about reflection but about taking action to create a world where all women and girls can thrive, free from discrimination and limitations. In this ongoing journey toward justice and empowerment, International Women's Day remains a crucial milestone—a day that reminds the world of its responsibility to uphold the rights, dignity, and dreams of women everywhere. *(The writer is the Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK)*

Beyond equality: The battle for public urinals



By: Amarpal Singh Verma

In our country, women's rights are often talked about. There is always a cry for women to have equal rights as men, but have we ever thought that let alone equality, even access to public toilets is a big struggle for women? Recently, it was surprising to know that an organization called Coro India has to run a 'right to Pee' campaign for women in Mumbai. Under this campaign, the establishment of free, clean and safe public urinals for women in the busiest areas of Mumbai is being advocated. From this, it is not difficult to understand that access to basic facilities for women in the country also remains a serious problem.

Urinals are easily available for men on roads, markets, bus stands and railway stations in small and big cities, but such facilities for women are either very few or are in very poor condition. In such a situation, women are forced to hold urine or go to unsafe and unhygienic places. The consequences of which they have to suffer in the form of urinary tract infection (UTI), kidney problems and other diseases.

Many times public toilets are in such an unsafe condition that women are afraid to go there. Defecating in public places in the open affects their dignity and self-respect.

Under Article 21 (Right to life and personal liberty) and 15 (Right to protection against gender discrimination) of the Constitution, it is the responsibility of the government to provide basic facilities to all citizens. Some time ago, the Rajasthan High Court has taken suo motu cognizance of the lack of toilets for women at workplaces and public places and the poor condition of the existing toilets and has sought a reply from the government. In its order, the court has said that women play the role of the backbone of a developing country. Women are facing many health problems due to the lack of toilets. The court said that women who go out of their homes look for toilets but they either do not find any toilet or it is not clean enough, due to which women hold back urine until they reach home. The High Court expressed concern that due to lack of toilets in the state, women drink less water and hold back urine, which can cause diseases.

The Chhattisgarh High Court has also taken suo motu cognizance of the lack of toilets in 150 government schools in Bilaspur district and the toilets not being usable in more than 200 schools and has sought a reply from the government. The High Court

noticed that due to the lack of toilets in schools, female teachers and girl students are affected as they have to go to the open field to urinate.

With the Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh High Court taking cognizance, it is clear that now this is not only a social problem but has also become a matter of legal rights, but the big question is when will this problem be solved? Will women have to raise their voice by running a campaign for the right to Pee everywhere on the lines of Mumbai?

The important campaign called 'right to Pee' launched by Coro India to solve the serious problem of women draws attention to this serious issue. This initiative is not limited to just ensuring the availability of special urinals for women, but it is a big step towards protecting the health, dignity and basic rights of women.

The facility of clean and safe urinals for women is not a privilege but a basic human right which they must get. This is not only an issue related to their health but also a question of equality, dignity and self-respect. The government, administration and society together will have to take serious initiatives on this subject so that women do not have to struggle to get such a basic right which is available to men without any effort.

Hearing about this campaign of Coro India seems strange at first, but thinking about it makes one understand how serious this issue is and why it is important to discuss it? This campaign challenges the mindset of considering the lack of public urinals for women as a 'normal situation'. Actually, this is a long-neglected problem of women, which needs a debate at the national level. The solution to any problem comes only by talking. If we have a wide discussion on this, then this demand of women will be raised strongly. There will be pressure on the government and administration and this will pave the way to work towards making the life of women more safe and convenient.

It is important that more clean and safe urinals be built for women at public places. There should be CCTV cameras at outside women's toilets, proper lighting, sanitary napkin vending machines and regular cleaning. It is important that the government makes a clear policy on this subject and immediately takes steps like making women's urinals compulsory in new building plans. It is a matter of shame for us to be forced to run a campaign like 'right to Pee' on the lines of right to education. *(The author is an independent journalist)*

The power of food creation - Empowerment or forfeit for women?

By: Dr Mridusmita Duara

Food is the quintessential fuel for the survival of all living beings. The act of creating food is deeply intertwined with human civilization, culture, and survival. Since time immemorial, women have been at the forefront of this essential skill, shaping traditions, feeding communities and influencing culinary heritage. Starting from the foraging societies, the hunting and gathering, the agricultural societies, upto the present modern age, women have been contributing to the creation of food. However, the question arises—has the power of creating food been a boon or a forfeit for women? While cooking is often revered as an art and a means of nurturing, it has also been a symbol of gendered unpaid and mostly unappreciated labor, reinforcing societal expectations and limiting opportunities for women by limiting her to the 'kitchen' and the household only. The answer lies in a nuanced understanding of history, economics, gender roles and the evolving landscape of food production.

The ability to create food has empowered women in numerous ways. Traditionally, women have been the custodians of culinary knowledge, passing down recipes, techniques, and cultural significance from one generation to the next. This legacy fosters identity, belonging, and pride in one's her-

itage. Cooking also provides economic opportunities. In recent decades, women have leveraged their culinary skills to break into the professional food industry, becoming chefs, restaurateurs, and entrepreneurs. The rise of female-led food businesses, home-based catering services, and social media-driven food influencers has demonstrated how cooking can be a tool for financial independence. Furthermore, food is a medium of creative expression. Many women find joy and fulfillment in experimenting with flavors, presenting aesthetically pleasing dishes, and using food as a storytelling device. The therapeutic aspects of cooking, where one engages in a mindful, sensory experience, contribute to mental well-being and emotional balance.

Whether cooking and creating food is a power or a generic burden needs to be debated. Despite its advantages, the association of cooking with women has long been a double-edged sword. Historically, domestic responsibilities, including cooking, were expected of women without acknowledgment or compensation. This gendered division of labor has placed undue pressure on women to bear the brunt of household food production while managing other roles in society. Some women are expected to sacrifice their career after marriage for cooking and taking care of the household. Even in modern households, studies indicate that

women continue to perform a disproportionate share of cooking and food-related tasks, even when they have careers outside the home. This expectation reinforces traditional gender roles and limits the time women can dedicate to personal growth, professional ambitions, and leisure activities.

In the professional front the culinary industry, the irony is stark. While home cooking is predominantly associated with women, the highest levels of professional cooking, Michelin-starred restaurants, celebrity chef status and high-paying executive chef roles are often dominated by men. The rigid division of domestic work based on gender is clearly evident. Women in the industry face systemic biases, workplace harassment and fewer opportunities for advancement, highlighting a gender disparity that stems from longstanding societal norms in the culinary industry.

Cooking as solely a woman's responsibility should gradually change, it is changing at a slower pace. With increased gender awareness and advocacy for equality, men are taking on a more active role in home cooking, and shared domestic responsibilities are being encouraged. Cooking is being viewed as a life skill rather than a gendered expectation, fostering a more balanced approach in households. In the professional realm, more women are challenging stereotypes and excelling in culinary arts, food science and

agricultural industries. Women chefs, food entrepreneurs and activists are redefining food production, sustainability, and nutrition, advocating for inclusivity and fair opportunities. The rise of feminist food movements has also drawn attention to ethical food sourcing, labor rights, and equitable treatment of women in kitchens worldwide.

While mostly women consider cooking food for the loved ones as an act of care, compassion and duty, another perspective also looks at it as a gender socialized form of manipulation. Thus the power of creating food is both a boon and a forfeit for women, depending on how society frames and values their contributions. When viewed as a creative and economic opportunity, cooking can be a means of empowerment and financial independence. However, when imposed as an obligation tied to gender expectations, it becomes a restrictive burden that limits personal and professional growth. For true progress, society must continue to challenge traditional norms, recognize unpaid domestic labor and create more inclusive opportunities for women in the culinary world. Only then can food creation be celebrated as a choice rather than a duty, ensuring that women harness its power on their own terms. *(The author is an Assistant Professor of Social Work, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati. She can be reached at mridusmita123@gmail.com or 8011223369)*

The journey from Shabri to Draupadi Murmu...

By: Priyanka Saurabh

Dalit women make up a significant portion of India's population. For a long time, they have faced social exclusion and humiliation. Historical and cultural narratives in India often overlook the contributions of women from marginalized communities, instead focusing on male-centric perspectives or the perspectives of dominant castes. By remembering the untold stories of Dalit women heroes and their struggles throughout history, we can enrich these narratives and confront the institutional discrimination that Dalit women have faced for generations. Today's women leaders are resilient and diverse. They are at the forefront of the global climate movement, advocating for social protections, tackling crises, and working to end systemic racial discrimination. Around the world, women leaders are changing lives and inspiring a brighter future for all.

The story of Sabari in the Ramayana exemplifies themes of acceptance, selflessness, and unconditional love, inspiring numerous hymns and poems. The rise of bhakti inspired Mahar caste women such as Sant Nirmala and Soyarabai to challenge traditional Hindu beliefs. Nangeli bravely opposed the harsh "breast tax" that targeted lower caste women who covered their breasts. Kuyili, a Dalit woman who led the army of Rani Velu Nachiyar of Sivaganga in Tamil Nadu, fought against British forces around 1780. Jhalkaribai, another courageous Dalit warrior, was a prominent figure in the

First War of Independence of 1857, serving as a trusted aide to Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi. Ujjirao, Lucknow Among the social reformers, Savitribai Phule emerged as a pioneer in the field of Dalit education, founding a school with just nine girls in 1848, which by 1851 expanded to three schools with about 150 female students. She worked with her friend Fatima Sheikh to start a school in 1849 and in 1852 founded the Mahila Seva Mandal to promote women's rights, as well as the Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, a safe place for widows and victims of assault to give birth.

Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar campaigned against the oppressive devadasi system, publishing a Tamil novel on the subject in 1936 and creating the fictional series Damayanti in 1945. Dakshayani Velayudhan made history as the first and only Dalit woman elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1946. In Maharashtra, writers such as Shantabai Kamble, Mallika Amar Sheikh, and Kumud Pawade highlighted Dalit feminism through their autobiographies. In Tamil Nadu, writers such as Bama and P. Sivakami addressed gender discrimination as a dual form of oppression. Marathi writers such as Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon worked to bring Dalit women into the spotlight within the women's movement, using their research and personal stories to highlight the harsh realities they faced.

Labour laws need to be reformed to provide exit options to Dalit women trapped in a challenging system. It is important to combine so-

cial and cultural change with economic options. Significant investments in skilling and educating women are required, along with government efforts to create new jobs in the formal sector and reduce barriers to job creation. Ensuring more stable-wage jobs for women is important to combat their socio-economic exploitation. Sustained efforts are needed to promote gender equality and challenge the tendency to give preference to boys to overcome deep-rooted prejudices. Women must be empowered with decision-making power and proper representation in governance. Therefore, the Women's Reservation Bill must be passed expeditiously to increase women's participation in Indian politics.

Additionally, governmental or community organizations should be established to oversee programs aimed at social welfare. Dalit women need targeted policies and initiatives that specifically address their unique challenges. Comprehensive health policies, particularly those focused on maternal and child health, are important. Taking inspiration from Kerala's Kudumbashree model, access to credit can be improved by encouraging women to form self-help groups. Dalit women in India are currently facing a critical juncture, as they face three significant barriers: class, caste, and patriarchy. These three interconnected aspects of social structure are important for understanding gender dynamics and the oppression faced by Dalit women. *(The author is a Research Scholar in Political Science, poet, freelance journalist, and columnist)*

Terrorism perennial challenge to be dealt with commitment: Jaishankar in Ireland

'It's not that we have very specific prescriptions here'

LONDON, March 7: Conflicts are a dominating issue today and India has taken a view that differences must be settled through dialogue and diplomacy, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in an address at University College Dublin in Ireland.

Jaishankar went on to cover a range of foreign policy issues and referenced the June 1985 Air India aircraft terrorist bombing to highlight a shared India-Ireland perspective on counterterrorism.

The external affairs minister (EAM) noted that the Irish village of Ahakista in West Cork commemorates the 329 victims of the Kanishka bombing disaster, which occurred off the coast of Ireland.

"A particular word about conflicts because it is today a very dominating issue where India is concerned; we have always taken the view that differences in this era cannot and should not be settled on the battlefield," Jaishankar said.

He was addressing students, academics and members of the diaspora at the leading Irish research institution on the topic of 'India's view of the world' on Thursday.

"It is important to have dialogue and diplomacy, to find ways of sitting down and talking, however difficult it is. It's not that we have very specific prescriptions here," he said.

"Talking about conflict, perhaps a word on countering terrorism would also be appropriate, particularly as a foreign minister of a country which has long been at the receiving end of terrorist efforts."

"Ireland actually happens to have in the



village of Ahakista a commemorative plaque which commemorates the 329 victims of the Air India aircraft Kanishka bombing which happened off the coast of Ireland. It's always a reminder that this is a perennial challenge which needs to be dealt with a great deal of resolution and commitment overall," he added. The minister went on to highlight India's "decades of about 7 per cent plus minus growth ahead," which opens up the prospect of greater alliances with friendly nations such as Ireland, a member of the European Union (EU).

With reference to the ongoing India-EU trade negotiations, he said: "We have been negotiating, and I'm afraid we've been ne-

gotiating quite long, almost 23 years now, for a free trade agreement.

"We just had a visit of the EU President with 21 commissioners to India, and we are perhaps a little bit more hopeful now that this exercise would be brought to an end, ideally by the conclusion of this year." The EAM highlighted the historic connections between India and Ireland and the strength of the bilateral relations, with nearly 13,000 Indian students enrolled at Irish universities.

"Economically today, we have a very robust level of trade. It's currently estimated at about 16 billion Euros... and what's interesting with Ireland is that actually our trade in services exceeds our trade in goods by a large

margin," he said.

"Education, as is evident, has been a really promising area of exchanges. I came into Ireland with the belief that we had about 10,000 students here. I was told the numbers today are closer to 13,000... making really a very serious contribution to Ireland's national development," the minister said.

He also noted former president V V Giri's association with University College Dublin where he studied law in 1913-16.

"As the world transitions into a different phase, I think it's important for all of us to nurture our cultural attributes, to understand their full value, to factor it in as we develop our own identity. And I think there are learnings that we have from each other," he said.

From the university, the EAM went on to address an Indian community gathering organised by the Embassy of India in Dublin, where he hailed the success and impact of the Indian diaspora. The interaction on Thursday followed his meetings with Irish President Michael D Higgins and former Irish prime minister of Indian heritage Leo Varadkar among other government ministers.

"Started my visit to Ireland going to the iconic General Post Office Museum in Dublin. The 1916 Easter Rising has a special meaning for so many who fought for freedom from colonialism," Jaishankar said in a post on X.

He also toured other historic venues in the Irish capital, including Trinity College Dublin, and will make his way to Belfast in Northern Ireland on Friday after talks with Irish Foreign Minister Simon Harris. (PTI)

Police in Bangladesh use batons, teargas to disperse rally by banned Islamist group



DHAKA, March 7: Police used batons and stun grenades on Friday to disperse thousands of members of the banned Hizbut Tahrir group as they marched near Bangladesh's main Baitul Mokarram Mosque in the country's capital.

Police said many people were injured and several protesters were arrested during the violence which came after weekly prayers.

Masud Alam, a deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said attempts were made to disperse the rally after marchers broke away from the police barricade. Witnesses said scores of people were injured.

The incident happened as between 3,000 to 5,000 protesters joined the procession, chanting slogans such as "Freedom has one path, Khilafat, Khilafat" and "Naraye Taqbir, Allahu Akbar".

The Islamist group had mounted a social media campaign in recent days and distributed leaflets and used posters across Dhaka urging people to join the procession, dubbed "March for Khilafat".

Hizbut Tahrir says it wants unification of all Muslim countries over time in a unitary Islamic state

or caliphate, headed by a caliph elected by Muslims. Its supporters believe this is an obligation decreed by Allah, warning that Allah will punish those Muslims who would overlook this duty. It also wants the introduction of Sharia law.

The group was banned in 2009 as a "threat to public security" by the government of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina under an anti-terrorism law.

Hasina was forced to flee last August after weeks of protests over a quota system for allocating government jobs turned into a broader challenge to her 15-year rule and an interim government was established under Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus. Hasina has been in exile in India since her ouster.

Bangladesh, a nation of about 170 million people, is largely Muslim-majority and is governed by mostly secular laws based on British common law. But many Islamist groups and headline political parties want to establish tough Sharia law in the country, which has experienced terrorist attacks in the past. (AP)

Migrant boats capsize off Yemen, Djibouti, leaving at least 2 dead, 186 missing

CAIRO, March 7: Four boats carrying migrants from Africa capsized overnight in waters off Yemen and Djibouti, the UN migration agency said Friday. At least two people died, and 186 others were missing.

Two of the boats capsized off Yemen late Thursday, said Tamim Eleian, a spokesperson for the International Organisation for Migration. Two crewmembers were rescued, but 181 migrants and five Yemeni crewmembers remain missing, he told The Associated Press.

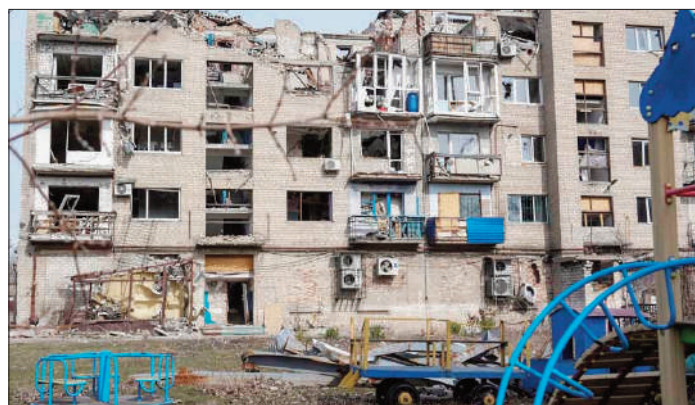
Two other boats capsized off the tiny African nation of Djibouti around the same time, he said. Two bodies of migrants were recovered, and all others on board were rescued.

Despite a nearly decade-long civil war, Yemen is a major route for migrants from East Africa and the Horn of Africa trying to reach Gulf countries for work, with hundreds of thousands attempting the route each year. To reach Yemen, migrants are taken by smugglers on often dangerous, overcrowded boats across the Red Sea or Gulf of Aden.

The numbers making it to Yemen reached 97,200 in 2023 — triple the number in 2021.

Last year, the number dropped to just under 61,000, probably because of greater patrolling of the waters, according to an IOM report this month. Over the past decade, at least 2,082 migrants have disappeared along the route, including 693 known to have drowned, according to the IOM. Some 380,000 migrants are currently in Yemen. (AP)

Russia bombards Ukraine's energy grid after Zelenskyy says his team will hold talks with US



KYIV, March 7: Russia targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure in a large-scale missile and drone bombardment during the night, officials said Friday, hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said talks with the US on ending the 3-year war will take place next week.

Ukraine came under a "massive missile and drone" attack, Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko wrote on Facebook. At least 10 people, including a child, were injured, authorities said.

"Russia is trying to hurt ordinary Ukrainians by striking energy and gas production facilities, without abandoning its goal of leaving us without light and heat, and causing the greatest harm to ordinary citizens," Halushchenko wrote.

Russia has repeatedly targeted Ukraine's power grid during the war. The attacks have depleted electricity generation capacity and disrupted critical heating and water supplies. Ukrainian officials have accused Russia of "weaponising winter" in an effort to erode civilian morale.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that the energy supply is a legitimate target in the war because it is "linked with Ukraine's military industrial complex and weapons production".

Russian air defences downed 39 Ukrainian drones overnight, according to the Russian Defence Ministry.

Ukraine's largest private gas producer, DTEK, said the overnight bombardment was Russia's sixth attack in the past two and a half weeks on its facilities.

Russia fired 67 missiles from air, land and sea and launched 194 strike and decoy drones, Ukraine's air force said. Their primary target was Ukraine's natural gas extraction facilities, it said.

For the first time, Ukraine deployed French Mirage-2000 warplanes delivered a month ago to help repel the attack, according to the air force. Ukraine also has Western-supplied F-16 fighter jets to shoot down Russian missiles.

Ukrainian defences downed 34 missiles and 100 drones, the air force said, while up to 10 missiles didn't reach their targets and 86 drones were lost from radars, presumably jammed by electronic warfare.

Western-supplied air defence systems are crucial for Ukraine's fight but further US help is uncertain under US President Donald Trump, who says he is determined to end the war and has paused

American military aid for Kyiv as a way of pressuring Zelenskyy to negotiate.

In his nightly address, Zelenskyy said Thursday he would travel to Saudi Arabia on Monday to meet the country's crown prince, and his team would stay on to hold talks with US officials.

Zelenskyy welcomed a European Union plan to bolster the continent's defences. He expressed hope that some of the new spending could be used to strengthen Ukraine's own defence industry. (AP)

Popular Iranian singer who urged women to go without hijab lashed over alcohol conviction

DUBAI, March 7: Iranian officials have flogged a popular singer who posted a song online urging women to remove their mandatory headscarves over a conviction for possessing and consuming alcohol, his lawyer and authorities said.

Mehdi Yarahi was flogged on Wednesday, his lawyer Zahra Minuei wrote on the social platform X. Iran's semi-official Fars news agency, quoting an anonymous official, said the sentence was for him drinking and having alcoholic drinks, not his music.

The lashes were "fully carried out in Branch 4 of the Enforcement of Sentences Office at the Tehran Morality Security Prosecutor's Office, and Mr Mehdi Yarahi's case has been closed," Minuei said.

Yarahi wrote and performed the song "Roosarito," Farsi for "Your Headscarf." The music video urged women to remove their hijabs and featured uncovered women dancing. Yarahi's initial arrest in August was believed to be linked to the video, which is still available online.

Yarahi wrote on X apparently after the flogging: "He who is not willing to pay a price for freedom is not worthy of it."

On the streets of Iranian cities, it's becoming more common to see a woman passing by without a mandatory headscarf, or hijab, after the second anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini and the mass protests it sparked in 2022.

Amini, 22, died on Sept 16, 2022, in a hospital after her arrest by the country's morality police over allegedly not wearing her hijab to the liking of the authorities.

The protests that followed Amini's death started first with the chant "Women, Life, Freedom." However, the protesters' cries soon grew into open calls of revolt against 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. (AP)

Orbán says Hungary will poll citizens on Ukraine's EU membership

BUDAPEST, March 7: Hungary will poll its citizens on Ukraine's potential future membership in the European Union, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Friday, a day after he refused to endorse an EU statement on support for Kyiv that was backed by the bloc's 26 other leaders.

In statements to state radio, Orbán said EU plans to fill the gap left by apparent cuts to American support for Kyiv by the administration of President Donald Trump would damage the bloc's economy. He reiterated his position that EU membership for Ukraine would come down to whether Hungary approves it or not.

EU membership for Ukraine would mean that "Europe will be destroyed, including the Hungarian economy," he said. "This process must be stopped in time."

As a way of shoring up support for Orbán's stance, the government will issue a "national consultation," a form of political campaign conducted periodically by Orbán's right-wing populist government in the form of an informal questionnaire sent to every adult in the country.

Such surveys have been widely criticized by pollsters and opposition parties as propaganda tools that are manipulative in their phrasing and highly suggestive of desired answers.

"Everyone will give their opinion" on Ukraine's potential EU membership, Orbán said. "The question is simple: yes or no."

The results of the survey will not be legally binding. He did not say when the survey would be conducted.

Orbán's government has said the



country.

surveys strengthen its bargaining position on the European level by demonstrating a national consensus on political issues.

Orbán, a staunch supporter of Trump and considered to be Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest EU partner, refused Thursday to endorse part of a statement supporting Ukraine at an emergency summit convened in Brussels.

At the summit, EU leaders committed to working together to bolster the continent's defences and to free up hundreds of billions of euros for security after Trump's repeated warnings that he would cut them admit to face the threat of Russia alone.

All 26 other EU leaders approved the bloc's stance that there can be no negotiations on Ukraine without Ukraine, and that the Europeans must be involved in any talks involving their security.

Orbán has repeatedly warned that his country could exercise a veto on allowing Ukraine into the EU, a decision which would require unanimity among all the bloc's leaders. (AP)

Clashes in Syria's coastal region between govt forces, Assad loyalists kill more than 70

LATAKIA (SYRIA), March 7: Clashes between Syrian security forces and gunmen loyal to former President Bashar Assad in the country's coastal region have left more than 70 people dead and an area outside government control, a war monitor said Friday.

Government forces sent major reinforcements overnight to the cities of Latakia and Tartus as well as nearby towns and villages that are the heartland of the minority Alawite sect and a base of support for Assad, to try to get the situation under control, state media reported.

The clashes are the worst since Assad was removed from power in early December by insurgent groups led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS. Since Assad's fall, there have been some sectarian attacks against members of his minority Alawite sect. These incidents have occurred despite the fact that officially the new authorities have said they are against collective punishment or sectarian vengeance.

On Friday morning, large numbers of troops were deployed in Latakia and no civilians were seen in the street as a curfew that was imposed in the city and other coastal areas remains in force. Members of the security force said there were some clashes in one of the city's neighbourhoods but most of the city was calm and under government control. (AP)

SpaceX loses contact with spacecraft during latest Starship mega rocket test flight

TEXAS (US), March 7: Nearly two months after an explosion sent flaming debris raining down on the Turks and Caicos, SpaceX launched another mammoth Starship rocket on Thursday, but lost contact minutes into the test flight as the spacecraft came tumbling down.

The 403-foot (123-metre) rocket blasted off from Texas a little before sunset. SpaceX caught the first-stage booster back at the pad with giant mechanical arms, but engines on the spacecraft on top started shutting down as it streaked eastward for what was supposed to be a controlled entry over the Indian Ocean, half a world away. Contact was lost with the spacecraft as it went into an out-of-control spin.

The space-skimming flight was supposed to last an hour and couldn't release the mock satellites into space as planned. The spacecraft reached nearly 90 miles (150 kilometres) in altitude before trouble



struck. It was not immediately clear where it came down.

"Unfortunately this happened last time too, so we have some practice at this now," SpaceX flight commentator Dan Huot said from the launch site.

NASA has booked Starship to land its astronauts on the moon later this decade. SpaceX's Elon Musk is aiming for Mars with Starship, the world's biggest and most powerful rocket.

Unexploded WWII bomb in Paris halts Eurostar travel connecting Paris to London, Brussels

PARIS, March 7: The discovery of an unexploded World War II-era bomb near the tracks severed Paris' high-speed rail links with London and Brussels on Friday, dashing travellers' weekend getaway plans and causing cascading disruptions to scores of other trains to and from France's busiest railway station, the Gare du Nord in Paris.

Eurostar, operator of the sleek speedy trains that usually make rail travel between the UK and the continent a breeze, announced the cancellation of all its services to and from its hub in the French capital.

Bright red signs warning of service disruptions greeted rail users at the usually humming Gare du Nord station, their travel plans thrown into disarray during the morning rush hour.

The repercussions quickly rippled beyond France's borders. In Brussels, trains to Paris were cancelled until at least Friday afternoon.

"There's no solution, we're going to call the hotel

and stay one more day. And change our train ticket," said Michel Garrot, a retired Parisian who was visiting the Belgian capital with his wife. At London's St. Pancras station, travellers who'd been looking forward to Paris' charms found their plans dashed.

"We're looking up flights, but our options are limited," said Lauren Romeo-Smith, part of a group on their way to a birthday weekend.

Eurostar, which runs passenger trains through the Channel Tunnel between Britain and the continent, said its "sincerely apologizes for the disruption and understands the inconvenience this may cause."

"We appreciate everyone's patience and cooperation during this time," it said.

Passengers at St. Pancras were advised to take the train to Lille in northwest France, or fly to Paris.

Fridays are invariably busy at St. Pancras, Eurostar's London hub, as thousands of people leave and arrive for weekend breaks. (AP)

New Zealand's top diplomat in London loses his job over remarks about Trump

WELLINGTON, March 7: New Zealand's most senior envoy to the United Kingdom has lost his job over remarks he made about US President Donald Trump at an event in London this week, New Zealand's foreign minister said Thursday.

Phil Goff, who is New Zealand's high commissioner to the UK, made the comments at an event held by the international affairs think tank Chatham House in London on Tuesday.

Goff asked a question from the audience of the guest speaker, Finland's Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen, in which he said he had been rereading a famous speech by former British wartime leader Winston Churchill from 1938, when Churchill was a lawmaker in the government of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. (AP)

Implemented in 2018 as part of India's Act East policy

Nagaland all-party delegation to meet Shah over FMR with Myanmar

KOIHIMA, March 7: The Nagaland Assembly on Friday decided that an all-party delegation would meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah to apprise him about the "resentment of the Naga people" against the Centre's decision to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with neighbouring Myanmar.

The central government in January last year announced that the FMR, which allows people residing close to the India-Myanmar border to venture 16 kilometres into each other's territory without visa, would end soon.

Chief minister Neiphiu Rio said in the assembly that the restriction would impact the age-old historical, social, cultural, tribal and economic ties of Nagas living on both sides of the India-Myanmar border.

Rio proposed that he would lead an all-party delegation to meet the Union home minister at the earliest opportunity to raise the issue before him and other members of the House accepted the suggestion.

The delegation would apprise the Centre about the concerns of the House expressed through resolutions passed on March 1, 2024, and the Cabinet decisions of February 8, 2024, and January 6, 2025.

The 1,643-km-long India-Myanmar border,



der, which passes through Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, currently has FMR. It was implemented in 2018 as part of India's Act East policy.

The CM informed the House that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on December 24 last year issued instructions allowing the cross-border movement of people who live within 10 km on each side

of the India-Myanmar boundary.

It also directed the state government to deploy at least two police personnel and two health officials at each of the entry/exit points at the company operating bases (COBs) of the Assam Rifles for smooth implementation of the measure, he said.

According to the instruction, the movement of people has been limited to 43 des-

ignated crossing points and will be granted to only those who hold Border Passes issued by the Assam Rifles. Of these 43 designated points, nine are located in Nagaland.

The MHA has also requested the Nagaland authorities to check Myanmar nationals for their Border Passes and take appropriate action on overstay or any other unauthorised activity by them, Rio said.

"It will also impede the close familial ties that exist between the communities who live along the border where at times people will have to cross the India-Myanmar border for farming. Moreover, there is movement of people across the border to avail of healthcare and education facilities. Hence, on humanitarian considerations, these restrictions need to be re-looked upon," he said.

Maintaining that the state government has highlighted the issues to the Centre on numerous occasions, the CM said that the state Cabinet deliberated on the proposal of MHA for fencing the international border and decided to request the central government to continue with the FMR and enact appropriate regulations.

The CM said that the chief secretary wrote a letter to the Union Home Secretary in this regard on January 22. (PTI)

Money laundering case

ED attaches ₹ 65 cr properties linked to ex-GM of Sikkim bank

GANGTOK, March 7: The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) has provisionally attached movable and immovable properties worth ₹ 65.46 crore in connection with a money laundering case involving a former general manager-ranked officer of a Sikkim-based bank.

The ED said in a statement that the attached assets include four residential properties and land parcels located in Deorali, Syari, Ranipool and Penlong - all in Sikkim.

These properties were allegedly acquired using proceeds from fraudulent activities linked to siphoning of funds from the State Bank of Sikkim (SBS) by Dorjee Tshering Lepcha, its former general manager (operations).

Additionally, several bank accounts with a combined deposit of approximately ₹ 53.41 crore in the names of Lepcha and his family members have also been frozen, the statement said.

These actions are parts of an ongoing investigation into the misappropriation and laundering of funds from the bank under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

Established in 1968, the SBS is an autonomous body under the Sikkim government and it is responsible to handle the treasury function of the state, according to the bank's website.

The statement added that that investigation followed an FIR registered by the Crime Investigation



Department (CID).

ED's findings revealed that Lepcha allegedly orchestrated a large-scale fraud by creating a fictitious bank account under the name "AE Roads and Bridges Department, Government of Sikkim."

Funds were illegally credited to this account by manipulating documents maintained for transactions involving two public sector banks.

The statement said the misappropriated funds were then diverted to personal accounts belonging to Lepcha and his associates.

The ED last month conducted multiple searches at properties linked to Lepcha, and seized documents related to various property purchases. The investigation is ongoing, with authorities continuing to follow leads and gather evidence against Lepcha and others involved in this extensive fraud it states. (PTI)

Governor extends International Women's Day greetings

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 7: Arunachal Pradesh Governor KT Parnaik, has extended his heartfelt greetings to the women of the state in the momentous occasion of International Women's Day. This year's IWD theme is 'Embracing Equity, Inspiring Change.' He urged all to move beyond equality and take decisive action to create a truly fair and just society where every woman has the opportunity to thrive.

In his message, the Governor said International Women's Day has been more than a celebration. "It is a call to action. It reminds us of women's immense contributions across all spheres of life. Women are the backbone of families, the pillars of communities, and the driving force behind national progress. He said that in Arunachal Pradesh, women have continuously demonstrated resilience, strength, and excellence in every field, contributing immensely to the State's growth and prosperity. The government remains steadfast in its commitment to their holistic development, recognizing that women's empowerment is a necessity for an inclusive and thriving society," the Guv said.

As we mark this important day, I call upon every woman to embrace her worth, assert her rights, and strive for greater opportunities, leadership, and economic independence, Guv added.

People give up over 1,000 illegal arms during surrender period in Manipur: Police

IMPHAL, March 7: People handed over to the security forces more than 1,000 arms along with ammunition during the two-week provided to them for voluntarily surrendering looted and illegally held weapons in ethnic strife-torn Manipur, a police officer said on Friday, a day after the deadline ended.

This figure, however, is provisional and the actual number of given up arms is likely to go up after details from all districts reach the authorities in Imphal, the capital of the northeastern state which is under President's Rule. The officers are yet to segregate the looted arms and illegally purchased weapons, which include handguns, machine guns, grenades, mortars, and INSAS and AK-56 rifles.

"A total of around 1,023 arms have been surrendered by members of the public in five valley districts, five hill districts and Jiribam during the surrender period," the officer said.

The remaining five districts of the northeastern state are Naga-majority ones where no ethnic violence has been reported since May 3, 2023.



In the other 11 districts, at least 250 people were killed and thousands rendered homeless since that day in clashes between the valley-based Meitei community and the Kukis who are in majority in the hills. Of the surrendered arms, more than 760 were from the valley districts while the rest were from the hill districts and Jiribam.

"The figures, however, are tentative and we are in the process of categorising the details of the weapons and ammunitions surrendered between February 20 and March 6," the officer said.

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla had on February 20 urged warring groups to voluntarily surrender weapons robbed from security forces and other illegally held arms within seven days. He ex-

tended the deadline for the surrender of looted and illegal arms till 4 PM on March 6, following demands by people from both hill and valley areas for additional time.

The administration had assured people that no punitive action would be taken against those who surrendered their weapons within this period, emphasising that "this is the last opportunity for everyone concerned to contribute to peace, communal harmony, the future of our youth, and the security of our society". Arms surrendered included 9mm pistols, sub-machine guns (SMGs), colt-machine guns (CMG), self-loading rifles (SLRs), modified snipers, grenades including Chinese ones, INSAS and AK 56 rifles, they said.

Besides, the people also handed

over articles like bulletproof jackets, helmets, radio sets, camouflage uniforms, boots and locally made mortars (Pompi) during the last two weeks. The highest number of arms surrendered was on February 27 when 307 weapons were handed over to the security forces in both valley and hill districts. Of them, 246 were alone surrendered by Arambai Tenggol, a Meitei group, police said.

March 6, the last day of the amnesty window, witnessed the second-highest number of arms surrendered with 196 weapons being handed over to various police stations in at least eight districts.

After the deadline for voluntarily surrendering arms expired at 4 pm on Thursday, joint security forces conducted combing and search operations in various parts of the state and recovered 36 arms, 129 ammunition, seven explosives, 21 miscellaneous items and destroyed 15 illegal bunkers, police said in a statement.

Twelve bunkers were destroyed at K Langnom and Khengjang areas while three others were demolished at Haraothel, all in Kangpokpi district. (PTI)

Tripura minister submits ₹ 150 crore proposal for tourism development

Establishment of an FCI regional office in Agartala proposed

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, March 7: Tripura tourism minister Sushanta Chowdhury announced recently that he has submitted a proposal worth ₹ 150 crore for the development of three major tourist destinations.

He also stated that Union civil aviation minister Kinjarapu Rammoohan Naidu would soon visit Tripura to inspect the non-functional Kailashahar airport in Unakoti district.

Addressing a press conference, minister Chowdhury emphasised the state government's commitment to transforming Tripura into a prime tourism hub, with continuous support from the central government.

"Since the formation of the BJP government, we have been focusing on the development of the tourism sector. Both the central and state governments, along with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), are working together to put Tripura on the global tourism map. Recently, I, along with other officials, met Union tourism minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and submitted a Detailed Project Report (DPR) to further enhance tourism in the state. We proposed three key projects, including ₹ 70 crore plan for Jampui Hills, which cov-

ers the redevelopment of Eden Tourist Lodge and the introduction of adventure tourism. Additionally, ₹ 50 crore proposal has been submitted for the Tripura Heritage Village and Sangeer Experience in Jirania subdivision, West District, and ₹ 30 crore plan for Mystic Plantation Retreat at Lakhilunga Tea Estate, also in West District. The Union minister assured us that these projects would be sanctioned after March," Chowdhury stated.

The minister further revealed that he met Union railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to discuss railway infrastructure development in Tripura.

"We placed several demands, including the introduction of the Vande Bharat Express for Tripura. The minister has taken note of it and assured that the matter will be reviewed. Additionally, we requested the conversion of the existing single railway track to a double line from Dharmanagar to Sabroom, the transformation of Agartala Railway Station into a world-class facility, improved sanitation in both local and express trains, and the expedited completion of the railway track at Sekerkote near the IOCL depot," he informed.

Chowdhury also met Union food and

civil supplies minister Pralhad Joshi, urging the release of pending funds amounting to ₹ 53.17 crore.

"The minister assured that the funds would be released soon. Additionally, we proposed the establishment of an FCI regional office in Agartala. The Union minister has directed the Secretary to take the necessary steps, and once the land is allocated, he has agreed to inaugurate the office. We have sought the requirements, which we will fulfill accordingly," he added.

Regarding aviation development, the minister shared details of his meeting with Union Civil Aviation minister Kinjarapu Rammoohan Naidu, where he advocated for the declaration of Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport as an international airport and the commencement of international flights.

"We also discussed the defunct Kailashahar airport in Unakoti District. The minister assured us that he would personally visit the site to assess its current condition and explore possibilities for its revival," he said.

The proposed developments are expected to significantly enhance Tripura's tourism and transportation infrastructure, fostering economic growth in the region.

Arunachal senior officers promoted to IAS cadre

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 7: To redefine excellence in public service and administration, four officers from the Arunachal Pradesh State Civil Service (APCS) have been honored with their promotion to the prestigious Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and will join the distinguished AGMUT Cadre.

Phunchu Norbu Thungon (born on May 1, 1966), Duly Kamduk (born on March 31, 1967), Sumedha Yadav (born on July 22, 1967) and Mamata Riba (born on December 4, 1968) have consistently shown their exemplary commitment, exceptional leadership in administration. Their elevation to the IAS would be pursuit of their excellence in governance and government and administrative services and public services.

Such promotion in the administrative services will inspire future generations of civil ser-

vants. The officers have been selected under the Select Lists of 2021 and 2022, filling vacancies arising in those years. The appointments were made in consultation with the state government and as per the Indian Administrative Service (Appointment by Promotion) Regulations, 1955. Chief minister Pema Khandu in a social media post has congratulated the four administrative officers.

"My warmest congratulations to Shri Phunchu Norbu Thungon, Smt Sumedha Yadav, Shri Duly Kamduk and Smt Mamata Riba on their well-deserved appointment to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) from the State Civil Service of Arunachal Pradesh," Khandu said. Their dedication, perseverance and service to the state have been recognized with this prestigious appointment, and I am confident that they will continue to serve with the same commitment and integrity in the AGMUT Cadre, Khandu added.

No. BTC/LR-32/2025/Pt.1/20 Dated Kokrajhar, the 07th March, 2025

NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

Sealed quotation affixing a court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five only) is hereby invited from the intending registered farms/ submit Quotations for "Supply of Machinery items (one Xerox Machine for each Circle Offices) under CALA Deptt., BTC, Kokrajhar for 10 (Ten) Nos. of Circle Offices" with the following terms and conditions.

The quotation will be received from 07.03.2025 to 27.03.2025 (11:00 AM till 3:00 PM) and will be opened on 27.03.2025 at 3:30 PM in presence of Quotationers or their representatives. In case of any unusual occurrence like Strike/ Govt. holiday etc. the receiving & opening of quotation will be on the next working day at the same time.

Terms & Conditions:-

- The quotation should be submitted with up-to-date documents as follows: -
i) Income Tax clearance for 3 (three) years.
ii) GST Registration Certificate.
iii) PAN Card.
iv) Trade License.
The Council may ask for any additional documents, if required.
- The rate of the items shall be quoted excluding GST and GST amount shall be shown separately.
- The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest rate and reserves the right to reject any or all quotation at any time without assigning any reason thereof.
- An amount of Rs. 10,000.00 (Rupees Ten Thousand only) is to be deposited as security money in the form of Bank Draft in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC along with quotation which will be refundable in due course.
- For details contact CALA, BTC Secretariat during office hours.

Sd/- Secretary,
Bodoland Territorial Council,
Kokrajhar

TPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1590

No. BTC/LR-32/2025/Pt.1/21 Dated Kokrajhar, the 07th March, 2025

NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

Sealed quotation affixing a court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five only) is hereby invited from the intending registered farms/ submit Quotations for "Supply of Machinery items (one Xerox Machine for each Circle Offices) under CALA Deptt., BTC, Kokrajhar for 9 (Nine) Nos. of Circle Offices" with the following terms and conditions.

The quotation will be received from 07.03.2025 to 27.03.2025 (11:00 AM till 3:00 PM) and will be opened on 27.03.2025 at 3:30 PM in presence of Quotationers or their representatives. In case of any unusual occurrence like Strike/ Govt. holiday etc. the receiving & opening of quotation will be on the next working day at the same time.

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Sd/- Secretary,
Bodoland Territorial Council,
Kokrajhar

TPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1589

NAME CHANGE

I Dhiramani Talukdar spouse of Dhanjit Talukdar, Resident of Vill-Digjira bajali pam, po-Salbari, Dist - Barpeta (Assam) I have changed my name from Dhira Talukdar to Dhiramani Talukdar, vide affidavit date 03/11/2024 from Ranchi court Jharkhand.

MONTHLY BASIS CAB & TAXI HIRING SERVICES

GeM Bid Number: GEM/2025/BI/6025760, Dated: 05-03-2025. (NIT No. SCL-ENGG-30-OF-2025). E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work.

Item Category: Monthly Basis Cab & Taxi Hiring Services-SUV; 2500 km X 320 hours; Outstation.

Estimated Bid Value: ₹28,32,939/-; **EMD Amount:** ₹56,700/-; Bid End Date/Time: 28-03-2025 at 17:00 hrs. Bid Opening Date/Time: 28-03-2025 at 17:30 hrs. Tender has been uploaded in website <http://www.GeM.gov.in>

DRM (Works), Lumding at Silchar

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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E-Auction for UP-GRADATION, MAINTENANCE AND MANNING OF AC WAITING HALL

E-Auction for Up-gradation, maintenance and manning of AC waiting hall with modern facilities, amenities like multipurpose stalls and Tourist kiosk at Guwahati Railway station. **Rate Unit:** Annual Licensing Fee. **Trips/Days:** 1096.

Auction Catalogue No. PNU-GHY-01-25		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	PNU-LMG-GHY-WRL-60-25-1 (Pay and Use- Lounges/Waiting/Retiring/Cloak Rooms)	Up-gradation, maintenance and manning of AC waiting rooms with modern facilities, amenities like multipurpose stalls and Tourist kiosk at Guwahati Railway station under Lumding Division

Auction Start Date & Time: 10.00 hrs. of 20-03-2025. **Auction Close Date & Time:** 10.30 hrs. of 20-03-2025. Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in

Divisional Commercial Manager, Guwahati

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers With A Smile"

PM Modi only interested in 'tareef', not concerned about tariffs: Jairam Ramesh's dig on 'US threat'

NEW DELHI, March 7: Narendra Modi is only interested in "tareef" and not concerned with tariffs, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on Friday and wondered where is the prime minister's "56-inch chest" in dealing with US threats on the reciprocal-tariff issue.

In an interview with PTI, Ramesh said the Congress will raise the issue of US President Donald Trump's reciprocal-tariff threats during the upcoming second half of the Budget session and called for a bipartisan collective resolve to deal with the threats.

The Congress leader also alleged that External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has been speaking like an American envoy and a spokesperson for that country.

"Our prime minister wants to hear only 'tareef (praise)', he is not concerned about tariffs. 'Tareef kum aur tariff pe baat kijiye (talk about the tariffs issue and less about your praise)', Ramesh said. He said Trump is redoing the entire rules of international trade, adding that the US president's whole idea of reciprocal tariffs is "bizarre".

"We have negotiated a tariff schedule. About 170 countries have negotiated a trade agreement, which became the World Trade Organisation in 1995. It took about 10 years to negotiate. Now, Mr Trump



comes up with his own bizarre notion of what constitutes international trade," Ramesh said.

"You tariff, I tariff", that is not the way international trade functions. These rules have been negotiated. The WTO is the World Trade Organisation, not the World Trump Organisation," he said.

Hitting out at the government over the manner in which illegal Indian immigrants were deported from the United States, Ramesh said even small countries are raising their voice but the prime minister stays mum.

"He should speak frankly.... Trump is threatening a country like India. The prime minister talks about having a 56-inch chest, where is his 56-inch chest now? Remember what Indira Gandhi had told (US President (Richard) Nixon in November 1971? Presi-

dent Nixon and Henry Kissinger had tried to defame India but Indira Gandhi stood up and said, 'I will do what is in the interest of India,'" Ramesh recalled.

"It is a question of India's interest. But our prime minister is doing 'Namaste Trump', 'my good friend Trump'. He is busy hugging him. So this question (on tariffs) will be raised (in Parliament). We have raised the issue of Indian citizens (being deported from the US)," he said.

The manner in which Trump is targeting India is a "serious issue" and a matter of "our sovereignty", the Congress leader asserted.

He further claimed that the prime minister does not break his silence in Parliament and sends the external affairs minister, "who is like a spokesperson of the US".

"The US does not have an am-

bassador and the external affairs minister talks like a US envoy," Ramesh said.

He asserted that there is a need to show a collective resolve to the US threats on reciprocal tariffs.

Slamming the BJP-led government, the Congress leader said it never calls an all-party meeting and when it does, the external affairs minister and the home minister simply give a sermon.

"In the first half of the Budget session, we raised the issue of the humiliating and demeaning manner in which the Indian citizens were deported from the US, handcuffed and chained," Ramesh said.

"Many of these migrants were from Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat, and even the migrants from Gujarat were asked to land in Amritsar to score a political point. We raised the issue of the manner of deportation very forcefully," he said.

The first half of the Budget Session was held from January 31 to February 13. The second half starts on Monday and will conclude on April 4.

Trump has repeatedly talked about India's tariffs recently. In his address to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, the first of his second term in the White House, Trump criticised the high tariffs charged by India and other countries and termed those "very unfair". (PTI)

Shah targets Stalin on language issue, asks CM to impart med, engg education in Tamil

State government maintains to follow the 2-language policy, i.e. Tamil and English



RANIPET (TAMIL NADU), March 7: Amid the language row in Tamil Nadu involving the ruling DMK and the BJP-led Centre, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday asked Chief Minister M K Stalin to impart engineering and medical education in Tamil in the state and also paid rich tributes to the Tamil language.

Targeting the chief minister on the language issue, especially given Stalin's opposition to the 'imposition' of Hindi, Shah said the Narendra Modi government has effected changes and now ensured that the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) aspirants could write the exam in their respective regional languages.

"Now the PM Narendra Modi government has ensured that the exam can be written in Tamil too," the home minister said, speaking at the 56th Raising Day of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) at RTC Thakkolam in this district, about 70 km from Chennai.

He further said, "I appeal to the Tamil Nadu chief minister to start the engineering and medical education in Tamil in the state for the benefit of students."

Shah's comments targeted at the CM come in the wake of an intense language row in the state, where the ruling DMK has been claiming the imposition of Hindi

through the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), a charge which the Centre has denied. The state government has maintained it will only follow the 2-language policy, i.e. Tamil and English.

Further, praising Tamil Nadu, Shah said the southern state's culture played a vital role in strengthening India's cultural stream.

"Be it administrative reforms, attaining spiritual heights, education or the unity and integrity of the nation, Tamil Nadu has reinforced Indian culture in every sphere," Shah said at the event, which was marked by a spectacular march-past of contingents, yoga display and commando operations.

The Tamil language, culture, and traditions are priceless jewels of India's heritage, which the entire nation proudly embraces today, Shah said.

Further, it was a matter of pride that the CISF Thakkolam Training Center, the Rajadithya Chozhan

RTC has been named in honour of the great warrior and valiant Tamil king of the Chola dynasty, Aditya Chola.

King Aditya Chola carved tales of bravery and sacrifice on this very land of Tamil Nadu and attained martyrdom, further strengthening the glorious traditions of the Chola empire, he said.

Talking about CISF, he said the force's contribution is very important in achieving Prime Minister Modi's resolve of making India the third largest economy of the world and also a developed nation by 2047.

"Whether it is the industrial development of the country, business or research institutes, their security cannot be imagined without CISF soldiers. It is the result of CISF's unwavering loyalty and dedication that today the country is moving ahead safely in all these areas," Shah said.

The home minister, who was the chief guest at the CISF Raising Day celebrations, released the CISF's magazine 'Sentinel' in the presence of CISF Director General Rajwinder Singh Bhatti, and inaugurated a gym and laid foundation stones for six welfare projects totalling ₹ 94.37 crore on the occasion.

Earlier, he paid floral tributes to the CISF personnel who lost their lives while in service. (PTI)

Election Commission has finally admitted and accepted 'guilt': TMC on duplicate EPIC card numbers

NEW DELHI, March 7: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has finally "admitted and accepted" their guilt, said the Trinamool Congress (TMC) as the poll panel issued a second statement over the issue of duplication of voter ID card numbers.

"The ECI has finally admitted and accepted their guilt that duplicate EPIC (Electoral Photo Identity Card) numbers have been allotted to multiple people. All of this has happened because (West Bengal) CM Mamata Banerjee nailed the lies of the ECI & exposed this scam," TMC Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale said in a post on X shortly after the poll panel released a statement saying it will address the "decades-long" matter in the next three months.

"After being in denial, the ECI now says it will 'fix the issue' in just three months. It has also given a very unconvincing explanation that "this

duplication of EPIC has happened since the year 2000 due to registration officers using incorrect alphanumeric series," he said.

Gokhale questioned how an "incorrect series" was allegedly used when ECI's Handbook for Electoral Registration Officers has clear guidelines, and asked about the fate of the software that was supposed to catch this.

He asked if the ECI said this had been happening since 2000, why nothing was done for 25 years until Banerjee pointed it out.

"Why hasn't ECI still revealed how many duplicate EPICs currently exist? This is the second eyewitness in a week being passed off as a 'clarification' by ECI," he said.

"What is the ECI hiding and who are they trying to protect? This is a scam & answers must be given," he added. (PTI)

BJP to back Nitish even after polls: Bihar Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary

PATNA, March 7: Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary has asserted that the BJP will back CM Nitish Kumar for another term in office, rubbishing speculations that the NDA could push for a new face after the assembly polls due later this year.

In a freewheeling conversation with PTI here, Choudhary also said the possible entry of Kumar's son Nishant in politics was their "personal" matter and an "internal" affair of the JD(U), even as he dismissed Tejashwi Yadav, the NDA's principal challenger in the state, as a "mere appointee" of RJD president Lalu Prasad.

"The BJP is comfortable with Nitish Kumar, who has led the NDA in Bihar since 1996. So Nitish was (the leader) yesterday, he is so today and will remain so tomorrow," said the former state BJP chief.

A trenchant critique of Kumar until the JD(U) returned to the NDA last year, Choudhary made it clear that while in the opposition "we were supposed to question the government. But, once in a coalition, the BJP is with its alliance partners 100 per cent".

He also claimed, "Nitish Kumar has himself

said so many times that it was because of late Atal Bihari Vajpayee, he became the chief minister. Even RJD president Lalu Prasad had become the CM with BJP's support. But he took a divergent path".

"On the other hand, with Nitish Kumar we have the situation that he is working under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the national level, while in Bihar he is our leader," Choudhary said.

Asked about speculations that 47-year-old Nishant, who has so far stayed away from public life, may enter politics in the near future, Choudhary replied, "It is a personal decision of Nitish ji and an internal matter of the JD(U). Whatever they decide, the BJP will be with them as an alliance partner."

About another NDA partner Chirag Paswan, a union minister who heads the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), he said the young MP from Hajipur was "a tall leader who lends strength to the coalition".

The BJP leader was also confident of the NDA winning "more than 200 seats" of the 243-strong assembly in the upcoming polls, thanks to the growth witnessed by the state

under the "double engine government".

The term "double engine" is used by BJP leaders to refer to the party being in power at the Centre as well as in a state.

The deputy CM was, however, dismissive of RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, the NDA's principal challenger, whom he called "not a leader in his own right but merely an appointee of his father Lalu Prasad".

"I have always said Tejashwi is just a baa (kid). The day Lalu ji says he wants Tej Pratap or Misa Bharti to be his political heir, nobody will care about Tejashwi," claimed Choudhary.

"Moreover, the people of Bihar can never forget the 15 years of lawlessness under the RJD. Marauders used to barge into homes and gun down the occupants. During the wedding of a daughter of Lalu Prasad, a car showroom was shoplifted," alleged Choudhary.

Ridiculing Yadav's attempts to create a buzz with populist promises, the deputy chief minister pointed out, "The RJD was in power when prohibition was imposed but now they speak of giving relief to toddy tappers. Also, the very domicile policy he is now promising was scrapped when they were ruling Bihar." (PTI)

Crimes against women rising in Odisha but BJP's double-engine govt silent: Cong

NEW DELHI, March 7: The Congress on Friday hit out at the BJP over alleged increase in crimes against women in Odisha, claiming that 54 incidents of gang-rape have taken place in the last eight months with the 'double-engine government remaining silent'.

Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Bhakta Charan Das said the central government should

pay attention to the situation in Odisha and if it is unable to do so, the Supreme Court should order the state government to change its attitude.

"For the last 24 years, the Biju Janata Dal government was in power in Odisha. Meanwhile, from 2000 to 2009, the BJP and BJD together ruled Odisha. The BJP government has been in power for the last eight

months. Chief Minister Mohan Majhi himself has stated that 3,420 women and 8,403 children are missing. "There have been 54 incidents of gang-rape in the last eight months. Along with this, incidents of rape and murder of minor girls are continuously increasing in Odisha. All this is happening, but the BJP's 'double-engine' government is silent," he claimed. (PTI)

CM Siddaramaiah announces several welfare schemes for minorities, BJP slams 'appeasement'

BENGALURU, March 7: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday announced various welfare schemes for minorities in his budget for the fiscal year 2025-26, including ₹ 50,000 to support simple marriages and ₹ 1,000 crore under the Chief Minister's Minority Colony Development Programme.

The BJP criticised these measures calling them "appeasement". While presenting the budget, the Chief Minister said, "To promote simple marriages among economically backward minority communi-

ties, an amount of ₹ 50,000 will be provided per couple to NGOs that organise such mass marriages."

He stated that classes from pre-primary to PU will be introduced in 250 Moulana Azad Model English Medium Schools in a phased manner, with a total cost of ₹ 500 crore.

An allocation of ₹ 100 crore has been made for this purpose in the current year, and the programme will be implemented in collaboration with the School Education Department. (PTI)

Omar Abdullah unveils fiscal reforms to strengthen J&K's economy

JAMMU, March 7: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday announced a series of economic and tax reforms aimed at bolstering revenue generation, infrastructure development and social security while underscoring the need for fiscal prudence.

Presenting the Budget in the Assembly, he highlighted the government's commitment to reduce fiscal deficit through strategic policy measures and central assistance.

"Because of our fiscal reforms and central support, the fiscal deficit will be reduced, bringing us closer to our Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) target," Abdullah said.

He projected the region's economy to grow at 7.5 per cent in 2024-25, with an estimated Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) growth of 9.5 per cent in 2025-26.

In a major announcement, Abdullah introduced new levies on non-transport vehicles purchased outside J-K but registered within the region through authorised dealerships. "These vehicles will now be subject to a 12 per cent road and token tax, along with a 3 per cent green cess on top of existing charges," he said.

"This measure aims to mitigate revenue losses and provide a level-playing field for local automobile dealers," he stated.

The chief minister also proposed revisions in fuel taxes to encourage the adoption of cleaner energy sources. The Budget reduces petrol rebates by Re 1 per litre and high-speed diesel rebates by Rs 2 per litre while increasing the tax rate on aviation turbine fuel to 5 per cent.

"We are taking steps to align fuel taxation with environmental goals while ensuring that J&K remains competitive compared to neighbouring states like

Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh," Abdullah said.

The chief minister acknowledged J-K's financial constraints, attributing them to high committed expenditures and limited revenue streams. He revealed that only 30 per cent of revenue receipts and 25 per cent of budgetary needs are covered by J-K's tax and non-tax revenues.

"Our historical challenges of high expenditure and low revenue generation have led to fiscal stress. However, through improved tax compliance, digital tracking and prudent fiscal management, we are ensuring revenue mobilisation," Abdullah said.

The government has intensified efforts to improve tax realisation, especially through Goods and Services Tax (GST) compliance. He assured that GST tracking for capital works and risk-based e-way bill verifications would be strengthened to curb tax evasion.

"Red-flagged cases will be closely monitored using inputs from the Business Intelligence Unit (BIU) and GST Network (GSTN) to prevent revenue leakages," he said.

The government's focus on digital reforms has yielded positive results, with non-tax revenue reaching Rs 5,824 crore as of January 31, while tax revenue has climbed to Rs 11,650 crore — both figures exceeding last year's collections.

"We are improving billing, metering and digitisation to enhance revenue collection. Our reforms in metering and power billing have led to a reduction in under-recovery from Rs 6,552 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 5,244 crore in 2023-24, with a further target of Rs 4,200 crore in 2024-25," Abdullah said.

Despite these efforts, he acknowledged that J-K's debt burden has risen due to borrowing for power purchases. The pub-

lic debt has increased from 48 per cent of GSDP in FY 2015-16 to 52 per cent in 2023-24.

"To address this, we are reducing high-cost debt and optimising liabilities for long-term fiscal stability," he said.

The chief minister reiterated the need to tackle J-K's infrastructure deficit, particularly in road connectivity, water supply, tourism and power.

"Addressing these gaps requires significant financial resources and continued central support. Our discussions with the prime minister, Union home minister and finance minister have resulted in special financial assistance for J&K," he said.

He announced that the budget for the J-K Police, previously constituting 11 per cent of the state allocation, has been migrated to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Budget from 2024-25 onward.

"J&K will also receive an extra Rs 5,000 crore in grants for 2024-25 and 2025-26, which will greatly strengthen our fiscal position," Abdullah said, expressing gratitude to the central government. "I sincerely thank the prime minister, Union home minister and Union finance minister for their unwavering support in strengthening J&K's fiscal health and realising its vision for growth and prosperity," he said.

The government is also focused on improving fiscal transparency by making all developmental expenditures publicly accessible through the Empowerment and Jan-Bhagidhari portal. Independent officers will verify projects to ensure timely completion and quality execution, he said. "We are strengthening fiscal discipline by curbing reliance on overdrafts. Improved liquidity management has significantly reduced our dependence on ways and means advances," Abdullah said. (PTI)

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL, DIPHU

INTERVIEW NOTICE

This is to formally notify all concerned applicants that, in response to the Situation Vacant Advertisment No. Addl.CPHE/DIP/Estt — 73/2024-25/2126, dated 31/01/2025, and the extension notice No. Addl.CPHE/DIP/Estt— 73/2024-25/2100-10, dated 21/02/2025, the written test for the Grade — III posts of Stenographer, Sectional Assistant, Assistant Driller, and Junior Assistant, as well as the oral interview for the Grade — IV posts of Chowkidar and Peon, will be conducted as per the schedule outlined below.

Schedule for grade-III post written test

Date of Written test	Time	
	Morning	Evening
23/03/2025	9:30 AM to 12:00 Noon	1:30 PM to 4:00 PM
	Stenographer, Sectional Assistant and Assistant Driller	Junior Assistant

Schedule for grade- IV oral interview:

Date of Oral Interview	Time	
	10:00 AM to 5:00 PM	
25/03/2025, 26/03/2025 & 27/03/2025	Chowkidar and Peon	

We strongly encourage all applicants to take note of the scheduled dates for the written test and oral interview and the venue for both written test and oral interview will be notified in due course of time.

For further information, applicants may visit the office of the undersigned during official working hours on weekdays.

Sd/-

Additional Chief Engineer (PHE)
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu

Memo. No. Addl.CPHE/DIP/Estt — 73/2024-25/2277-86 Date: 07/03/2025

Hindus to play Holi till 2.30 pm on March 14, Muslims to offer Jumma namaz thereafter

SAMBHAL (UP), March 7: Hindus would play Holi till 2.30 pm on March 14 while Muslims would offer Jumma namaz after 2.30 pm here in the communally sensitive city of Uttar Pradesh, a senior police official on Friday said, adding seven companies of Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) have been deployed ahead of the festival.

The new directive comes a day after a circle officer (CO) kicked up a row by saying that Holi is a festival that occurs once a year whereas Jumma namaz takes place 52 times a year. He said anyone who feels uncomfortable with the colours of Holi should stay indoors on that day.

Sambhal Superintendent of Police (SP) Krishan Kumar on Friday told reporters that in view of Holi and the first Friday of Ramzan falling on the same day, seven companies of PAC have been deployed in the city. Complete peace prevails in the district and peace committee meetings are being organised at the mohalla level, he said.

Asked about the discussions that took place in the meeting of the peace committee, the SP said, "Talks were held with key people from both sides in the district-level peace committee meeting and it was decided that the Jumma namaz will be held after 2.30 pm and people of the Hindu community will play Holi till 2.30 pm and go to their homes."

He said the Sambhal district police are keeping a strict vigil on social media and people should not believe any kind of rumour.



Kumar said the police outposts are being inspected, an antenna has been installed at the Satyavrat police outpost and a district control room is being built on it because it is located at a height.

"If there is any rumour then inform the police so that it can be refuted in time. I would also appeal to everyone not to believe any kind of rumour," he said.

Sambhal District Magistrate (DM) Rajender Pensiya told reporters that the city has been divided into six zones and 29 sectors.

Magistrates have been deployed in all sectors. Peace committee meetings have been

held at the police station level and the district level.

Asked whether tarpaulin cover will be put on mosques due to Holi, he said, "There is no such plan from our side. If the parties decide on their own, they can cover them. Both the parties have said they will celebrate both festivals with great harmony, coordination and peace."

On Thursday, a police officer posted in Sambhal had said those uncomfortable with Holi colours should remain indoors as the festival comes once a year, sparking criticism from the opposition parties which demanded action against him saying his

remarks show "bias" and are not befitting of an officer.

A peace committee meeting was held on Thursday at the Sambhal Kotwali police station given the upcoming Holi festival, which coincides with Friday prayers during the ongoing holy month of Ramzan.

"Holi is a festival that comes once a year, whereas Friday prayers take place 52 times in a year. If anyone feels uncomfortable with the colours of Holi, they should stay indoors on that day. Those who step out should have a broad mindset, as festivals are meant to be celebrated together," Sambhal Circle Officer (CO) Anuj Chaudhary told reporters on Thursday after the meeting.

He emphasised the need for communal harmony and strict vigilance to maintain law and order. He said peace committee meetings had been going on for a month at various levels to ensure smooth celebrations.

Chaudhary urged both communities to respect each other's sentiments and also appealed to people to avoid forcibly applying colours on those who do not wish to participate.

"Just as Muslims eagerly await Eid, Hindus look forward to Holi. People celebrate by applying colours, sharing sweets and spreading joy."

"Similarly, on Eid, people prepare special dishes and embrace each other in celebration. The essence of both the festivals is togetherness and mutual respect," he had said. (PTI)

SC refuses status quo on Dharavi redevelopment

NEW DELHI, March 7: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to order a status quo on Dharavi redevelopment project in Mumbai.

A bench of Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar sought responses from the Maharashtra government and Adani Properties Pvt Ltd, which was awarded the tender for the project, on a petition challenging a December 20, 2024 verdict of the Bombay High Court.

The high court had cleared the decks for redevelopment of the slums in Dharavi and upheld the tender awarded to the Adani Group for the project, ruling there was no "arbitrariness, unreasonableness or perversity" in the decision.

The high court in the process dismissed the plea of UAE-based Seclink Technologies Corporation challenging the state government's decision to award the mega redevelopment project to Adani Properties Pvt Ltd, which had made a Rs 5,069-crore offer.

Seclink Technologies Corporation emerged as the highest bidder for the project first in 2018 with its ₹ 7,200-crore offer, but the tender was later scrapped by the government.

The Adani Group had emerged as the highest bidder for the 259-hectare Dharavi redevelopment project in the heart of Mumbai and bagged it with its ₹ 5,069-crore offer in the 2022 tender process.

The corporation moved against the high court decision.

While issuing notice on its plea, the bench directed Adani Properties Pvt Ltd to make payments for the project through a single bank account.

After the bench issued notice on the plea, senior advocate C Aryama Sundaram appearing for Seclink Technologies Corporation urged the court to order a status quo. The CJI, however, said, "No." Sundaram informed the bench that the petitioner company offered ₹ 7,200 crore in the first tender.

"I will increase my offer of ₹ 7,200 crore by 20 per cent," he told the bench, adding that the figure comes to ₹ 8,640 crore.

"What about additional obligations?" asked solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state.

When the bench asked Sundaram, if it was willing to increase the offer "with the same obligations as put on the highest bidder", Sundaram said "yes".

The bench noted Sundaram's submission on the proposed commitment and said, "The petitioner will file an affidavit to the said effect before this court."

The matter would come in the week of May 25.

The bench, however, clarified no special equities would be claimed by either sides.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Adani Properties Pvt Ltd, said the project work had already commenced.

"I have carried out constructions. I have deposited funds. About 2,000 people are employed," he said.

Mehta said some railway quarters were demolished aside from new constructions taking place.

While dismissing Seclink Technologies Corporation's plea, the high court had also rejected its contention that the tender was "tailor made" to suit a particular firm of the private conglomerate, noting three bidders had participated in the process.

The government had cancelled the 2018 tender and issued a fresh one in 2022 with additional conditions.

The corporation first challenged the cancellation of the 2018 tender and subsequently the 2022 award of tender to the Adani Group.

The state government had claimed in the high court that the tender was awarded in a transparent manner without any undue favour to the highest bidder.

The government said the 2018 tender was cancelled and a fresh one was issued four years later owing to several factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war which affected the financial and economic state of affairs.

The first tender for the mega redevelopment project was issued in November 2018.

In March 2019, the bids were opened and it was found that Seclink Technologies Corporation was the highest bidder.

Dharavi, one of the world's densest urban sprawls, is a slum colony having a mix of residential and small industrial units. (PTI)

UP govt to attempt Guinness world record

LUCKNOW, March 7: The Uttar Pradesh government on Friday said it will attempt to create a Guinness world record by organising Holi with over 2,000 widows in Vrindavan. The state's Tourism Department and welfare organisations will jointly host the event in the holy city. According to a statement, officials from Guinness World Records will be present to oversee and facilitate the certification process.

"In 2025, the Yogi government, in collaboration with social welfare organisations, is set to attempt a Guinness world record for the largest Holi celebration with over 2,000 widows," it said, adding organic colours would be used in the event that would feature folk songs, traditional dances and devotional music. (PTI)

Pressing, touching minor's lips without sexual advances not POCSO offence: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, March 7: The Delhi High Court has said in the absence of sexually motivated advances, touching and pressing minor girl's lips and sleeping next to her cannot attract prosecution for "aggravated sexual assault" under POCSO Act.

Justice Swarnika Kanta Sharma observed the acts might violate her dignity and outrage her modesty but without "overt or inferred sexual intent" would fall short of meeting the legal threshold required to sustain a charge under section 10 of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act). The judge, however, ruled that there was a clear prima facie case under Section 354 of IPC for 'assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty'.

The court passed the judgement on February 24 while deciding the plea of the uncle of a 12-year-old minor girl against framing of charges under Section 354 IPC and Section 10 of POCSO Act against him. The court sustained the charge under Section 354 but discharged him under section 10 of POCSO Act. "Essential ingredients of an offence under Section 354 of the IPC are squarely met. This provision criminalises the use of criminal force or

assault against a woman with the intent to outrage her modesty or with the knowledge that such an act is likely to do so," the court said.

Referring to Supreme Court's rulings, the court said the apex court has repeatedly said modesty, in the context of Section 354 of IPC, must be interpreted in light of the dignity and bodily autonomy of a woman, or a minor girl.

"(However) the victim has not alleged any act of an overtly sexual nature, nor has she suggested in any of her recorded statements - whether before the magistrate, the police or CWC - that she was subjected to sexual assault or that there was even an attempt to commit such an offence... the absence of even the slightest indication of a sexually motivated advance in the statements of the victim negates the foundational requirement of 'sexual intent', which is an essential element of an offence under Section 10 of POCSO Act," it added.

The minor girl, the verdict said, was abandoned by her mother at a young age and lived at a child care institution. She was visiting her family at the time of the incident, it noted.

The verdict observed in a scenario when the

child was seeking familial warmth and security, any inappropriate physical contact by a family member in a position of trust was far more than just discomforting - a clear violation of her dignity, bodily autonomy, and modesty. Even a minimal physical contact, when done with an intent or with the knowledge that it was likely to outrage modesty, was sufficient to invoke Section 354 of IPC, it said.

The court also deprecated the practice of passing "cryptic, non-speaking, proforma orders" by trial courts underlining no reasoning - even in the present case - whatsoever to justify the framing of charges. "The practice by some sessions courts of passing four line orders on charge - devoid of facts, arguments and analysis thereof and the reason to reach a conclusion as to why charge under a particular section is being ordered to be framed - is not appreciable," it said. The court said when a person was at a risk of incarceration for a significant period, judicial orders should not be passed in a mechanical manner and trial courts were expected to provide at least some reasoning to demonstrate application of mind to the facts and arguments placed before them. (PTI)

GOLD SMUGGLING CASE

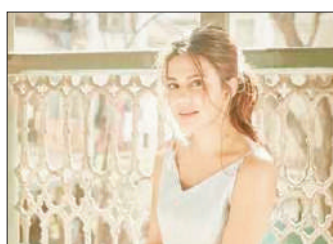
Actress Ranya Rao remanded to 3 days in DRI custody

BENGALURU, March 7: A special court for economic offences on Friday granted the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence three days' custody of actress Ranya Rao, who was arrested at Kempegowda International Airport earlier this week for allegedly smuggling 14.2 kg of gold from Dubai.

The DRI sought her custodial interrogation to investigate the source of the smuggled gold and its intended recipients, suggesting a possible link to "anti-national activities". The court agreed to the request, allowing further inquiry into the case.

During the hearing, the DRI submitted a statement obtained from the actress to support its request for her custody.

Investigators revealed that Rao, identified in her passport as Harshvardini Ranya, had travelled to Dubai 27 times in the last six months, raising concerns about the nature of these frequent visits.



Following her arrest, she reportedly claimed to be working as a freelancer in Dubai's real estate sector.

While Rao applied for bail on Thursday, the court deferred its decision to prioritise the DRI's custody request.

According to DRI officials, gold bars worth ₹ 12.56 crore were seized from the 34-year-old actress at Kempegowda International Airport. Subsequent searches at her residence led to the recovery of gold jewellery worth ₹ 2.06 crore and Indian currency amounting to ₹ 2.67 crore.

Rao is the stepdaughter of senior IPS officer Ramachandra Rao. The DGP-rank officer is currently serving as the Chairman and Managing Director of the Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd, according to a senior police official. The total seizure in the case stood at ₹ 17.29 crore, including assets worth ₹ 4.73 crore, marking a significant blow to organised gold smuggling networks. The 14.2 kg haul is one of the largest gold seizures at Bengaluru airport in recent times, officials claimed.

Investigators had been monitoring Rao's movements for some time due to her frequent international travel. Officials are also investigating whether she had similarly smuggled gold in the past.

She allegedly often used VIP channels at Bengaluru airport, where a protocol official would receive her, allowing her to clear security checks with ease. (PTI)

US exits fund to compensate loss and damage in poor nations

NEW DELHI, March 7: The United States has withdrawn from a global agreement under which developed nations pledged to compensate developing countries for climate change impacts.

The African Group of Negotiators (AGN), a coalition of African nations participating in UN climate talks, expressed deep disappointment over the US withdrawal from the Board for the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage.

"This decision, made by the nation with the largest historical responsibility for climate change, jeopardises vital support for vulnerable countries facing irreversible climate impacts," AGN Chair Ali Mohamed said.

In an official communication to Jean Christophe Donnellier, Developed Country Co-Chair of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, Rebecca Lawlor, the Deputy Director at the US Office of Climate and Environment, wrote, "On behalf of the United States Department of the Treasury, I write to inform you that the United States is withdrawing from the Board for the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, effective immediately." "Both the United States Board Member and United States Alternate Board Member will be stepping down, not to be replaced by a US representative," the letter stated.

After years of advocacy by developing and least-developed countries suffering from climate change, nations agreed to establish the fund at the UN climate conference in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, in 2022. At COP29 in Baku in 2024, countries decided to operationalise the fund from January 1, 2025. (PTI)

MP pollution control board 'misleading' people on Carbide waste disposal: Group

INDORE, March 7: An organisation opposing the incineration of toxic waste from the Union Carbide factory at a unit in Pithampur on Friday accused the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board of "misleading" people on the ongoing trial burning of the material in the industrial town.

The Pithampur Bachao Samiti alleged the board is not making public the complete report of the ongoing trial incineration of Union Carbide's waste at the disposal plant of a private firm in Pithampur in adjoining Dhar district.

The outfit said it will soon approach the Madhya Pradesh High Court with a plea to stop the eight-day-long trial of burning the waste brought from Union Carbide's defunct factory in Bhopal, the site of the 1984 industrial disaster, to Pithampur, located 250km from the state capital.

The pollution control board has consistently maintained that during the trial, all emission levels have remained within standard limits, while the state administration has allayed fears of any adverse impact on the health of local residents.

The second round of waste burning trial is currently going on at the disposal site. As part of a plan to dispose of 337 tonnes of waste from the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal, the material was transported to Pithampur on January 2. According to an order of the HC, the trial of disposal of this

waste is to be done in three rounds while strictly following safety norms and a report is to be submitted before it on March 27. In each round of trial, 10 tonnes of waste is to be disposed of. The first round concluded on March 3 and the second phase is underway since March 6.

Addressing a press conference in Indore, Hemant Kumar Hirole, head of the Pithampur Bachao Samiti, said, "The State Pollution Control Board is not making public the complete report of the ongoing trial of the Union Carbide waste burning at Pithampur's disposal plant. The board is misleading people. It has also not disclosed the status of the ashes and other residues left after burning the waste." He said his organisation will soon file a petition with "facts" in the HC and request it to halt the ongoing trial.

Hirole claimed that ever since the exercise started, local residents in Pithampur have complained of burning sensation in eyes, pain in the throat and dryness in mouth.

However, the board has insisted all emissions caused by the incineration are within standard limits.

Indore division commissioner Deepak Singh said during the trial disposal of the chemical waste, the health department examined the health parameters of people living in settlements around the incineration facility and all their test reports have been found to be

normal.

He said as part of the second round of trial, the process of putting waste in the incinerator began on Thursday (March 6) and it is estimated that 10 tonnes of waste will take about 55 hours to burn.

According to the pollution control board, in the first round of disposal of Union Carbide factory's waste, the emission of particulate matter (PM), sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide, hydrogen chloride, hydrogen fluoride and total organic carbon from the Pithampur plant was found to be within standard limits.

On the intervening night of December 2 and 3, 1984, highly toxic methyl isocyanate gas (MIC) leaked from the Union Carbide's pesticide factory in Bhopal. At least 5,479 people were killed, while thousands others suffered physical disabilities in the world's worst industrial disaster.

According to the state government, the waste from the Union Carbide factory includes soil from the premises of the closed unit, reactor residues, sevin (pesticide) residues, naphthal residues and "semi-processed" residues.

The board said according to scientific evidence, the effect of sevin and naphthal chemicals in this waste has now become "almost negligible". Methyl isocyanate gas is currently non-existent in this waste and it is also free of radioactive particles, it asserted. (PTI)

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS-cum- COUNCIL HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT (FORESTS) KARBI ANGLONG D I P H U

Notice Inviting Tender

Sealed Tenders in Two Bid System (Technical and Financial) affixing Council fee for Rs. 10.00 (Rupees ten) only are invited from reputed firms/organizations with adequate relevant experience and financial capability for carrying out consultancy job titled "Drainage pattern analysis for the watersheds including rivers, streams, rivulets falling under Parkup Pahar & Dolamara Range jurisdiction in Karbi Anglong, Assam draining into Kaziranga National Park & Tiger Reserve (KNP&TR)" areas.

Eligible firms/organizations may submit tenders/bids with all requisite documents upto 3 pm of 25th March/2025 in O/o Chief Conservator of Forests - cum- Council Head of Department (Forests), Vill.: Rongmili, Ward No. 06, Karbi Anglong, Diphu, Assam, Pin -782460. Tender details/bid documents may be obtained from the office of the undersigned on any working day upto 20th March/2025 through post or email by submission of request with Expression of Interest including credentials of intending bidder firm on ccfcumchdforest.ka@gmail.com.

Sd/-

Addl. PCCF -cum- CHD(Forests),
Karbi Anglong::Diphu

Memo No.CCF-cum-CHD(F)/KA/Tender/2024-25/2941-45 Dated 26/02/2025

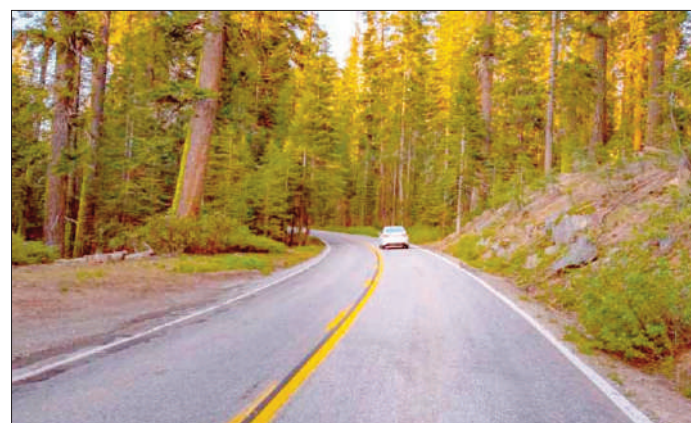
NABARD sanctions ₹ 109 crore for 10 rural road projects in Himachal

SHIMLA, March 7: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has approved ₹ 109.3 crore for 10 rural road projects in six districts of Himachal Pradesh under RIDF XXX, state Public Works Minister Vikramaditya Singh said on Friday.

RIDF XXX refers to the 30th tranche of rural infrastructure development fund that provides funding for rural infrastructure like agriculture, healthcare and connectivity. The Project Internal Approval Committee of NABARD sanctioned the amount during its 141st meeting.

In a statement issued here, Singh said these projects would significantly boost the rural economy by ensuring improved transportation facilities and connectivity to benefit people in the state.

The PWD Minister said the present state government is com-



mitted to delivering progressive governance and ensuring the holistic development of the state.

The state government has been making persistent efforts to enhance infrastructure and promote rural prosperity by actively repre-

senting the developmental needs of the state at the central level.

He further said the approved projects include the upgradation of key roads, including Junalla-Karloti-Chhat-Berthin road, Tikkar Manoh via Jakhoyol-Ramehra-

Sulkhan-Dhirwin road and Rohru-Chirgaon-Dodrakawar road.

Additionally, link roads connecting Pirsaluh (Kangra) to Kitpal (Hamirpur), Puyad to Tikhari via Dharli, and roads from Thathar Tripal to Mehwa Panchayat, along with Saheed Tej Singh Smarak Jatta-Ra-Nallah to Kukrigal via Harijan Basti Saloun, Katloun & Chhamyar, will be upgraded, the statement said.

A key project also includes the construction of a 35-metre span bridge connecting Nehwat, Nayaser, Ghaini, and Devidhar. Furthermore, a road with culverts and metalling/tarring from Kansh-wala to Biroja Factory via Jable Ka Bag, Kanol Lag, and Batuni Morch has been sanctioned.

He directed officials of PWD to initiate work within a month after completing all necessary formalities. (PTI)

Wanted to celebrate immigrants and refugees in ‘My Melbourne’: Kabir Khan

MUMBAI, March 7: Immigrants and refugees should not be seen with just one perspective, says filmmaker Kabir Khan, who narrates an uplifting story of a young Afghan woman who reconstructs her life in Melbourne after fleeing the oppressive Taliban regime in "My Melbourne".

The anthology movie also features segments by Imtiaz Ali, Rima Das and Onir. Themed around the four pillars of diversity— sexuality, gender, disability, and race— the anthology film features four unique stories -- directed by Khan, Imtiaz Ali, Rima Das and Onir. They are inspired by true incidents.

Khan's segment, titled "Setara", brings to life the journey of a 15-year-old Afghan girl, who has come to Melbourne after fleeing the Taliban. She finds her sense of belonging through cricket amid family tensions and past trauma.

"It was an uplifting story because Setara's dream was fulfilled through cricket, and also to show a city with the heart to do this. It's an important story to tell the world that if you see immigrants and refugees with just one perspective, then

they'll never be able to contribute to society. "But if you welcome them and make them feel at home, they contribute to you. In the film, Setara also helps Melbourne, so that's why, for me, it became an important story," the director, known for blockbusters such as "Ek Tha Tiger", and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan", told PTI in an interview. Khan said he got to know about the Afghan women's cricket team while he was in Melbourne about two years ago to accept an award for his 2021 critically-acclaimed feature, "83" and felt inspired.

"When the Taliban took over for the second time, everyone had to run to save their lives, and Melbourne hosted them. The Afghan women's cricket team members and their families were invited by Melbourne. "I met Setara. She was training in Afghanistan and wanted to play for the national cricket team, but her dream was left unfulfilled because she had to leave Afghanistan. So, I said this is a very good story, through which we can talk about Melbourne, and her story," he said.

Khan's connection to Afghanistan began initially as a documentary filmmaker and

later while filming his debut feature, "Kabul Express". The director said he inadvertently gets drawn to stories from war-affected country. "I've spent a lot of time in Afghanistan. I've lived through the experience. I've seen what's going on. So, there's an understanding of the subject. The Taliban took over again, but I'm still staying in touch with people. My experience as a documentary filmmaker has helped me while making this movie," he said. "In a certain sense, that's why I get drawn to some subjects like that because I know this world, I know the people, and their problems, and they give me a position of strength to be able to tell this story," the director added.

To have an authentic portrayal, Khan made a deliberate choice to cast Setara in the titular role of his short film instead of opting for a well-known star.

"We wanted to keep it real. Why burden it with a star? For me, the story is about this girl, Setara is the star," he said, adding that he did a few workshops with Setara and encouraged her to embrace her true self rather than act. (PTI)



Anupam Kher celebrates 70th birthday in Haridwar, Anil Kapoor also attends



HARIDWAR, March 7: Actor Anupam Kher celebrated his 70th birthday on Friday with family and friends at Juna Akhada's Acharya Mahamandaleswar Swami Avdheshnand Giri Harihar Ashram here.

Actor Anil Kapoor, a close friend, attended the occasion with wife Sunita.

Kher made an offering at the Ashram's Parad Shivling.

"I had spent two days at Swami ji's camp at Prayag during Kumbh. It was a milestone birthday. So I decided to celebrate it here in the Sanatan way. I prayed for good health and success of my yet-to-be released film Tanvi The Great," he told reporters at the ashram.

Shot in Uttarakhand, "Tanvi The Great" is a film with a message, Kher said.

The film has been directed by Kher.

Kapoor said he and Kher have been friends for more than 40 years and worked together in many films. (PTI)

Joe Russo says Robert Downey Jr researching backstory for Doctor Doom role

LOS ANGELES, March 7: Hollywood star Robert Downey Jr is immersed in researching the backstory for his role of villain Doctor Doom in the two upcoming Marvel films, film-

maker Joe Anthony said.

Downey Jr was announced as the lead villain in the next chapter of Marvel movies after playing Avengers' superhero Iron Man (Tony Stark) for

over a decade.

In an interview with Entertainment Tonight, Joe and Anthony Russo, co-directors of the last two Avengers movies, spoke about Downey's involvement in "Avengers: Domsday".

"It's a very intense process developing the character. He's so immersed in it. He is so dialed in," Joe told the publication.

"(Downey's) writing backstory, costume ideas ... I think he just loves really rich, three-dimensional characters and I think he sees a real opportunity here with that character," the director added. In July, Downey surprised the crowd at Comic-Con by revealing that he would play Doctor Doom. His superhero character Iron Man died in 2019's "Avengers: Endgame".

"Avengers: Domsday" is slated to release in May 2026. The follow-up "Avengers: Secret Wars", is scheduled for a release in May 2027. (PTI)



Women's Day: White saris to technicolour portrayals: Hindi movie mothers evolve into fuller beings

NEW DELHI, March 7: Almost always in a white sari, long-suffering and beyond reproach, waiting for her son to come home so she can tell him to wash up while she sets out his meal. That's the mother figure imprinted in the collective memory of generations of Hindi cinema goers. That is fast changing. Images of the ideal 'ma' framed in sepia, all the way from Nirupa Roy to Rakhee, are giving way to the modern-day mother in her many shades who loves her children for sure but also maintains her individuality.

As another women's day comes around, time perhaps to look at the long distance travelled. More and more mothers in Hindi cinema, both mainstream and off it, now represent the concerns of everyday women, of those who have lives beyond their children. They have agency, often a job and points of view that go beyond typical "motherly concerns" of yore.

And that, many writers and directors have discovered can be a great backdrop against which to tell the story of the hero or the heroine. In the Saif Ali Khan-Rani Mukerji starrer "Hum Tum", both the mothers are single. One, who is separated from her husband and the other a widow. But both, Rati Agnihotri as mother to the hero and Kirron Kher as mother to the heroine are spunky, smart and full of life.

The 2004 film, in which the mothers are not mere stand-ins but vital to the lives of their children, was a huge hit.

In the 2000s, the mother figure started transforming slowly and Kher got too play many of these roles, some a little off-kilter, others hugely melodramatic and always empathetic of course. And so came films such as "Dostana", "Main Hoon Naa", "Veer Zaara" and "Devdas".

In 2014 came "Khoobsurat" where Kher played the mother of Sonam Kapoor and Ratna Pathak Shah the strict matriarch and mother of the hero Fawad Khan.

Two years before that, Dimple Kapadia was the fierce, full of laughs single mother to a wayward son in the Saif Ali Khan-Deepika Padukone starrer "Cocktail".

The evolution of mothers is now visible in the smallest of roles in narratives where they are sometimes the protagonist and other time a useful foil.

Actor Seema Pahwa has played many middle class mother roles in films such as "Bareilly Ki Barfi" and "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan".

In "Bareilly Ki Barfi", she is Sushila, a harrowed mother vetting grooms for her daughter. In "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan", she is a well read woman who uses a children's classic to deliver a sex talk to her soon-to-be-married daughter.

Among the more memorable in recent years has been Dolly Ahluwalia's turn as a widowed mother to Ayushman Khurrana in Shoojit Sircar's "Vicky Donor". The mother, a salon owner, has a great relationship with her mother-in-law, the two enjoying a tipple and more every evening after work.

In "Thappad", Dia Mirza plays a single mother who explains to her teenage daughter why she does not want to get married again.

In the same film, Ratna Pathak Shah delivers an engaging performance as a mother who makes her gentle husband realise that he overlooked her ambitions in their marriage.

Shah, in fact, has played many varieties of interesting and memorable mother roles in "Jaane tu Yaa Jaane Naa", "Khoobsurat" and

"Kapoor & Sons".

Over the years, the portrayal of mothers has become more diverse and also more nuanced, seen most particularly in parallel cinema.

In 2024's "Girls Will Be Girls", director Shuchi Talati explores the conflict between a young mother and her teenage daughter to mine a beautiful story. The film, which opened to rave reviews, features Kani Kusruti as the mother whose yearning and loneliness runs parallel to her daughter's coming-of-age dilemmas.

Also last year was Katrina Kaif playing a mother with a mysterious past in Sriram Raghavan's thriller "Merry Christmas". In fact, she is in a restaurant with her daughter when she attracts the attention of a stranger who she invites home.

With filmmakers exploring the funny and at times complicated facets of women within the framework of the relationship of their children, many such stories have started to emerge.

Geeta Agrawal Sharma last year had fun playing interesting mother roles in Varun Grover's directorial "All India Rank" and Kiran Rao's satirical rural comedy "Laapataa Ladies". In "All India Rank", she is Manju, who acts as the balancing act between a strict father and her son buckling under the pressure of cracking the IITs.

In "Laapataa Ladies", she is Yashoda, a conventional mother who realises what her life really is when her daughter-in-law gets swapped with another bride. There are moments when Sharma remembers her own fears as a young bride and the fact that she never cared to notice what she herself liked while cooking for the family. (PTI)



CHHETRI'S RETURN GIVES NATIONAL TEAM HOPE BUT REFLECTS BADLY ON INDIAN FOOTBALL

NEW DELHI, March 7: Described as "a wise decision" by the sport's national federation, Sunil Chhetri's return from international retirement at 40 actually reflects badly on Indian football, for it lays bare the paucity of quality strikers in a country of over 1.4 billion.

No amount of praise is too high for the man who has served the national team with distinction for nearly two decades, eventually ending his glorious career as India's highest-ever goal scorer with 94 strikes to his name.

When he called time on his international career in May last year, Chhetri was the world's third leading scorer among active players, behind Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo and Argentine icon

Lionel Messi.

But Chhetri's long list of achievements in the sport is one thing, and his coming out of retirement less than a year after he decided to leave the scene, is another, and Thursday's surprise announcement certainly carries a negative connotation.

According to the All India Football Federation (AIFF), he was coaxed out of retirement by national team head coach Manolo Márquez, who urged him to join his old teammates for the crucial final round of the AFC Asian Cup 2027 qualifiers.

People in the top rung of the AIFF are convinced that the right move has been made by head coach, who is also doing duty as

FC Goa's gaffer in the ongoing Indian Super League.

Since his retirement, he had continued playing for Bengaluru FC in the ISL. He has so far scored 12 goals from 23 matches this season to become its highest Indian goal-scorer, and it is this performance graph that has driven Márquez to get in touch with Chhetri.

His form in the ISL, in which he has also made two assists besides finding the back of the net a dozen times, has also impressed AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey.

"Sunil's leadership qualities are unmatched. A player of his stature can motivate the entire team. His form too has been impeccable in the ISL, scoring 12 goals, and

India can greatly benefit with a striker like him," Chaubey said.

Like Chaubey, AIFF secretary general Anilkumar P too preferred to look at the positive side of the move, and so did the legendary IM Vijayan, who, however, also rued the absence of a striker good enough to lead the team upfront.

"It's a wise decision on part of the head coach to include Sunil Chhetri based on the technical data we received from our experts," Anilkumar told PTI.

"In the ongoing Indian Super League, Chhetri is performing

consistently. His inclusion will definitely strengthen the Indian national team.

"We have some important matches coming up soon. We are fully aligned with the coach's decision and hopefully Chhetri can contribute much more to the national team so that we can move to the next level of the Asian Cup 2027," Anilkumar added.

Chhetri, who made his international debut in 2005 and left the scene as India's most-capped player, has been included in Márquez's list of 26 players for

the March FIFA international window.

Vijayan, an Indian football legend in his own right and currently the head of the AIFF's technical committee, sounded excited when asked to share his views on Chhetri's return.

"It's a good decision from the team's point of view. You are asking me that you are calling back a 40-year-old to play for national team, but there have been similar instances in the past.

"You look at Roger Milla, who came out of retirement (at 38) to help Cameroon qualify for the quarterfinals of 1990 World Cup. Age is not a factor, what matters is fitness, and Sunil remains extremely fit and he is also playing

very well," Vijayan told PTI.

However, he acknowledged that the lack of good strikers in India remains a problem.

"We have been trying so hard to find good strikers, but unfortunately, we have not succeeded so far. Most of the top strikers in the ISL are foreigners, so that is how it is."

Chhetri's retirement had made headlines with FIFA, world football's global governing body, leading the outpouring of tributes for the Indian talisman.

FIFA had earlier in 2022 released a documentary on the long-serving Indian captain.

Titled 'Captain Fantastic', it had three parts — kick off, mid-game and extra time. (PTI)



UP Warriorz look to end campaign on a high, disrupt RCB's playoff hopes

LUCKNOW, March 7: Staring at elimination, UP Warriorz will hope for a stronger middle-order performance as they aim to derail Royal Challengers Bangalore's campaign and conclude their Women's Premier League season on a high when they face off here on Saturday.

It has been a tale of missed opportunities for UP Warriorz.

Apart from a few individual flashes of brilliance, they have failed to fire collectively.

With just four points from seven matches, UPW are languishing at the bottom of the table and are only mathematically in contention.

Defending champions RCB have also endured a tough season, with four points from six games and are coming on the back of four defeats on the trot.

However, they have a game in hand over UP Warriorz, keeping their playoff hopes alive as Smriti Mandhana and Co will need to put their best foot forward.

The heartbreak of their Super Over loss in their last encounter will be still fresh in their minds, and they will be keen to settle the scores.

UP Warriorz batting order has been far from settled with frequent changes, especially at the top in the last three games.



They have experimented with at least one overseas batter as an opener, but the strategy has yielded little success.

While India's Kiran Navgire has been a constant in the top-three with mixed results, Grace Harris had an impactful innings, and Georgia Voll produced a sensational knock against Mumbai

Indians in their last match.

However, in their pursuit of a strong start, UP Warriorz's middle order has misfired as the team has struggled to post competitive totals or chase effectively.

"We are making back-to-back mistakes in the middle order. Our top and lower orders are doing well, but we need to focus on the

middle order," said Deepti Sharma, UP Warriorz captain, after the match.

"We had a lot of expectations from the middle-order batters, and we hope for the best in the last game."

UP Warriorz will take heart from the fact that their highest score of 180 came against RCB.

Although the match was tied, UP Warriorz won in the Super Over, which will keep their confidence high.

RCB, on the other hand, began the season with back-to-back wins in Vadodra but have since lost their way.

They had a dismal run at the home stretch where they failed to win a single game.

RCB skipper Mandhana will hope that a change of venue will bring a change in fortunes.

Placed fourth in the table, RCB's batting frailties were exposed in their last two matches, with Mandhana's form being a major concern.

While she scored 81 against Delhi Capitals, Mandhana has struggled against spin.

It's not just Mandhana -- most of the other batters, except Ellyse Perry, have been inconsistent.

England's Danni Wyatt-Hodge has been as unreliable as Mandhana, having scored 137 runs so far with just one half-century.

Perry has been the standout performer, amassing 295 runs, including four fifties, to emerge as their top player.

Her 60 in the last match was the highlight of their batting against DC.

RCB's bowling unit has been equally inconsistent. (PTI)

Aravindh inches closer to Prague Masters title



PRAGUE (CZECH REPUBLIC), March 7: Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram came within striking distance of winning his first major tournament after an easy draw with David Navara of Czech Republic in the eighth and penultimate round of Prague Masters tournament here.

With this result, Aravindh took his tally to 5.5 points, maintaining a half-point lead over compatriot R Praggnanandhaa, who drew with Vietnam's Quang Liem Le. In the final round, Aravindh will face Turkey's Ediz Gurel, while Praggnanandhaa has a tougher challenge against Anish Giri of the Netherlands.

After losing two of his first three games, top-seeded Chinese GM Wei Yi bounced back impressively, defeating local favorite Nguyen Thai Dai Van to move into sole third place with 4.5 points.

Vincent Keymer (Germany), Ediz Gurel, and Giri share fourth place with four points each, followed by Quang Liem, Navara, and Sam Shankland, all on 3.5 points.

Dai Van remains at the bottom with 2.5 points.

The Berlin defense is normally known to get balanced endgames and this time too, Navara had little trouble reaching an equal endgame.

A small oversight by both players at a critical moment briefly offered Aravindh a chance to push for victory, but the opportunity slipped, and

both players signed truce in 32 moves.

Praggnanandhaa, playing White, opted for his pet Catalan opening against Le.

However, the Vietnamese GM found adequate counter play in the middle game by cornering the white queen.

Praggnanandhaa parted with a pawn for activity but the resulting position was only good enough to repeat. The game lasted 36 moves.

In the Challengers' section, Divya Deshmukh drew with Czech player Nemec Jychym but remained in last place with two points.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Yakubov regained sole lead with 6.5 points after defeating Richard Stalmach.

Results (Round 8)

Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 5.5) drew with David Navara (Cze, 3.5); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 5) drew with Quang Liem Le (Vie, 3.5); Sam Shankland (Ukr, 3.5) lost to Anish Giri (Ned, 4); Wei Yi (Chn, 4.5) beat Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2.5); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 4) drew with Gurel Ediz (Tur, 4).

Challengers: Richard Stalmach (Cze, 3) lost to Nodirbek Yakubov (Uzb, 6.5); Finel Vachlav (Cze, 3.5) drew with Jonas Buhl Bjerre (Den, 6); Nemec Jychym (Cze, 2.5) drew with Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 2); Ivan Salgado Lopez (Esp, 4) drew with Ma Qun (Chn, 4.5); Stamatis Kourkoulous-Arditis (Gre, 3) lost to Marc-andria Maurizzi (Fra, 5). (PTI)

Golf has grown in popularity in India but professional game hasn't progressed, feels Shiv Kapur



MUMBAI, March 7: Three-time Asian Tour champion and Arjuna Award winner Shiv Kapur on Friday said while golf has become popular in the country, it still hasn't seen corresponding progress on the professional front.

Kapur said India should have produced a Major winner by now and have had players featuring in the top rankings in the world, but it is not the case.

"Golf has grown in popularity a lot. I think the corporate game has grown. There's a lot more people playing," Kapur told PTI in an exclusive interaction during Habitat for Humanity India's sixth Annual Charity Golf Tournament here on Friday.

"But unfortunately, the professional game hasn't progressed as well as I would have liked to see it," he said.

"You know, we should have had a major champion by now. We should have had many Indians in the top 10 or 20 in the world, like other countries," he said. "But the game in general has increased in popularity. A lot of club members playing, a lot of corporates (are) playing, so the support for the game is

there."

The 40-year-old Kapur said golf hasn't had a breakthrough champion unlike cricket and hockey, the team sports where India have been able to make a mark at the global level.

"We've still not been able to make a breakthrough like we have in cricket or in hockey and other sports, where you've got national icons that young kids can look up to and say, 'this is what, you know, I want to be able to be the number one in the world,'" he said.

But adding that there is potential for things to change, Kapur said, "There's no reason why we can't have a world champion out of India in the next few years."

Kapur said a competitive edge in a player tends to come out even if one is playing for a cause. "When you're on the course, your competitive nature will come out and everyone wants to be out here trying to win, win trophies. But when it's all said and done, I think the greater cause is what everyone is here for, (irrespective of) win or lose. But, when you're here, you want to play well, you want to win," he said. (PTI)

After dream senior India debut, Sakshi focuses on speed to shine at Jr WC

NEW DELHI, March 7: Bolstered by a dream senior India debut at the Hockey Pro League, young forward Sakshi Rana is now working on her speed as she sets her sights on defending the gold medal at the Junior World Cup in Chile later this year.

The 17-year-old struck a sensational field goal against Spain on her debut, even as India went down 3-4 to Spain in Bhubaneswar.

Sakshi later played against Spain and Germany.

"I was waiting for the day of my debut for a long time so I was really happy about it. I wasn't nervous as such before the match because the seniors supported me and told me that there are no mistakes in your first game, hence, I could play freely," Sakshi said in a Hockey India release.

Sakshi's debut goal was a brilliant solo effort as she pressed effectively, timed her tackle perfectly to win the ball in a dangerous area, and then fired a backhand shot from inside the circle. "My target was to score on my debut so I was very determined. When I made the effort and snatched the ball, I saw no one was around me and just took the shot. Everyone started shouting and I realised that I had scored a goal."

Sakshi said her stint in Bhubaneswar made her realise the need to work on her speed during training.

"As I have played against foreign players in the Hockey India League and Pro League recently, I have realised it is all about speed now. I have to be quick on the field, especially since I am a forward, so I will be working on that now," she said.

that was used in the match against Pakistan, where spinners had found some assistance.

In that context, Williamson's impeccable adaptability skills and technical nous is vital for New Zealand, and he had produced a masterclass while making an 81 in the final group match against India here a few days ago.

New Zealand coach Gary Stead thought that India will pursue the four-spinner strategy in the final as well, which he termed "challenging."

"It's probably what we expect for them to play against us, but we have four spinners as well within our squad and we think we're pretty well balanced. But it's always a chal-

lenge. They are very, very good spinners, all of them in their own right.

"So, for us, it's just being clear on our plans and working out if there could be a match-up that we are deciding within our team that it's the right one for us to go after. So who knows, they (Indian spinners) might have an off-day as well and that could be in our advantage," said Stead.

But Stead also knows that rather than waiting for an off-day from the well-stocked Indian spin unit, taking them head on is a better option.

"We have to adapt to what's going on within the match, but all our batsmen will have their individual plans around how they want to combat them."

DUBAI, March 7: The showdown between Indian spinners and Kane Williamson will be intense on a gripping DICS pitch, but beyond the personal realm, it also has the potential to decide the outcome of the Champions Trophy final here on Sunday.

New Zealand is eager to end their 25-year-long wait for an ICC 50-over title after bagging the ICC Knockouts Trophy in Kenya, beating India by four wickets in 2000.

On the other hand, India are gunning for their second Champions Trophy since 2013 and they could be fielding four spinners and two pacers for the ICC showpiece final here on Sunday. The title clash could be played on the same surface

that was used in the match against Pakistan, where spinners had found some assistance.

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"We have to adapt to what's going on within the match, but all our batsmen will have their individual plans around how they want to combat them."

It is true particularly against Varun Chakravarthy who has a bottomless bag of tricks — wrong'uns, leg-breaks, scrambled seam deliveries, and seam-up ones which are faster.

In fact, he clean bowled Mitchell Santner with a 113 kmph seam-up delivery to end New Zealand's resistance in the league match here a few days back.

"Sometimes a little bit of bravery to take, I mean, those options are on, so we're certainly up for that, up for that challenge and that's what India will bring. We know that they've got four very capable spinners," he added.

So, Stead will certainly pencil in Williamson big time in his plans to counter Indian

slow bowlers as the 34-year-old has a remarkable career record against spinners in ODIs — 2952 runs at an average of 47 with a strike rate of 86. "He's a guy that rises for the big occasion and he's done it many times for New Zealand in the past. Look, cricket's a game runs aren't guaranteed, but I know that Kane will be doing everything he can to prepare to score well and he's one of those unique individuals around the world that has that ability to adapt to different pitches.

"He seems to be able to do that faster than many other players, so fingers crossed from our perspective that Kane has a big day," said Stead. (PTI)

Rohit must aim for bigger scores, can take game away from opposition: Gavaskar

NEW DELHI, March 7: Legendary Sunil Gavaskar believes Rohit Sharma should not be content with scoring just 25-30 runs and must focus on building longer innings, as his presence at the crease can have a game-changing impact for India.

In ODI cricket, the Indian skipper has embraced an aggressive approach to give India quick starts, but this has often resulted in early dismissals.

His highest score in the ongoing Champions Trophy is 41 against Bangladesh in the opening game.

"(If) He (Rohit Sharma) bats for even 25 overs, India will be around 180-200. Imagine if they have lost only a couple of wickets by then; just think what they could do. They could reach 350 or more," Gavaskar told India Today.

"He also needs to give it some thought. It's one thing to go out and play aggressively, but there has to be a bit of discretion somewhere to give himself the chance to bat



for 25-30 overs. If he does that, he takes the game away from the opposition. That kind of impact is match winning."

Rohit has managed scores of 20, 15, and 28 against Pakistan, New Zealand, and Australia respectively

in the tournament.

"And I think, as a batter, are you happy with scoring 25-30 runs? You shouldn't be! So that is what I would say to him: your impact on the team will be even greater if you bat for 25 overs instead of just

seven, eight, or nine overs," Gavaskar said.

India and New Zealand will face off again in the Champions Trophy final on Sunday, having played the final group A game in Dubai.

Former England captain Nasser Hussain has backed New Zealand to win, saying the Kiwis have some tough cricketers who won't choke under pressure.

"They will not bottle it, they won't choke. We were having dinner with [former Australia batter] Aaron Finch and he summed it up pretty well in saying New Zealand are never a side that beat themselves. And by that, he means that they will rock up, and they will put in a performance," he told Sky Sports.

"All the way through the New Zealand lineup they have some very, very tough cricketers who turn up to every single game and give it their absolute best - that's why they will always be there around semi-finals and finals." (PTI)

Harmanpreet fined for Code of Conduct breach in WPL



LUCKNOW, March 7: Mumbai Indians captain Harmanpreet Kaur was on Friday fined 10 per cent of her match fee for showing dissent at umpire's decision during her team's match against UP Warriorz at the Ekana Cricket Stadium here.

The incident occurred at the end of the 19th over of UPW innings when umpire Ajitesh Argal informed Harmanpreet that only three fielders could be outside the circle in the final over due to a slow over rate.

Seemingly unhappy with the ruling, she was seen engaged in a brief argument with the umpire, with teammate Amelia Kerr also joining the discussion.

"Harmanpreet Kaur admitted to the Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 which relates to showing dissent at an umpire's decision during a match," WPL said in a release.

"For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding."

Harmanpreet also had a spat with UP Warriorz's Sophie Ecclestone during the match, when the English cricketer, standing at the non-striker's end, walked toward the umpire to explain something.

Harmanpreet appeared to respond sharply, seemingly asking Ecclestone to stay out of the conversation.

The exchange prompted intervention from square-leg umpire N Janani and UP Warriorz captain Deepti Sharma, who stepped in to defuse the tension. UP Warriorz went on to post a total of 150/9, a target that Mumbai Indians chased down in 18.3 overs. (PTI)

England considering Ben Stokes for white ball captaincy



LONDON, March 7: England's Test captain Ben Stokes is being considered as a potential replacement for Jos Buttler as the limited-overs skipper with ECB's director of men's cricket, Rob Key emphasising that it would be "stupid" not to explore the option, given his leadership qualities and the need to revive England's struggling white-ball setup.

Stokes, 33, has not played ODIs since the 2023 World Cup, where he reversed his initial decision to retire from the format.

His Champions Trophy return was marred by a second hamstring tear in six months, sustained during the third Test against New Zealand.

"I think nothing's off the table really," Key was quoted saying in ESPNcricinfo. "You look at every single option and you think, right, what is the best thing to do? How is that going to impact on other things?"

"Ben Stokes is one of the best

captains I've ever seen. So it would be stupid not to look at him. It's just the knock-on effect of what that means."

"He's an unbelievably good tactician, which we've seen in Test cricket, but he's a leader of men. He's someone who gets the best out of people. He's someone that, when the pressure is really on, he's able to throw a blanket around the players and actually say, 'no, no, this is the way forward. Keep going with it.'"

Stokes is currently in Abu Dhabi recovering with an England Lions training group and is expected to be fully fit for the summer with Durham.

Key, who was also in the UAE, believes Stokes has the ability to rejuvenate the ODI team, just as he did with the Test side.

"They're the qualities that you need in leadership. Ben's, as we know, an outstanding player, an outstanding leader. It's more about, what would that then mean to him?"

What would that then mean to his workload?

"We don't want to risk other things as well. But there's always a way in England, I think, where you start looking at, 'what if it goes wrong?' You've also got to think, 'what if it goes right?'. They're the decisions that I have to make."

Stokes' rapport with Brendon McCullum, now overseeing England's entire setup, may add weight to the idea.

After taking charge of the white-ball set up McCullum lost 10 of 11 matches, in sharp contrast to his Test transformation.

Under their leadership, England have won 22 out of 35 Tests since 2022.

Citing example of Team India model, Key believes Tests and ODIs share a strategic similarity that would work for Stokes.

"When you start looking at it, I believe that Test cricket and 50-over cricket are probably closer than T20s, which is the outlier now. So then that makes different things."

"We look at India and the way they play T20 cricket, and they've got all these young players coming through, but it's their Test players that are making the difference in 50-over cricket."

But it remains to be seen how injury-prone Stokes manages the demanding schedule.

England face India and Australia in crucial Test series this year, and would play ODI series against West Indies (May into June), South Africa, Ireland (both in September) and New Zealand (ahead of the Ashes). (PTI)

Raphinha scoring in the clutch to keep Barcelona on pace for titles

BARCELONA, March 7: Robert Lewandowski is leading Barcelona in scoring. Pedri is in complete command of the midfield, and Lamine Yamal has all the trappings of a generational star.

But it is Raphinha who has Barcelona looking like a championship-caliber team thanks to his clutch scoring.

The Brazil forward has blossomed into an all-round player this campaign, shifting from his natural spot on the right wing and becoming a versatile attacker from pretty much any position, including a mid-field role. The goals have followed in bunches, and the 28-year-old speedster is having his best scoring season with 25 goals across all competitions.

His rivals have taken notice. "Raphinha is underrated," Osasuna coach Vicente Moreno said Friday, a day before his team visits the La Liga leader.

"I think he is one of the best in the world if you consider his influence in attack and defense, his work for the team and on an individual level," Moreno said. "We are talking about an elite player."

Beyond his Swiss Army knife-role for coach Hansi Flick, Raphinha is also notching some of the biggest goals of the season to help keep Barcelona in the running for potential titles in La Liga, the Champions League and the Copa del Rey.

The Catalan side leads La Liga by one point ahead of Atletico and three points in front of Real Madrid. Raphinha has proven especially lethal against Benfica, scoring winners in two games at the Portuguese club. He struck from distance to help earn 10-man Barcelona a 1-0 victory in the opening game of its Champions League round-of-16 series this week. Before that, Raphinha scored twice, including a last-gasp solo effort, to lead a stun-

ning 5-4 comeback over Benfica in the group phase.

His goal in Lisbon was his ninth in the Champions League this season, while Raphinha's superb performances include a hat trick against Bayern Munich and three goals in two blowouts of Madrid.

Raphinha is also among the most productive scorers in La Liga. He has needed only 34 shots to produce his 13 goals. Compare that to Madrid star Kylian Mbappé and his league-high 57 shots needed for 17 goals. Lewandowski, Raphinha's attack partner, leads the competition with 21 goals on 38 shots.

Flick said Friday that he will rotate his starting 11 without naming the regular starters he would rest ahead of Tuesday's home game against Benfica and the following weekend's game at Atletico in the domestic league.

Budimir makes Osasuna dangerous

On Saturday, Barcelona will face another extremely efficient scorer. Ante Budimir has scored 14 goals on just 23 shots for Osasuna this season. Two of those goals by the Croatia striker came in a 4-2 win over Barcelona in Pamplona, when Osasuna dealt Flick's side its first loss of the season in September.

Budimir became Osasuna's all-time top scorer in La Liga last round when he took his club tally to 58 career league goals.

Bellingham returns for Real Madrid

Jude Bellingham is available for Real Madrid when it hosts Rayo Vallecano on Sunday after the England midfielder missed three of his team's last four games overall serving suspensions.

Atletico is at Getafe on Sunday as it eyes the second game of its Champions League series against Madrid when Diego Simeone's team needing to overturn a 2-1 loss to advance to the quarterfinals. (AP)

Playoffs-bound NorthEast United FC target first ISL win in Shillong



SHILLONG, March 7: Their play-offs berth secured, North-East United FC will target their first Indian Super League win in the picturesque hill town when they face East Bengal FC here on Saturday.

The Highlanders have qualified for the playoffs with 35 points from 23 games on the back of nine wins and eight draws. They will want to enter the playoffs with another victory.

East Bengal FC are eighth with 28 points and will hope to cap off the campaign by extending their

strong record against NorthEast United FC, having lost just once in their last six meetings and scoring in each of those contests.

Meanwhile, NorthEast United FC head into this fixture on the back of a 3-0 victory over Chennaiyin FC, marking the seventh time this season they have netted three or more goals in a single game, as only Mohun Bagan Super Giant have achieved this more times (nine) in ISL 2024-25.

Notably, the Highlanders' seven such high-scoring games this season equal their combined

tally from the last three seasons.

The Highlanders have lost their last two home games by similar 0-2 scorelines. The last time they failed to find the back of the net in three successive home matches was between December 2019 and February 2020.

NEUFC are the fourth highest scoring teams with 42 strikes. Alaaeddine Ajaraie had netted 21 times, but the joint-best in the list next are Guillermo Fernandez and Nestor Albiach with five goals each.

East Bengal FC are currently unbeaten in their last three away games in ISL 2024-25 (W2 D1). A win or a draw in this match would set a new club record for their longest such sequence in ISL history.

East Bengal FC have laid a potent offside trap this season, catching opponents offside 60 times, more than any other side in the competition. This also means that they play a slightly high defensive line at times, which could leave their backline exposed too.

The two sides have played nine games against each other, with NorthEast United FC and East Bengal FC winning four and three times respectively. Two matches have produced draws. (PTI)

Varun is a big threat in the game, we'll be putting our thinking caps: NZ coach Stead

DUBAI, March 7: New Zealand coach Gary Stead conceded that Varun Chakravarthy will be a "big threat" in the Champions Trophy final, and the Kiwis will put on their "thinking caps" to work on the ways to negate India's mystery spinner.

India will face New Zealand in the final of the ICC showpiece here on Sunday.

"We certainly expect him to play after getting 5/42 against us in the last game. He's a class bowler, and showed his skills against us last time and he's a big threat in the game," Stead told reporters here on Friday.

"So we'll be putting our thinking caps on around how we nullify that and how we can still score runs against him," he added. In that context, Stead said the Kiwis will look to take some cues from the last Group A match they played here against India a few days back.

In fact, he refused to read too much into India's familiarity with the conditions here. "The decision around that (the schedule) out of our hands, so it's not something we worry about too much. India have got to play all their games here in Dubai, but we have had a game here and we'll learn very quickly from that experience. "So when you come to this stage of the tournament,

I mean, we've had eight teams at the start, we're down to two now. It's always exciting to be in this situation and from our perspective, it just comes to a one-off game now and if we're good enough to beat India on Sunday, then I will be happy," he explained.

New Zealand, however, had to shuttle between Pakistan and Dubai for their final group stage match, the semifinal against South Africa and eventually for the final here.

Stead admitted it was a bit hectic but said his side was good enough to adjust to such schedules. "There's no doubt that coming here off playing Lahore and we had a full day of travel yesterday, then it just takes it out of you a little bit, but we've got a couple of days now of a little bit of recovery and planning and training towards the game." Towards the business end, Stead believes that it is more about co-ordination of mind and body rather than excessive training.

"I guess we're deep into the tournament now and sometimes it's not always a lot of training that you need, it's just getting your body and your mind right to compete in the final and that will be our key focus over the next two days," he added. (PTI)

Varun Chakravarthy on verge of becoming world-class bowler in ODIs, T20Is: Murali Vijay

MUMBAI, March 7: With Varun Chakravarthy proving to be a vital cog in India's successful run in the ongoing Champions Trophy, former opener Murali Vijay said on Friday that the mystery spinner is on the verge of becoming a world-class white-ball bowler because of his control on the carrom ball and the flippers.

Chakravarthy has taken seven wickets in two Champions Trophy games, including a five-for against New Zealand in the group stage, which puts him among the leading wicket-takers in the competition as India aim to win the marquee ICC event in Dubai on Sunday.

"I think he is a world-class bowler," Vijay told PTI in an exclusive interaction with housing non-profit organisation 'Habitat for Humanity India' sixth Annual Charity Golf Tournament.

"He is on the verge of becoming a world-class bowler in ODIs and T20s because it is a very rare commodity to bowl

the carrom balls and flippers and having that kind of control, which is fantastic to watch," he added.

India's T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav had recently said that Chakravarthy was more "tough mentally" now and, irrespective of what happened on the field, maintained a cool demeanour.

Vijay felt it is a natural progression, which come with playing international-level cricket regularly.

"I feel it is a natural progress, like what I am talking now from the way I started... and now I've got that little bit of rhythm, so that's how life is," he said.

"You got to go and give it yourself, (an) honest try and give your 100 per cent effort every time you walk into the field because wearing an India badge is something special for all of us. And, once you get it, you make use of it."

"You make use of those opportunities and make those opportunities (count) in



an impactful way. So, that is what Varun has done in his short career. Bit I wish and hope that he has a long career in the

Indian cricket team," Vijay added.

Vijay also shared his happiness on seeing another Tamil Nadu cricketer in

Varun excelling at the highest level.

"He is coming from my state and I am very proud that the Indian team is being filled with lot of talent. They are ready to go and perform at that level, that is what is exciting for me to see as a fan, as a cricketer who played the game and a well-wisher of Indian cricket," he said.

Vijay, who played 61 Tests, 17 ODIs and nine T20Is for India before retiring in 2023, said that Rohit Sharma's team is forcing the opposition to do "catch up".

"To be honest, the Indian cricket team is playing a great brand of cricket for over a number of years now and all the players are in form and looking fit," he said.

"Indian cricket is on an upward curve, definitely, other teams have to catch up with us and (the Champions Trophy) final is going to be crucial. India will lift the trophy, we have been unbeaten and it's going to be crazy if we lift the trophy," he said.

Asked if Shreyas Iyer had made the

No. 4 spot in ODIs his own with a strong showing, Vijay credited MS Dhoni for instilling the habit of playing with freedom.

"See, I have been playing with all of them, so I am a happy brother to be honest seeing all of them perform, even Virat Kohli for that matter, his hunger and the intensity that he brings on to the field every time and also Shreyas Iyer," he said.

"We have set a nice bench-mark for all of them. Dhoni is the primary person in this new age because he led us and he gave us that template to be free and express yourself. From there, Virat carried forward and now the youngsters are feeding on that."

"They know what to do at that level, they are no longer scared of what the opposition is going to do, so they are ready and raring to go," he continued. Vijay added, "A mental approach and mental shift has happened with the Indian cricket team which is fantastic to watch." (PTI)