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- Omar chairs meeting of coalition partners ahead of budget session in Jammu
- No place for gangsters and criminals in Punjab, they will be wiped out: CM

AAP brings back Bhaben as Assam chief after 5 months



GUWAHATI, March 2: The Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday said the party has appointed its national joint secretary Bhaban Choudhury as the acting state president of the Assam unit, five months after replacing him from the post.

As the party's permanent president Manoj Dhanowar is not active due to "personal reasons", the executive committee in its meeting on Saturday unanimously chose Choudhury for the position.

Choudhury was the chief of AAP Assam prior to Dhanowar taking charge as state president in September last year.

Immediately after assuming office, Choudhury condemned the "increasing political violence, suppression of democratic protests and the deliberate defamation campaigns against opposition leaders and their families".

"The BJP government is systematically killing democracy by silencing opposition voices. No matter how much suppression they impose, the people of Assam will give them a befitting reply in 2026," he said in a statement.

Highlighting the "rising public discontent", he claimed that the government has failed to address critical issues like skyrocketing prices, communal remarks, environmental destruction due to deforestation and the recurring floods in Assam.

"The frustration among the common people is growing every day and in response, the BJP is intentionally creating a chaotic environment to instill fear among the masses," Choudhury said. He also alleged that the BJP government is using fear tactics ahead of the 2026 assembly elections to deter public dissent.

"If a double-engine government with full control over the home department cannot prevent lawlessness, it only proves that the situation is being deliberately created for political gains," Choudhury asserted. He also criticised the one-man Justice (ret) Biplab Kumar Sharma Commission report on the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Attempt to unify opposition in Assam off the track 2026 state polls: Bhupen Kr Borah gives 'Ekla cholo re' hint

GUWAHATI, March 2: An attempt to bring non-BJP parties together ahead of next year's assembly polls in Assam seems to have hit a roadblock, with top Congress leaders hinting at the possibility of the main opposition party going alone in 2026.

State Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah's post on Facebook on Sunday hinted at the likelihood of the party treading the solo path, while party MP Pradyut Bordoloi's abrupt departure from an all-opposition party meet the previous evening also cast doubts on consensus for the formation of an anti-BJP forum.

Representatives of opposition parties, including Congress, Left parties, Rajior Dal and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP), had met at a resort in Sonapur, on the outskirts of Guwahati, on Saturday evening, at a meeting convened by leading citizens to bring together non-BJP parties on a common platform for the state polls.



Bordoloi, a two-time Lok Sabha MP and former state minister, had rushed out of the meeting and driven away in his vehicle, refusing to comment on his abrupt departure midway.

Borah, who stayed on in the meeting, later refused to divulge any delib-

erations held and said the decisions will be informed by the organisers.

However, his post on Facebook on Sunday morning hinted at possible major differences of opinion.

Borah quoted a couplet of the famous song by Rabindranath Tagore,

'Ekla cholo re', with a caption: 'Pre-poll/post-poll'.

The state Congress president could not be reached for his comments or clarification on the social media post.

Prominent writer and former DGP Harekrishna Deka, among the organisers of the meeting, claimed that a decision has been taken by the parties to remain united.

"There were discussions and arguments. But in the end the decision was that for the greater cause, all non-BJP parties will come together," Deka said on Saturday evening.

AJP president Lurinjoyti Gogoi also said that a decision was taken to remain united.

"In a democracy, there are arguments. The MP left due to personal reasons. There were emotions, logical reasoning, arguments, discussions, and the decision was that we will take forward our united stand," he claimed. Rajior Dal (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Women growing handcrafted tea in Assam look forward to better production, branding

ENGLEPATHAR, March 2: Mina Tokbipi had been growing tea in her backyard in Assam's Karbi Anglong district and processing it by hand for family use for years but her life changed for the better following interventions to launch the tea as a branded product in an assured market.

Tokbipi said that after own consumption, her family used to sell the surplus tea to agents at nominal rates.

However, this changed in 2020 when biodiversity organisation 'Aaranyak' evolved a business model to ensure fair price to the growers, Firoz Ahmed, a scientist heading the livelihoods programme of the NGO in the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong basin, told PTI.

"We found that most locally produced products, including tea, by small land-holding farmers in the basin were sold at throwaway prices to the middlemen. The locals were often exploited and they received a pittance for their toil," he said.



"It was decided that women in the area, who practised handcrafted tea production, will be trained as there was an exclusive market for it and our primary aim was to ensure that they got proper prices by branding the product," Ahmed said.

Following several meetings with women and local stakeholders, the NGO decided to train 19 women from 10 villages. However, at present, only four

women in the three villages of Englepathar, Rongtara and Bakrung Engti are practising it, another 'Aaranyak' official, Jayanta Kumar Roy, who monitors the programme, said.

The production of handcrafted tea is not an easy task and maintaining its quality control is difficult with no two packages being the same, he said.

"Besides, it is a time-consuming process and women who are burdened with household chores were not too willing to take it up. However, the scenario changed marginally when they saw these four women earning respectable incomes," Roy added. Tokbipi, who received training in the first batch, has now moved on to training more women and she hopes that more people will take it up in a concerted manner.

Another tea grower, Sika Terangpi, pointed out that earlier they used to hardly get any return from (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

EC statement on duplicate EPIC numbers confirms voter list anomalies in Bengal: TMC

KOLKATA, March 2: The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal said Sunday's statement by the Election Commission that duplicate numbers do not necessarily imply fake voters backed its claims about the inclusion of non-resident voters in the state's electoral list to help a particular party.

Amid reports flagging issuance of identical voter card numbers to electors in two different states, the EC in a statement said while elector photo identity card (EPIC) numbers of some voters "may be identical," other details such as demographic information, assembly constituency and polling booth are different.

"Irrespective of the EPIC number, any elector can cast a vote only at their designated polling station in their respective constituency in their state or Union territory where they are enrolled in the electoral rolls and nowhere else," the EC said.

TMC state general secretary Kunal Ghosh told reporters that the EC's statement "confirms our claims that there are names in the electoral list which had been included after (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Shah: Modi govt unsparing in punishing drug traffickers



NEW DELHI, March 2: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the Modi government is unsparing in punishing drug traffickers who drag the youth into the dark abyss of addiction for the greed of money.

In a post on X, Shah said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government pledges to continue combating the drug menace with ruthless and meticulous investigations to build a "drug-free Bharat".

He said, as a result of a foolproof investigation with a "bottom to top" and "top to bottom" strategy, 29 drug traffickers have been convicted by courts in 12 different cases across India.

This success is a testament to the "bottom to top" and "top to bottom" approach adopted by the government, an official release said.

In pursuit of Modi government's

zero-tolerance policy against drugs, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has achieved this significant success, it said.

The details of 12 cases include the seizure of 23,859 kg of charas at the Sabarmati Railway Station in Gujarat's Ahmedabad in 2019, where three people were arrested and sentenced to 14 years in jail.

In July 2022, the NCB in Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur intercepted two vehicles in Shahdol and seized 123,080 kg of ganja. Four people were arrested in the case and sentenced to 12 years rigorous of imprisonment with a fine of Rs 2 lakh each. In the Chandigarh Zone last year, a parcel containing two hockey sticks packed with 438 grams of opium was intercepted at DHL Express, Ludhiana, by the officers of the NCB. Two arrested accused in the case were sentenced to three years (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP govt conspiring to end reservation by privatising institutions: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, March 2: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday accused the BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government of conspiring to end jobs and reservation by privatizing government institutions in the state.

The former chief minister claimed that the state government is hell-bent on privatising two power distribution companies - Purvanchal and Dakshinanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd.

"Earlier the BJP government at the Center handed over many government institutions to private hands. Now, following the same path, the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh is also promoting privatization," Yadav said. He also alleged that BJP governments "work for capitalists", according to a statement issued by the SP here.

"The BJP government of Uttar Pradesh is hell-bent on handing over

Purvanchal and Dakshinanchal Vidyut Nigam to private hands. The government wants to give assets worth billions of rupees to capitalists under the guise of privatization," the SP chief charged.

Yadav alleged that the BJP government is against the Constitution and reservation. He said that the BJP is hatching new conspiracies every day to keep 'PDA' (Pichhda, Dalit, Minorities) away from jobs and reservation.

"The BJP's policy is anti-PDA. It hates PDA," he said.

"Privatisation ends government jobs. Private sector arbitrarily increases inflation which affects the common people," he added.

The SP chief said that along with this, due to government institutions going to the private sector, 'PDA' does not get the opportunity of reservation. (PTI)

Bharat fastest growing global economy in last decade: Dhankhar

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 2: Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday said the country has seen exponential economic upsurge in the last decade and has become the fastest growing global economy during this period.

The Vice President made the statement while delivering the 4th P Parameswaran Memorial Lecture organised here by the Bharatheeya Vichara Kendra.

P Parameswaran was one of the senior-most 'pracharakas' of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and a former leader of the erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

Dhankhar said that in 1989 when he was an MP and in 1991 when he was a Union Minister, the "atmosphere did not inspire us".

"Now our Bharat is brimming



with positivity and possibility. It is full of hope and aspirations. All around and all pervasive, we can see an ecosystem of hope and possibility. In the last decade, Bharat has seen an exponential economic upsurge," he said.

He further said that the country was the fifth largest global economy and was "on its way to be-

coming a USD 4 trillion economy very shortly".

"With an average growth of 8 per cent, Bharat happens to be the fastest growing global economy in the last decade," he said.

Dhankhar also said that India was no longer labelled as a nation of snake charmers as it was "charming the entire world with the potential it has".

Referring to the growth trajectory of the country, he said that a phenomenal infrastructure growth was taking place in the nation.

"People-centric policies and transparent accountable governance has given buoyancy to the ecosystem," he said. In his speech, Dhankhar also alluded to the politically divisive environment in the nation. He said that the country was faced (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'We can't pay our children's school fees, buy clothes, and meet household expenses' Plight of Broom Farmers in Karbi Anglong

By: Helvelyn Timungpi

DIPHU, March 2: Broom cultivation, a major cash crop, serves as a crucial source of income for the people of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. More than half of the population living in the hilly areas of West Karbi Anglong depends on broom cultivation for their livelihood. However, in recent years, farmers have faced increasing challenges, as their hard work is no longer yielding adequate returns.

Farmers typically harvest broom grass in January and February. While it is relatively easy to grow and has been a profitable venture, the income from it remains unstable.

"Sometimes we earn well, but at other times, there's a sharp decline in broom prices in the market," said a local farmer.

"When the market price is good, we feel happy. We can pay our children's school fees, buy clothes,

and meet household expenses. However, when the price drops, we are the ones who suffer the most," said Kamsing Tisso, a broom farmer with three school-going children.

Rongbang Timung, another farmer from Tharvelangso, stated that he switched to pineapple cultivation due to the unstable prices of broom and the heavy taxes imposed on it.

"Broom is treated as a forest product, so the Forest Department imposes taxes on it. I feel exploited because a significant portion of my earnings goes to them. With pineapple cultivation, I don't have to pay anyone," he explained.

Kare Phangchopi, a prominent broom farmer from Diphu, said her family is struggling due to the declining prices over the past two years.

"We live hand to mouth. My husband is a full-time farmer, managing the broom garden and our or-



ganic vegetable farm. Our children's education, clothes, food—everything depends on the price of broom. When the price is good, we can pay off debts and manage household expenses. But with the current low rates, we are barely surviving," she shared.

She further added that her family

had to take loans to pay daily wage laborers. "Broom needs to be plucked between January and early March, and we can't do it all by ourselves. So, we hire laborers. Since prices have been low for the past two years, we've had to borrow money to pay them," Kare added.

Reflecting on better times, she

recalled, "In 2022, we earned a profit of ₹1.3 lakh when broom prices reached ₹50 per kg. I was so happy—I bought household items and a cow, which now provides us with milk and has even given birth to a calf. I really hope prices improve because broom cultivation is tough, especially since its sharp-edged leaves make harvesting difficult."

Another farmer, Ojit Phangcho, from Umswai in West Karbi Anglong, emphasised the labor-intensive nature of broom cultivation. "Broom plants can grow in any type of soil, but the process requires hard work. Clearing bushes, pruning, and harvesting are difficult tasks, requiring manual labor. The reward for our efforts depends entirely on the market price," he said. He also urged the government to remove broom from the list of forest products, stating, "If the government leaves us alone, we will benefit greatly."

Achievement



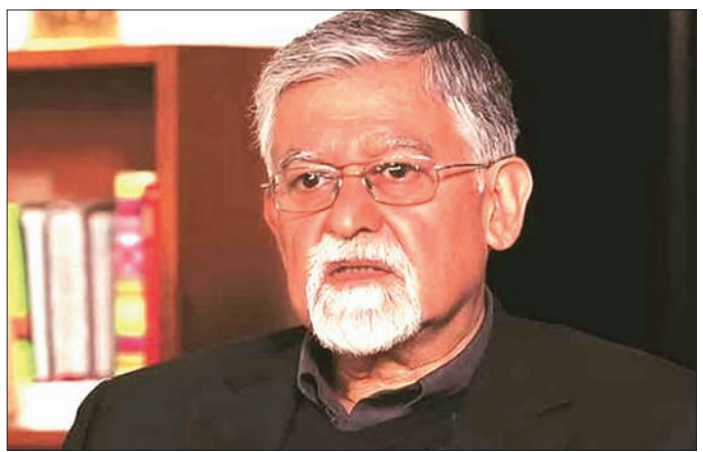
Pronomita Rajioug has been awarded Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in Department of Linguistics at Assam University, Silchar for her thesis entitled "Comparative Phonological Study of Dembra, Dijuwa and Hawar Dialects of Dimasa". She carried her research work under the supervision of Dr. D. Mary Kim Haokip, Head of the Department of Linguistics. She is the daughter of Mr. Sajal Rajioug and Mrs. Chaya Rajioug of Dilaji Mithiphang, Diphu, Karbi Anglong District and wife of Mr. Ponjit Naiding. She has presented many research papers in National and International Seminars and Conferences. She has also published a number of research papers in peer-reviewed journals.

States' investment friendliness index to be launched in 2 months: NITI

NEW DELHI, March 2: NITI Aayog member Arvind Virmani has said that work on the second phase of the investment friendliness index of states is in progress and it is expected to be released in a month or two.

The Union government in its FY26 Budget announced the launch of the 'Investment Friendliness Index of States' in 2025 to further the spirit of competitive co-operative federalism. This index will motivate states to review regulations to identify what is impeding investment. The initiative aims to promote healthy competition among states to attract private investment. The Ministry of Finance is working on the parameters related to 'Investment Friendly Index of States' in consultation with NITI Aayog and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

In an interview with PTI-Bhaskar, Virmani said, "The first phase of preparing the index has been completed. Work is going on in the second phase. In this, suggestions are being taken from the industry. The opinion of the industry is important in the index because they have to make the investment. Necessary improvements will be made in it based on the suggestions." About the expected timeline for the release of the index, he said, "I cannot give any specific date about this. But the index is expected to be released in a month or two." Virmani said, "The prime minister had instructed us that all states should get the benefit of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) and private investment. Overall, all states will benefit from this and investment and manufacturing will increase. Overall, the economy of the states will get a



boost. They will be able to tell their strengths in this and work will be done to correct the shortcomings." Earlier, Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil had told PTI that several regulations and reforms have been done at the Centre but some investors feel similar reforms are needed at the state level too.

"The main idea behind this index is not to rank states and say which one is good or bad. Its purpose is to motivate states to look at their own rules, regulations and procedures. To help them figure out which rules investors find practical or difficult..." Govil said.

NITI Aayog member Arvind Virmani also said that while employment is increasing in India, real wages for regular jobs have not kept pace with inflation over the past seven years.

India has an opportunity in terms of global population, and there is a need to take advantage of it. For this, improving the quality of teaching and training is important, he noted.

He said, "According to PLFS (Periodic Labour Force Survey)

data, the worker-population ratio has been clearly increasing in the last seven years. This means that the number of jobs is increasing more than the population growth. There are fluctuations in this too but the trend shows that jobs are increasing. Therefore, it is wrong to say that jobs are not increasing".

As per the PLFS Annual Report 2023-24 (July-June), the worker-population ratio in terms of persons of all ages increased to 43.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 34.7 per cent in 2017-18. "If we look at the wage data in PLFS, the real salary of casual workers has increased during the seven years and their condition has improved during this period. The figures confirm this.

"But a bigger issue is in the case of regular salaried jobs. In this category, real wages have not increased in line with inflation in seven years," the economist said.

"As far as my assessment is concerned, the main reason for wages not increasing as per inflation is the lack of skills. We are not hiring skilled jobs. I have seen the data of many countries... based on that, I would say that we need to work on

this (skill). It is in a very weak state. The central government is taking steps. States also need to work in this direction, work needs to be done at the district level because jobs will be created there." This is important because when skills increase, productivity increases and real wages increase. This happens in India as well as in the world. Skill development is needed not only for those who are already working but also for the new people who are coming in, the NITI Aayog member said.

"According to the analysis we have done, skill development is needed at every level of education. Many children drop out of school midway, they need to be given skills accordingly. It is not that everyone needs skills only to become an AI (artificial intelligence) or electronic engineer. We also have to think about those children who drop out of school midway," Virmani said. The major problem is the lack of quality education and skills. Skills need to be improved at every level -- lower, middle and higher. We need skills for all kinds of jobs, he added.

"For a developed India, there is a need for improvement everywhere. We should see the opportunity and use it... We need to take advantage of the opportunities that we have at the level of global demographics. For this, improving the quality of education along with teaching and training is important. Attention needs to be paid here. So that we can reach a higher income level. Similarly, there is a supply chain, which needs to be worked upon," the member said. "Job and skill are two sides of the same coin. If you have skill then it becomes easier to get a job. This needs to be understood. (PTI)

ACME Solar plans ₹ 17,000 crore capex by 2026 for renewable expansion

NEW DELHI, March 2: ACME Solar on Sunday said it has planned an investment of ₹ 17,000 crore on capital expenditure by 2026 with a focus on hybrid and round-the-clock renewable capacities.

The company is also evaluating entry in nuclear energy segment, though these plans are at a drawing board level, ACME Solar said in a statement.

ACME Solar Holdings plans to invest ₹ 17,000 crore by 2026, according to the statement.

"We intend to focus our new capacities on the revenue and margin accretive hybrid and FDRE (Firm and Dispatchable Renewable Energy) projects as a critical pivot in our business strategy," CEO Nikhil Dhingra said.

Renewable energy projects integrated with energy storage systems are referred as FDRE projects. Such projects ensure round-the-clock supply of green power, addressing challenges related to variable RE production.

Dhingra further said that ACME Solar plans to roll out its capacity expansion in two phases starting in April this year.

As of the nine-month period of FY25, ACME Solar's portfolio stood at 6,970 MW, with 2,540 MW already operational and 4,430

MW under construction projects, with 49 per cent focus in hybrid and FDRE projects.

The operational capacity of 2,540 MW is expected to provide ACME Solar an annualised EBITDA run rate of up to ₹ 1,800 crore.

The current operational capacity off-take is split between central and state off-takers having power purchase proportions of 67 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

This is reflective of the growing demand for renewable energy across both the state and central governments, positioning ACME Solar as a key supplier in the country's energy transition.

ACME Solar secures long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs) of 25 years that are less susceptible to the volatility of the merchant power market.

Delving into the company's business strategy pivot, Dhingra pointed out that ACME Solar's growth plan is not only focused on expanding its solar capacity but also diversifying its project mix.

Its under-construction projects include a mix of solar, wind, FDRE, and hybrid solutions. These renewal projects have a short capex-to-revenue cycle ensuring faster accretion of revenue and

margin benefits.

The company has recently invested around ₹ 4,400 crore in its 1,200 MW inter-state transmission system connected project in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.

ACME Solar also said it has made significant strides in reducing net debt. Through IPO proceeds, the company reduced net debt by ₹ 2,070 crore, while also securing ₹ 16,500 additional debt for 1,700 MW under-construction hybrid and FDRE renewable energy projects.

The company has secured grid connectivity for 4,430 MW of under-construction capacity, and further connectivity of 2,000 MW is available for future bids.

Besides having solar, wind and hybrid renewable energy projects, Dhingra said the company is keen to explore nuclear energy investments, particularly in light of the recent government push to involve private sector participation in the sector.

In the third quarter of FY25, ACME Solar reported a 9.9 per cent year-on-year growth in revenue, amounting to ₹ 401 crore.

EBITDA (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation) increased by 15.7 per cent, and net profit surged by a remarkable 152.1 per cent, it said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

AAP brings back Bhaben as

scam, calling it a politically motivated document. "The investigation ignored key testimonies, favouring only the version of the accused, which even the judiciary does not find credible. This is a clear conspiracy to malign opposition leadership," he claimed. The role of former CM Tarun Gogoi in appointing prime accused Rakesh Kumar Paul first as a member and later as chairman of the APSC has come under scrutiny in the report, which was tabled in the Assam Assembly on February 17.

Choudhury also condemned the "targeted defamation" of spouses of opposition MPs and MLAs, wondering why the government failed to investigate more serious allegations such as illegal coal mining in Umrangso and the disproportionate assets of ruling party members.

"The entire administrative machinery is being misused for political vendetta," he remarked. Choudhury claimed that under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's leadership, the BJP government has dragged Assam's politics to an "all-time low", turning it into a battleground for personal enmity rather than governance. "This trend is extremely dangerous for the future of Assam's political system," he added. (PTI)

2026 state polls: Bhupen Kr

chief and MLA Akhil Gogoi also maintained that the meeting ended with a unanimous decision. "No one left in anger. There were arguments. But in the end, the decision was unanimous," he said. The 16-party opposition alliance in the state, formed during the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, had fallen apart during bypolls to five assembly seats last year over the seat-sharing arrangement.

The forum, Asom Sonmilito Morcha (ASOM), without the Congress, had fought the bypolls together, but the BJP and its allies had swept the five seats with the opposition drawing a blank. (PTI)

Women growing handcrafted

the tea sold to the middlemen. Most of the women trained initially were not keen to take up handcrafted tea production but now they are eager to join after seeing that the others are getting good returns, she said. The handcrafted tea produced by these women are being packaged and sold under the brand name 'Pirbi' at a store started by the biodiversity organisation. "Making handcrafted teas is a delicate art requiring skill, patience, and dedication. From handpicking the tea leaves to rolling those by hand, each step is meticulously carried out to ensure the highest quality tea," North East Tea Association (NETA) advisor Bidyananda Barkakoty said.

Machine-made teas are preferred for their efficiency, consistency, and ability to be produced in large quantities, but handmade teas are sought-after for their unique flavours and exceptional quality, Ahmed said.

The fact that each batch of handcrafted tea is unique, as it cannot be replicated exactly in the same way, makes it even more exciting, adding to its value and appeal, he added. "The process of preparing handcrafted tea is painstaking with the first step being the plucking of tender leaves, then subjecting those to heat to keep them from oxidising. "Then, the leaves are gently hand rolled for drying, which we are planning to do in the near future with solar energy, and finally the leaves are crushed with the traditional Karbi mortar and pestle called 'Long' and 'Lengpun', respectively," Tokbipi explained. The women are focusing on producing green, smoked, orthodox Roselle tea, she added.

Barkakoty pointed out that there is no authentic data available for handcrafted tea but as a conservative estimate, there are small production units of not more than 50 across Assam, with all of them producing small quantities with the annual production being not more than two lakh kg.

"Handcrafted tea, however, has a niche market in both domestic and international markets. There is an opportunity to grow as a cottage industry and help in the rural economy but the main challenge is marketing these teas in an organised manner," he said. These small units are spread out over a huge geographical area, producing small quantities and with buyers finding it difficult to procure them in bulk. "The solution is to form clusters so that there is a sizeable quantity and no significant difference in quality," Barkakoty added. (PTI)

EC statement on duplicate

conclusion of previous polls. This is aimed at helping BJP get more votes." "These names don't tally with the list of permanent residents of a constituency and are aimed at helping the ruling party at the Centre. Our supreme Mamata Banerjee had pointed out this anomaly days back," he added. He added that TMC leaders and members are already visiting their respective areas to scan and physically verify voter lists.

"However, despite all attempts, BJP will not succeed in making inroads in Bengal. They will be rejected by people again," he claimed. BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said the TMC is "scared of losing power in the next assembly polls as it won't be able to manipulate the public mandate through terror, intimidation, and false voting." "To allay any apprehensions, the commission has decided to ensure allotment of unique EPIC number to registered electors. Any case of duplicate EPIC number will be rectified by allotting a unique EPIC number," the EC said. (PTI)

Shah: Modi govt unsparing

of imprisonment by a Punjab court for their role in attempting to transport the opium to Canada. In another case, the NCB arrested one person at the Chandigarh Railway Station in 2021 for possession of 390 grams of charas. The accused was formally arrested, and upon completion of the investigation, a special court sentenced him to six months in jail.

In June, 2021, the NCB intercepted a Zimbabwean woman on her arrival at the Cochin International Airport. The examination of her luggage led to the recovery and seizure of 2.910 kg of heroin. She was subsequently arrested and a court in Ernakulam sentenced her to 11 years in jail.

In January 2018, the NCB seized 450 grams of charas, leading to the arrest of one person in Dehradun, who was later sentenced to one year in jail.

In 2021, the NCB seized 1.950 kg of charas from the possession of two accused who were later arrested. A court in January 2025 sentenced the accused to 10 years in jail. In February 2021, the NCB seized 681.8 kg of ganja in the Ranga Reddy district of Telangana. Eight accused were arrested and charged with drug trafficking. A local court sentenced them to 10 years in prison.

In September 2021, the NCB intercepted a truck in Seoni, Madhya Pradesh and seized 152.665 kg of ganja. Four people were arrested sentenced by a special court to 15 years of rigorous imprisonment. In July 2020, the NCB seized 1,301 kg of ganja from a truck between Plessey and Krishnanagar in West Bengal. Two accused were arrested and charged with drug trafficking and one of them was sentenced for 15 years of imprisonment.

"These convictions exemplify the NCB's dedication to ensure successful prosecution of its cases filed before courts," the release said. The home ministry said under the guidance of Shah, the NCB is working relentlessly to realise the prime minister's vision of a drug-free India by 2047. (PTI)

Bharat fastest growing global

with "alarmingly worrisome scenarios" on certain aspects as politics have become polarised, vertically divisive and temperatures are always high. He also underscored the significance of dialogue and deliberation while referring to the "disturbances and disruptions" in the Parliament which he termed as "sacrilege of intense enormity".

"Parliament must be the role model for the people. It is a platform to transform aspirations of the people into reality. It has to be an impregnable citadel of dialogue, debate, discussion and deliberation. "And what do we see today? Dialogue, deliberation, and others have yielded to disturbance and disruption. Can there be sacrilege of more intense enormity when temples of democracy are ravaged by disruption and disturbance? Our democracy has to survive and the first test is parliamentary functioning," Dhankhar said.

He said that the country was facing situations where national interest was relegated and "anti-national narratives took wings". "We are living in very dangerous times. Political intolerance and reckless stance promoting partisan and personal interest at the cost of nationalism needs to be moderated. There is a need for social counselling," he added. (PTI)

Indians must work hard to achieve a \$30 trn economy by 2047: Amitabh Kant

NEW DELHI, March 2: Indians must work hard to achieve the ambitious target of making India a USD 30 trillion economy by 2047, former NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant has said.

Joining the ongoing debate on working hours, India's G20 Sherpa said Japan, South Korea and China have achieved economic success through a strong work ethic and suggested that India must cultivate a similar mindset to build a world-class economy.

"I strongly believe in hard work. Indians must work hard, whether it's 80 hours or 90 hours a week. If your ambition is to move from a USD 4 trillion to a USD 30 trillion economy, you can't do it through entertainment or by following the views of some film stars," he said while speaking at Business Standard's Manhattan summit. Currently, the size of the Indian economy is around USD 4 trillion.

"We have made it fashionable to talk about not working hard. Why? India must work hard to deliver projects ahead of time, with world-class excellence, without time and cost overruns," he added.

Responding to a question on work-life balance, Kant emphasised that there is enough time for personal well-being within a disciplined work schedule.

"I work every day. I exercise. I play golf, and I still manage to work hard. Keep aside one-and-a-half-hour for yourself, and you still have 22.5 hours in a day. There's plenty of time to manage work-life balance, but don't make it fashionable to say people shouldn't work hard," Kant said. He also asserted that Indians must learn the art of delivering projects with world-class excellence without time and cost overruns.

"We are all sending wrong messages to the young generation of India that India can become a great nation without working hard. No, no country has been able to do this," Kant said.

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Chairman SN Subrahmanyan in January sparked an online outrage with his



comments, advocating a 90-hour work week and suggesting that employees should even give up Sundays. "How long can you stare at your wife," he was heard saying in a purported video address to employees where he urged them to spend less time at home and more in the office.

His remarks have reignited the work-life balance debate, first triggered by Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy's suggestion of a 70-hour workweek.

"I regret I am not able to make you work on Sundays. If I can make you work on Sundays, I will be more happy because I work on Sundays," Subrahmanyan was heard saying in an undated video circulating on social media.

"What do you do sitting at home? How long can you stare at your wife? How long can the wives stare at their husbands? Come on, get to the office and start working," he had said.

"India's work productivity is one of the lowest in the world...my request is that our youngsters must say, 'this is my country, I want to work 70 hours a week'," Murthy had said. (PTI)

Purabi Dairy inks pact with NDDB, to double output to 3 LLPD

GUWAHATI, March 2: The West Assam Milk Producers' Co-operative Union Ltd (WAMUL), which operates under the brand Purabi Dairy, on Sunday said it has joined hands with the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) to double production to 3 lakh litres per day.

The two organisations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the recent 'Advantage Assam 2.0' business summit for the Guwahati-based milk producer's expansion exercise.

"The expansion project, estimated at Rs 100 crore, will increase Purabi Dairy's Panjabari plant's capacity from 1.5 LLPD to 3 LLPD, ensuring a steady supply of quality dairy products to meet growing consumer demand," WAMUL said in a statement.

It will also see an increase in fermented milk product capacity from 20 metric tonnes per day (MTPD) to 50 MTPD and the establishment of a new ice cream plant with a capacity of 20 LLPD.

Along with enhancing the supply chain, this will also ensure better returns for dairy farmers through value-added products, the company said.

In July last year, WAMUL had entered into an agreement with the Assam government to operate a 5,000-litre daily capacity plant in Dhemaji district. (PTI)

Wave Group, Belgium's Agristo to invest ₹ 750 cr in UP to expand potato processing plant capacity

NEW DELHI, March 2: Wave Group and Belgium's Agristo NV will invest around ₹ 750 crore to expand their potato processing plant in Uttar Pradesh to make premium french fries, amid rising global demand for processed food.

In 2019, Wave Group firm Masa Global Food Pvt Ltd and Agristo's subsidiary firm IMSTO NV, Belgium had formed a 50:50 joint venture firm to establish a potato processing plant at Bijnor to make dehydrated potato flakes. The name of the joint venture firm is Agristo Masa Pvt Ltd. The plant started operations in 2022 with an annual capacity of 7,500 tonnes.

In an interview with PTI, Wave Group Chairman Manpreet Singh Chadha noted that there is an immense growth potential in Indian food processing sector. He also stressed on the need to boost crop yields and processing capacity for augmenting farmers income.

"We are setting up a new production line for export quality french fries at Bijnor," Chadha told PTI. He said the total investment on this expansion will be around ₹ 750 crore, which will be financed through equity and debt.

The joint venture had invested



around ₹ 300 crore on setting up the existing plant, taking the total investment commitment to more than ₹ 1,000 crore.

Chadha said the new production line with 80,000 tonnes per annum capacity will become operational in the next two years and cater to both domestic and global markets.

The JV is into B2B (business to business) segment only.

"Our aim is to empower the farmers and diversify their cash crop beyond sugarcane. We have helped these farmers to double the potatoes output with the help of

new technologies. Their income has increased by 50 per cent over the last 3-4 years," said Chadha. Princess Astrid of the Kingdom of Belgium, Finance Minister of Uttar Pradesh Suresh Kumar Khanna and Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh Manoj Singh attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the expansion of the production facility. Wave Group already has two sugar manufacturing plants in Bijnor area and has been procuring sugarcane from farmers.

The potato processing plant set up by the joint venture firm has

helped in enhancing farmers income of this region, Chadha said.

"We are helping farmers in accessing good quality seeds for potato production. We are also procuring all potatoes from farmers at a very remunerative price," Chadha said. Around 2,500 farmers are expected to benefit from this expansion.

This is in addition to the 500 farmers in the region who have been provided sustainable livelihood opportunities through the plant's interventions.

The productivity of potato has gone up from 17 tonnes per hectare to 32 tonnes per hectare.

The Bijnor plant caters to both domestic and export markets, with North America, Middle East, South East Asia and Japan being the key destinations overseas. Filip Wallays, Co-CEO of Agristo, said, "The Bijnor plant is a testament of how results can be achieved when vision and technical expertise are combined. Partnering with Masa Global Food has allowed us to contribute in a meaningful manner to the rapidly evolving Indian agriculture and food processing sectors and ensure development of all stakeholders." (PTI)

Minister Nandita Gorlosa attends Budget awareness meeting in Kokrajhar

Importance on four sectors -Agriculture, MSME, Investment and Export were highlighted

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 2: Assam cabinet minister, Nandita Gorlosa on Sunday visited Kokrajhar, and held an awareness meeting with citizens that discussed on details the centre's budget which has been deemed as the people's oriented budget for the fiscal year 2025-26.

The meeting took place at the Terapanth Bhawan in Kokrajhar that emphasized on welfare and development of the common people.

Gorlosa said that importance on four sectors was highlighted in the budget ie Agriculture, MSME, Investment and Export.

Hundreds of citizens from various corners of the district participated the meeting, and expressed their opinions on the positive aspect of the centre's budget.

Addressing the reporters, minister Gorlosa stated that she attended



a meeting with people cutting across communities on the centre's budget. She said that the meeting

Gorlosa elaborating on the provisions of the new budget of the centre said that the budget has been aimed to benefit citizens, particularly in the state's development.

She highlighted the government's commitment ensuring financial well being of all citizens, emphasising various measures introduced in the budget.

"Today, I attended an awareness meeting in Kokrajhar on the Central Budget along with several dignitaries and different stake holders were present in the programme. While India proceeds towards Vikshit Bharat by 2047, the importance on four sectors were highlighted-Agriculture, MSME, Investment and Export. As reflected in the Union Budget on February 1, by Honble Union finance minister Nirmala Sitaraman ji, the awareness programme will reach the masses," Gorlosa said.

focused on the India-centric, people-oriented Central Budget for the fiscal year 2025-26.

Without govt aid, villagers build 1.3 km embankment to protect land in Dhubri

HT Correspondent
DHUBRI, March 2: In a remarkable display of unity and determination, villagers under Naskara Jamadarhat Block, located on the southern bank of Dhubri district, have successfully constructed a 1,300-meter-long embankment to protect their croplands and human habitation from the devastating floods of the Brahmaputra River.

The extraordinary initiative, carried out by the villagers of Nichinpur without any government funding, has drawn widespread appreciation from people across Assam. In 2024, the Brahmaputra breached large sections of land in Beldubi area at Nichinpur, submerging thousands of hectares of fertile cropland and residential areas.

The revenue village Nichinpur falls under the Biring-Jarua constituency in Dhubri district has been severely affected by aggressive river erosion over the years in the face of natural calamities. Determined to prevent further destruction, the villagers of Beldubi, Nichinpur, Medortari, Chirakuti, and Dingdinga Gaon Panchayats came together to form the Nichinpur River Bank Protection Committee (Nichinpur Nadir-Par Suraksha Band Committee) to take initiative to construct an embankment.

What sets this initiative apart is that the entire project is carried out without any government assistance or funds. The committee took on the daunting task by appointing private engineers to oversee the technical aspects while constructing the embankment two kilometers upstream from Bura Buri Dham in Kulumya Choto Nichinpur village to prevent further land erosion, safeguard their livelihoods.

Rahim Uddin Ahmed president of the committee said that, the villagers pooled their own resources, gathered donation and volunteered their labor to construct the embankment before the flood season arrived.



Heavy machinery like JCBs and tractors were provided free of cost by locals. Sand was collected from river-deposited land (chars). Boulders were purchased by the committee to reinforce a 300-meter stretch with boulder pitching.

Through sheer hard work and collective effort, the community is successfully constructed the embankment, ensuring better flood protection for the future. 300 metre boulder pitching work is on process after completion Geobags will be placed throughout the embankment. The successful completion of this project will set an inspiring example of self-reliance in rural infrastructure development said the committee secretary, Tarachand Ali.

In an era when many communities rely on government intervention for disaster management, the villagers of Nichinpur and surrounding areas have shown that proactive and collaborative efforts can lead to lasting solutions. Locals hope that the embankment will prevent further land erosion, safeguard their livelihoods, and encourage other flood-prone communities to take similar initiatives without external support.

Asomiya Sahitya Sanmilani gets new president

HT Correspondent
GOLAGHAT, March 2: Distinguished litterateur professor Mukul Chakrabarty has been unanimously nominated as the president of Asomiya Sahitya Sanmilani for the forthcoming term 2025—2027 on Sunday. Chief secretary of sanmilani Bhaskar Bhuyan told this to reporters and also revealed that the 7th state conference will be held in Nalbari.

Body of woman recovered

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, March 2: Body of Sabita Chetia, a resident of Kaliapani Dighalibam Gaon was recovered from her residence on Sunday. According to sources, people of Kaliapani Dighalibam feel that Chetia faced torture in the hands of her son and daughter-in-law resulting Chetia committing suicide at her residence. People from Kaliapani Dighalibam came to the Demow Police Station on Sunday and lodged an FIR with Demow Police seeking Justice. Investigation has been underway.

Dibrugarh University to introduce Japanese language course

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, March 2: The Dibrugarh University is going to introduce a Japanese language course from the next academic year.

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the initiative, highlighting its potential to equip students with valuable skills.

The course aimed to strengthen ties with Japan, which is playing a crucial role in Assam's industrial and infrastructural growth. This will open new educational and employment avenues for local youth.

A Japan Caravan was recently hosted on the university campus by the Japan Foundation, promoting cultural and academic exchanges. The event showcased Japan's commitment to fostering stronger ties with India.

CM Sarma expressed his support for the initiative on social media, calling it a significant stride in broadening academic horizons and creating global opportunities for Assamese students.

Bajali District Yoga Association takes part in special meeting



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, March 2: A special meeting was held on Sunday between the Assam Yoga Association and the Bajali District Yoga Association at the Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) office in Nagaon.

The meeting aimed to facilitate a mutual exchange of ideas and discuss various aspects of yoga development in the region.

The meeting was presided over by Prabhath Chandra Bora, general secretary of the Assam Yoga Association. In his opening remarks,

Bora emphasised the importance of yoga in promoting physical and mental well-being, and highlighted the organisation's efforts to popularize yoga across the state.

The Bajali District Yoga Association delegation was led by Jyotish Sarma, advisor, Bhiva Kalita, secretary, Santosh Sarma, treasurer, Bimala Borkatoki, assistant secretary, and Anjana Kalita, member.

The delegation shared their experiences and insights on promoting yoga in Bajali district, and sought guidance from the Assam Yoga Association on how to further develop yoga activities in the region.

Other notable attendees included Samir Hazarika, joint secretary of the Assam Yoga Association, Nijara Bora, office secretary, Bichitra Ranjan Bora, technical director, and Sudipta Deka, vice-principal of the Assam Yoga College.

The meeting witnessed a fruitful exchange of ideas, with discussions focusing on various aspects of yoga development, including yoga education, training, and competition.

The participants also explored

Indian Dental Association, Assam confers lifetime achievement on Dr Pradeep Kumar Sharma

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 2: Dr Pradeep Kumar Sharma, a prominent dentist and social worker of Tezpur, has been awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Indian Dental Association, Assam state branch at the 55th Annual Conference of the Indian Dental Association, Assam.

It is underway at Maniram Dewan Trade Centre, Guwahati which is a part of two-day programme from Saturday for his outstanding contribution to the promotion and dissemination of dental education and services throughout the North East.

Dr Sharma, a resident of Tezpur and also a life member of Indian Dental Association served as the president of the Indian Dentists Association, Assam state branch for two terms in the past.

Born to late Dr Bhuban Mohan Sharma and late Sunita Devi in Jorhat, Dr Sharma after persuading B.Sc. with Honors joined King George's Medical College, Lucknow to pursue B.D.S.

He has completed PG Training in Electro Surgery and Aesthetic Dentistry from Switzerland and Liechtenstein. A pioneer in Multi-Speciality Clinic in Tezpur Dr Pradeep Kumar Sharma served in Government service for 21 years in Dhubri and Tezpur. After retiring from government service he established his own clinic at Tezpur in the year 1991 and till date he has been continuing his practice.

Dr Pradeep Kumar Sharma has received many awards and recognition from various organisations for his contribution towards the field of Dentistry. As a member of Rotary Club of Tezpur and actively participated in many health camps and flood relief camps. Rotary Club of Tezpur awarded him the "Swarna Seva Award". Marwari Yuva Mancha recognised him with 'Certificate of Appreciation' for his dedicated 50 years of exceptional service in the Medical profession. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from ADDSA in the year 2021.

AASU delegation visits Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 2: A 10-member delegation team from the central committee of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) visited Kokrajhar and held an important meeting with AASU members from the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) districts being held at the Kokrajhar AASU office on Saturday evening in Kokrajhar.

The team was led by its vice president, Bhabajit Bezbatua met organisation members of the students union across the region.

The students union laid stress on strengthening the district committees in BTR region while working dedicatedly towards the

welfare and development of the citizens.

Addressing the reporters after the meeting, AASU vice president Bhabajit Bezbatua emphasised that the AASU leadership has been taking proactive steps to strengthen the district committees in BTR.

He acknowledged that the committees in the region are facing several organisational challenges, and to address these issues, the leadership has been holding district-level meetings across BTR.

Bezbatua also highlighted the ongoing collaboration between AASU and the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) for the overall development of society and the BTR region.

He reiterated AASU's commitment to work closely with ABSU on key issues affecting students and the people of the region.

He stated that the team received a good response from the members of the students union in the districts, and discussed at length on welfare activities for people.

Buddhist association in Margherita condemns police atrocity on Buddhists

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, March 2: The Federation of Barua Buddhist Welfare Association of Assam (FBBWAA) president Subash Baruah and secretary general Sibul Talukdar have condemned the February 28 Bihar police action at Bodh Gaya, Bihar where Buddhist monks were forcefully removed from the Hunger strike site.

Talukdar said that Bodh Gaya in Bihar is the most revered pilgrimage sites for the Buddhist community people residing all over the world as it is the sacred place where Lord

Buddha attained enlightenment.

He further said that Buddhist monks across the country from February 12 onwards were peacefully participating in an indefinite hunger strike at the Mahabodhi Mahavihara in Bodh Gaya, Bihar in support of the long standing demand of the Buddhist community to repeal the Bodh Gaya Temple Act 1949 and to carry out amendment in the Bodh Gaya Temple Management Act.

"Both Gaya in Bihar is sacred shrine of Buddhist community people residing all over the world, but unfortunately

Hindu community Brahmins have occupied the shrine for which they are protesting against the atrocity since time immemorial," he said.

Talukdar said that Bihar police action of forcefully removing the Buddhist monks from the hunger strike site was a sign of cowardice and inhumanity which Buddhist community people residing at Assam condemned it in high words and demand Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar and home minister to immediately take action against those police officials who were involved in the incident.

Two-day medical camp underway

HT Correspondent
BAKALIA, March 2: A two-day free medical health checkup camp has been underway from Sunday at Ram Janaki Shiva Mandir Complex.

The executive member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Madhu Ram Lekthe, also Langher Member of Autonomous Council, inaugurated the Medical Camp in the presence of chairman of Bakalia Municipal Board, Hemsing Teron.

The camp was organised by Sri Sri Ram Janaki Shiva temple in collaboration of Indal Advance Lifecare Centre, Susuwahi, Banaras, in which MD (BHU) DNB (Medicine), PGDGM (Geriatric Medicine), Dr Indal Chauhan gave his serve.

More than a hundred patients from Langpher and nearby areas benefited from the medical camp. President Ram Janaki Shiva Mandir, Radheshyam Chauhan, deputy chairman, Bakalia Municipal Board, Anita Saikia, ward commissioners Gautom Banik, Raju Terang, Pranjal Sarmah and others attended the opening ceremony.

Book on English economics terminology in Assamese ignites knowledge



HT Correspondent
JORHAT, March 2: Assam Sahitya Sabha president Basanta Kumar Goswami on Sunday released a book containing a glossary of English economic terms translated into the Assamese language. The book titled 'Asomiya Paribhasha Kosh: Arthaniti' by Susmita Priyadarshini, an associate professor of DCB Girls' College,

Jorhat, was released at a ceremony held at the Jorhat Science Centre and Planetarium.

Speaking on the occasion Goswami highlighted the need of appropriate terminology in all aspects of knowledge. He emphasised that terminologies should not be mechanical but should be in conformity with the context. Goswami, while lauding

Priyadarshini for undertaking this task, underlined the need of terminology in all the disciplines of knowledge in the Assamese language.

Bhaskar Jyoti Sharma, professor, Anundoram Boroah Institute of Language, Art and Culture, Assam, who was an invited guest at the function, said that in addition to economic discussions Priyadarshini's book would be of use in deliberations of other subjects.

Rafique Ahmed, retired faculty of Economics department, Bahona College, Jorhat, who was a special guest on the occasion shared the difficulties faced by him while writing books on economics due lack of Assamese terminology.

"It is the need of the hour to enrich the Assamese language keeping in mind the requirements of the digital age," he added.

Susmita Priyadarshini, writer of the book elucidated her experience in writing the book.

Woman farmer Ila Deka keeps spirit alive in fields in Morigaon

Example for many, items produced from millet finding consumer's plate



HT Correspondent
MORIGAOON, March 2: Women are no less than men now as they are seen toiling in

field of agriculture. Whether it is sowing, reaping the harvest or creating job opportunities for others they are no less than their male counterparts.

One such example is Ila Deka, a woman farmer from Nakkhola village under Jagiroad Krishi Chakra in Morigaon. She has been making headlines for creating jobs by producing food items out of various kinds of millets.

Under Deka's leadership inspired by Millet Mission launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi 500 women have been now producing various items of millet and capturing market.

Initially, Deka grew Finger Millet on 2 bighas of land for the first time under the Assam Millet Mission. They were successful in the first year of production and produced about half a quintal of millet per bigha of land.

However, at that time in 2022, the millet crop was not popular among people and she faced problem in finding consumers. Later, Deka found other way round to find the consumer's plate with the millet. Slowly, with the help of other women started making food items in an effort to find the desired market.

The enthusiastic women cultivated foxtail millet on about 7 bighas of land with seeds received from the district agriculture department in the same year. They prepared millet powder from the produced crop and sold it at ₹ 150 per

kg to capture a suitable market. They have recently captured another market by producing delicious laddos, pitha, cakes, chocolates and biscuits from millet and benefited about 500 women. The women farmers have set a target of starting an agricultural revolution by cultivating finger millet on 100 bighas of land by 2024 with the efforts of Ila Deka.

Notably, Deka formed Junabeel Women Farmers Producer Company in 2020.

Agricultural venture was not new to Deka. Being spirited, in 2016 Deka; a graduate, mortgaged 6 bighas of land and cultivated Grand-9 variety of bananas on 4 bighas of land under the Apart scheme. However, due to floods the plantation did not yield the expected income. In parallel, he cultivated Ranjit Sub-1 variety of paddy seeds received under the National Agriculture Development Scheme on his own 5 bighas of land and earned about ₹ 15,000.

She benefited from paddy cultivation in the first year and later laid stress on extensive paddy cultivation. In 2018-19, he cultivated Ranjit Sub-1 variety of paddy on about 30 bighas of land under the National Agriculture Development Scheme with seeds received from the district agriculture department and 3 bighas of sugarcane, Jaha and Bora paddy. The farmer earns about ₹ 1 lakh by selling the paddy produced in the local market.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A man who has never made a woman angry is a failure in life. - Christopher Morley

Post Trump-Zelensky spat?

Is the global geopolitics moving a full circle after 80 years since the end of the Second World War in 1945? The question is now extremely relevant after the world saw on Friday in TV channels the unprecedented spat between the United States president Donald Trump and the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky. Ukraine president visited Trump in the White House to sign a deal on mineral resources apart from discussions on the proposed peace deal with Russia. At the end of the meeting, the former reality TV star as also the present political star, Trump said: "This is going to be a great television", perhaps pointing to the TRP rating that the programme got in those momentous 45 minutes, and Zelensky's leaving the meeting in a huff without signing the minerals deal. But the live broadcast sent shivers into the European capitals and in one go, the entire EU leadership said in one voice that enough is enough: it is time to opt for a new leader for the free world without depending on the US president. The entire EU leadership extended immediately their support to Zelensky's stance that Trump is playing Russian President's Putin's game and he could not be coerced into an agreement on Trump and Putin's terms. The reaction of the White House meeting in which the Ukrainian president was bullied by both Trump and his vice president J D Vance, created big apprehensions among the European leaders. They felt that Zelensky is a leader of a European nation and if he was insulted by the free world leader in such a manner, the same could happen to any other European country-head who would disagree with Trump on any issue.

The British Prime Minister Keir Starmer visited the White House on Thursday and met Trump, though he could not persuade the US President from his present stance on the Ukraine peace deal. Starmer extended his support to Zelensky by stating that Britain supports the path of a lasting peace based on the sovereignty and security of Ukraine. However, the European leaders who are known as pro-Trump, spoke in a different tone. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, known as an acolyte of Trump, spoke like a peacemaker between Europe and the USA. She called for an emergency meeting of the U.S. and its European allies as also Ukraine to sort out the issue. Hungarian president Victor Orban, a Trump fan openly supported peace formula by saying, "Strong men make peace, weak men make war."

Now what next? President Zelensky is in a reviewing mood after leaving the White House meeting in a huff on Friday. Soon after, he said that he would not apologise to Trump. Zelensky knows that whatever bravado the European leaders are showing now in his favour against Trump, that is of not much consequence to him if U.S. withdraws arms supplies to Ukraine and boycotts Zelensky. So he will certainly move immediately for a rapprochement. He is looking for a face-saving formula with President Putin. The 'imperialist' Trump has become peacenik while Europe does not want to end the Ukraine war now. What a turnaround of diplomacy and history?

The Ukraine conflict: A geopolitical reckoning beyond Western narratives

As a qualified senior teacher of Political Science with research and professional specialisation in Law & Governance, Public Policy as well as South-East Asia-focusing on the dynamics of the Indo-Myanmar Border, Myanmar state affairs, and Afghanistan-alongside expertise in International Maritime Law, International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law, I approach the Ukraine conflict with an analytical lens unclouded by Western propaganda. The discourse surrounding this war has been oversimplified into a binary of good versus evil, failing to acknowledge the nuanced historical, strategic, and legal complexities that underpin Russia's actions. It is imperative to scrutinise the broader geopolitical chessboard, recognising how NATO's expansionism, Western-backed regime changes, and historical security assurances have contributed to the present crisis. A myopic portrayal of the conflict disregards these crucial elements and serves only to perpetuate a skewed narrative, one that strategically overlooks the legitimate security interests of Russia while simultaneously whitewashing Western interventionist precedents.

The ongoing Ukraine conflict has been widely framed as an unprovoked act of Russian aggression, yet such a characterisation conveniently omits the intricate geopolitical realities that precipitated this crisis. To approach the matter with intellectual honesty, one must look beyond Western narratives and examine Russia's strategic concerns, NATO's role in heightening tensions, and the broader historical precedents that make Moscow's actions more comprehensible. Dismissing Russian security anxieties as mere expansionism disregards the patterns of Western interventionism and the balance-of-power dynamics that shape global politics.

The argument that Ukraine, as a sovereign nation, has the unconditional right to determine its alliances and geopolitical orientation is one often advanced in Western discourse. However, sovereignty does not exist in a vacuum; it is invariably shaped by the geopolitical realities of major power rivalries. The United States itself has long adhered to the Monroe Doctrine, aggressively countering any foreign military presence in the Western Hemisphere. When faced with potential Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962, Washington was prepared to go to war rather than accept an existential threat on its doorstep. Similarly, Russia perceives NATO's expansion towards its borders as an intolerable provocation. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO has systematically encroached upon Russia's periphery, reneging on past assurances to Soviet leaders that such expansion would not occur. De-classified documents from Western archives confirm that officials from the U.S., UK, and Germany gave verbal assurances to Soviet leaders in the early 1990s that NATO would not expand eastward, yet these commitments

were soon disregarded. For Moscow, Ukraine's potential NATO membership represented not only a security threat but also a direct challenge to its historical and cultural ties to the region. The reality is that Ukraine has been used as a geopolitical pawn by the West, with its internal affairs heavily influenced by external actors, including the United States and European Union.

The 2014 Maidan Revolution, often portrayed as a democratic uprising, was in many ways a Western-backed coup designed to install a government amenable to NATO interests. The now-infamous leaked conversation between U.S. officials Victoria Nuland and Geoffrey Pyatt exposed Washington's direct involvement in selecting Ukraine's post-Maidan leadership. The ousting of a democratically elected government in Kyiv further exacerbated divisions within the country, alienating Russian-speaking populations in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. It is within this context that Crimea's decision to rejoin Russia must be understood. The Crimean referendum of 2014, which resulted in an overwhelming majority voting in favour of reunification with Russia, mirrored other instances of self-determination worldwide. Western powers that recognised Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia cannot credibly argue that Crimea's reintegration with Russia was wholly illegitimate. The stark inconsistencies in how self-determination is applied across different geopolitical contexts highlight the extent to which international norms are often manipulated to serve strategic interests. Similar cases, such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia's breakaway from Georgia in 2008 following NATO's increasing influence in the region, reinforce the notion that self-determination is selectively supported depending on Western strategic priorities.

Historical precedent further supports Russia's concerns regarding NATO expansion. In 1999, NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, carried out without UN Security Council approval, set a dangerous precedent for unilateral military action under the guise of humanitarian intervention. The West justified its actions by claiming the need to protect Kosovo Albanians, yet the sovereignty of Serbia was disregarded entirely. The same rationale that NATO used in Kosovo can be applied to Russia's concerns about protecting Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine. Furthermore, Western-backed interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Syria demonstrate a pattern of selective sovereignty, where the rules of international engagement appear to shift depending on strategic interests. Russia's intervention in Georgia in 2008, often criticised in the West, was similarly framed by Moscow as a necessary measure to protect ethnic Russians and counteract NATO's encroachment. These precedents underscore that security considerations are not unique to Western nations; Russia, too, has legitimate concerns when



Facing the prospect of foreign-aligned military installations near its borders.

Western discourse on the Ukraine conflict frequently omits the egregious role that NATO and the U.S. have played in escalating hostilities. Since 2014, Ukrainian forces have been extensively armed and trained by NATO, further entrenching the country within Western military structures. U.S.-led military exercises near Russia's borders and the continuous supply of advanced weaponry to Ukraine left Moscow with limited diplomatic alternatives. When Russia launched its military operation in 2022, it was responding to years of strategic encirclement and growing threats on its doorstep. The portrayal of this move as a sudden, unjustified act of aggression fails to acknowledge the long-standing provocations that preceded it. The same logic applied by the U.S. in its pre-emptive strikes against perceived threats—such as its 2003 invasion of Iraq under the pretext of weapons of mass destruction—demonstrates that military action, when deemed strategically necessary, is a tool frequently employed by Western powers.

The hypocrisy of the West is particularly glaring when one considers its own history of military interventions. The United States has invaded and occupied numerous sovereign nations under the pretext of security or democracy promotion—Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria being prime examples. In these cases, Western military campaigns led to widespread destruction, massive civilian casualties, and protracted instability, yet they were framed as necessary measures for global security. The Western silence on its own interventions, while simultaneously condemning Russia, underscores the selective application of international law. If military intervention is to be judged objectively, then all aggressions—whether by the U.S., NATO, or Russia—must be held to the same standard.

Beyond military confrontations, the economic war waged against Russia through unprecedented sanctions further illustrates the West's reliance on coercion rather than diplomacy. These economic measures were intended to cripple Russia's economy, yet they have, in many respects, backfired. European nations now struggle with inflation, energy shortages, and political instability, while Russia has successfully adapted by pivoting its economic alliances towards China, India, and other Global South na-

tions. Afghanistan, too, has witnessed the destructive impact of Western economic manipulation, particularly through asset freezes and financial embargoes that exacerbated the suffering of its civilian population. Such tactics, rather than fostering stability, deepen divides and prolong conflicts.

For Afghanistan, the Ukraine crisis is a case study in how great powers instrumentalise smaller nations to advance their geopolitical objectives. The U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, framed as a mission to combat terrorism and promote democracy, ultimately ended in failure, leaving behind a fractured and uncertain future. Much like Ukraine today, Afghanistan was subjected to foreign influence, its sovereignty subjugated to broader strategic interests. This parallel fosters scepticism towards the West's narrative on Ukraine and raises questions about the true motivations behind Western support for Kyiv. History has shown that U.S. interventions are rarely driven by altruistic concerns; rather, they are calculated moves in the broader contest for global dominance.

The Ukraine conflict is not merely a bilateral war but a pivotal moment in the realignment of global power structures. The unipolar order, long dominated by the United States and its Western allies, is steadily disintegrating, giving rise to a multipolar world where emerging powers assert their strategic autonomy. Russia, India, and China, alongside influential regional actors such as Iran, Turkey, and the rising Afghanistan, are actively reshaping the geopolitical landscape by challenging Western-centric economic, political, and security paradigms. The West's attempts to isolate Russia through economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure have, paradoxically, accelerated this transition, compelling Moscow to strengthen strategic partnerships with non-Western powers, particularly in Eurasia, the Middle East, and the Global South. The resistance of nations across Asia, Africa, and Latin America to Western coercion underscores a broader disillusionment with the post-Cold War order, as many states recognise that their long-term interests are best served by pursuing independent foreign policies rather than subjugating themselves to any single power bloc. The shift towards de-dollarisation, alternative trade mechanisms, and regional security frameworks further highlights this rebalancing. As Western influence wanes, the once unquestioned dominance of institutions like NATO, the IMF, and the World Bank is being challenged by alternative alliances and economic systems that prioritise sovereignty over subjugation. In this broader geopolitical contest, states that were once considered peripheral, such as Afghanistan, are finding themselves at the centre of emerging regional strategies, navigating new alliances and diplomatic recalibrations that reflect a world no longer dictated solely by Western imperatives. *(The author is an Academician and Independent Researcher, Director, "Project Constitutional Justice- A People's Initiative, Tuensang")*

The unspoken challenges of writers

By: Dimple Sarma

Writing is often seen as putting thoughts into paper, a combination of thoughts and imagination, a pursuit driven by passion rather than profit. However, beyond the creative aspect, writing is also a profession—where someone's idea, thoughts and imaginations turned into a meaningful piece—something that demands time, effort, and financial recognition. Yet, many writers face a lack of clarity regarding publication timelines, proper communication from the publishers or editors, and regarding remuneration. As we celebrate International Writers' Day on March 3, 2025, it is worth examining these concerns and raising some fundamental questions about the professional treatment of writers. World Writers' Day started in 1953, but its roots go back to 1926 when the International PEN Club was founded in London. This group was created to support literature and bring writers together from different countries. To honor the power of writing, they chose March 3 as World Writers' Day. Writers have a big impact on the world because their words can change how people think and see things.

A writer thinks, make outline of the topic he wanted to write and then he puts his thoughts into paper. A writer spends hours, sometimes days, to craft an article that is well-researched, original, and engaging to the readers. Proper knowledge about the subject is the fundamental requirement and on the basis of that he can research from various sources and a turn his ideas into an article with his original thoughts. Yet, the financial compensation for such work varies widely. Some newspapers and magazines offer a respectable honorarium, while others expect writers to contribute without any payment. This raises a crucial question: how much should a writer be paid for their work? Should there be a standard remuneration policy across publications for their effort? Establishing an industry-wide benchmark for writer compensation can ensure fairness and motivate quality content creation.

Writing is more than a job—it is a way to share truth and stories. A freelance writer may spend weeks researching and writing, yet receive little pay for their effort. Many writers, both new and experienced, face similar struggles. While global publications pay well, many local outlets offer little or nothing. But writing is not just about money. It brings awareness, preserves voices, and connects people. Without fair support, many writers are forced to quit, leading to lost stories that shape our world. A fair system is needed to respect and sustain writers. Proper pay and recognition will help them continue their important work. Writing is powerful—it informs, inspires, and preserves history. It deserves to be valued.

Beyond remuneration, another significant concern for writers is the unpredictable waiting period after submitting an article. Some publications take weeks or even months before responding, while others never respond at all. What should be the minimum waiting period before a writer can submit their piece elsewhere? Should newspapers and magazines set a clear response timeframe—perhaps two to four weeks—to ensure writers are not left in limbo? A transparent timeline would help writers manage their expectations and work more efficiently.

When a writer covers a recent event, expressing their concern and opinion, they hope to see it published soon to engage readers while the topic is still relevant. However, waiting endlessly after submission, with no response from

the editor, creates uncertainty and frustration. Many experienced writers recall instances where their articles sat in editorial inboxes for months, only to be rejected with a generic response. By then, the piece had lost its relevance. If editors could set a clear timeframe and keep writers informed, it would prevent such losses and build trust within the writing community. Open communication benefits both parties, ensuring transparency in the process. If a piece does not meet the required standards, a simple rejection email stating the reason would help writers refine their work and focus on areas that need improvement. Respecting writers' efforts with timely feedback fosters a more professional and productive publishing environment.

The relationship between a writer and an editor should be a collaborative one, where feedback and discussions help refine the final piece. However, in many cases, writers receive little to no communication after submission. Emails go unanswered, inquiries remain unaddressed, and decisions are often unclear. A structured communication process benefits both parties—writers receive clarity, and editors maintain a professional workflow. A simple acknowledgment of receipt, a tentative timeline, and constructive feedback can significantly enhance the editorial process. While publications receive numerous submissions and may not always be able to respond in detail, even a small effort to keep writers informed fosters a more positive and professional environment.

Rejection is a natural part of a writer's journey, but the absence of communication makes it more challenging. Writers should be informed about the status of their submissions so they can move forward—whether by refining the piece or submitting it elsewhere. A brief email notifying them of a decision can save time and encourage growth. Clear and respectful communication builds trust and strengthens the writing community, ensuring that both writers and editors work toward the best possible outcome.

A practical solution is for newspapers and magazines to adopt standardized policies regarding response times, payment rates, and communication. Many publications have already embraced these practices, setting a positive example for others. By committing to respond to every submission within a reasonable timeframe and offering constructive feedback, the professional experience for writers can be greatly enhanced. Media organizations and journalism associations can also take an active role in advocating for writer rights. By introducing industry-wide best practices, the editorial process can become more transparent and fairer. Encouraging writers to share their experiences will help emerging professionals navigate the industry with confidence and clarity. On International Writers' Day, we celebrate not only the creative contributions of writers but also their professional dedication. Writers shape public discourse, preserve history, and bring untold stories to light. They deserve respect, fair compensation, and clear communication, which in turn upholds the integrity of the written word. Now is the time for publications, editors, and media houses to embrace transparency and fairness. Implementing clear guidelines on remuneration, communication, and rejection policies will support writers and elevate the quality of journalism and literature. Together, let us build an industry based on respect and professionalism in every writer-editor relationship. With awareness and open conversation, we can create a future where all writers thrive in a more structured, fair, and respectful publishing environment. *(The author can be reached at sarmadimple@gmail.com)*

Investing in nature for a sustainable future

By: Dipak Kurmi

The global observance of World Wildlife Day, celebrated annually on March 3rd, serves as an urgent reminder of the indispensable role that wildlife plays in sustaining ecological harmony and human well-being. Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, this day marks the anniversary of the 1973 signing of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). As we approach the 50th anniversary of this landmark treaty's enforcement, the theme for 2025, "Wildlife Conservation Finance: Investing in People and Planet," underscores the critical need for sustainable financial mechanisms to support biodiversity conservation.

The Dire Need for Conservation Finance
From the rugged highland steppes to the fragile ecosystems of coral reefs, wildlife forms the bedrock of Earth's biological diversity. These natural wonders not only sustain ecosystems but also play a crucial role in regulating climate, securing food systems, and stabilizing economies. Despite their significance, human activities—ranging from habitat destruction to illegal wildlife trade—have pushed over one million species toward the brink of extinction. This alarming biodiversity crisis is not merely an environmental catastrophe but an economic and social dilemma, as over 50% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) depends directly on nature.

However, financial allocations for conservation efforts remain critically insufficient. While an estimated USD 143 billion is invested annually in biodiversity preservation, this figure falls drastically short of the USD 824 billion required each year. Recognizing this shortfall, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called for an SDG Stimulus of at least USD 500 billion annually to fortify sustainable development, including nature conservation.

Innovative Financial Mechanisms for Wildlife Conservation
To address this funding deficit, conventional government subsidies and international aid must be supplemented by innovative financial strategies. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) has set forth ambitious goals, including mobilizing at least USD 200 billion annually for conservation and phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies by 2030. Several groundbreaking financial tools are being explored to achieve these objectives:

Debt-for-Nature Swaps: These agreements allow nations to restructure their sovereign debt in exchange for committing funds to conservation efforts, ensuring that financial relief directly benefits wildlife protection.

Wildlife Conservation Bonds (WCBs): Also known as "rhino bonds" or similar instruments, these bonds attract private investors who finance conservation projects, with returns being tied to measurable ecological outcomes such as increased wildlife populations.

Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES): This model compensates local communities and landowners for conserving biodiversity, ensuring that preservation efforts align with economic incentives.

Private Sector Investment: Businesses are increasingly recognizing the importance of biodiversity in their supply chains and sustainability strategies. As a result, corporate-driven investment in conservation initiatives is growing, fostering a market-driven approach to sustainability.

World Wildlife Day 2025: A Global Platform for Conservation Finance
World Wildlife Day 2025 will serve as a pivotal platform to promote and refine these financial mechanisms. The United Nations Palais des Nations in Geneva will host high-level discussions involving governments, financial institutions, conservation organizations, and private-sector leaders, all working towards bridging the conservation funding gap.

Beyond policy debates, the event will spotlight initiatives like the Jackson Wild Film Showcase and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Youth Art Contest, using storytelling and artistic expression to raise global awareness about conservation finance. Moreover, youth activists and indigenous communities will gain access to resources and insights on sustainable funding mechanisms, ensuring that conservation

finance reaches grassroots levels.

India's Commitment to Wildlife Conservation

As part of the global observance, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Sasangir in Gujarat on March 3, 2025, reaffirming India's dedication to wildlife conservation. Gujarat, home to the last remaining population of Asiatic lions, has undertaken remarkable conservation initiatives to protect these magnificent creatures.

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, significant measures have been implemented, including:

1. The recruitment of 237 beat guards (including 75 women) to monitor protected areas.
2. Establishment of a high-tech wildlife monitoring center to track and protect endangered species.
3. Implementation of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in collaboration with Indian Railways to prevent railway accidents involving lions.
4. Launch of the GirSamvadSetu program, which fosters community engagement in conservation efforts.
5. Creation of nine breeding centers for herbivorous animals to maintain ecosystem balance.

Furthermore, eco-tourism has become a significant driver of conservation finance in Gujarat. With over 3.3 million visitors recorded in Gir's protected areas over the past five years, revenue from eco-tourism is being reinvested into conservation projects. The Ambardi Safari Park and the Gir Online Permit Booking System have streamlined tourism while ensuring minimal ecological disruption.

The Economic Rationale Behind Conservation Finance

Beyond environmental ethics, wildlife conservation has substantial economic implications. More than half of the global GDP is directly tied to natural ecosystems, making biodiversity loss a direct threat to global economic stability. The Strategic Vision of CITES 2030, alongside frameworks such as KMGBF and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reinforces the necessity of financial investments in conservation. CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero emphasized this responsibility, stating, "Wildlife conservation finance is about conserving plant and animal species while ensuring the sustainability of ecosystems and communities worldwide." This perspective aligns with the broader goal of integrating biodiversity investments into mainstream economic and development strategies.

The Future of Conservation Finance: A Call to Action

Looking ahead, conservation finance must be embedded within the global economic architecture. Governments, businesses, and financial institutions must collaborate to mainstream biodiversity investments, ensuring the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts. Strategies such as strengthening public-private partnerships, enhancing financial transparency, and creating incentives for sustainable business practices will be crucial in achieving these conservation goals. Gujarat's conservation model presents a replicable blueprint for other regions worldwide. By combining robust policies, technological interventions, and community involvement, conservation can transition from being an economic burden to a self-sustaining initiative. The establishment of the Gujarat State Lion Conservation Society (GSLCS) in 2007, funded through eco-tourism revenue, exemplifies how conservation finance can be both effective and sustainable.

A Defining Moment for Wildlife Conservation Finance

As we commemorate World Wildlife Day 2025, it is imperative that conservation finance be recognized not only as an environmental necessity but also as an economic priority. Nations, corporations, and individuals must come together to ensure that financial investments in wildlife conservation continue to grow.

By unlocking new financial pathways and fostering global collaboration, we can secure the future of both people and the planet. Now is the time to act—to invest in conservation, protect biodiversity, and build a sustainable future where wildlife thrives alongside humanity. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

Sweat smelling like vinegar: What to know

By: Lois Zoppi

Sweat is released by sweat glands that are found throughout the body. These are the eccrine, apocrine, and apoeccrine glands.

Eccrine glands are found across the whole body and produce the most sweat. Sweat from eccrine glands generally does not smell.

Apocrine glands are found in the breasts, face, scalp, perineum, and the underarms. They produce less sweat than eccrine glands and open onto hair follicles rather than the skin. Sweat from apocrine glands can smell.

Apoeccrine glands are found in the underarms. The glands release sweat in the form of salt water.

Sweat helps the body stay cool by transferring heat from the body to the water in sweat on the skin. Heat then evaporates from the sweat and cools the body. Sweat also naturally moisturizes the skin and protects it against infection.

Sweat is mainly water and sodium chloride, but also contains small amounts of potassium, calcium, ammonia, urea, lactate, and ethanol. When sweat mixes with bacteria on the skin, it can produce a smell, which may smell like vinegar.

Causes of odor

Possible cause of a vinegar odor in sweat may include:

Kidney disease

A change in body odor can be a sign of kidney disease. In kidney disease, the kidneys may not be able to break down urea, which the body excretes through urine or sweat. This can have a vinegar-like smell.

According to The National Kidney Foundation, over 37 million American adults have kidney disease.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a condition that causes high blood sugar levels. If a person does not control their diabetes, they can enter diabetic ketoacidosis. This is when the body burns fat too quickly for energy if the cells cannot get enough glucose to use.

When the body burns fat, it produces ketones, which make the blood more acidic. Metabolites such as acetone are also released into the sweat, which can smell like vinegar.

Trichomycosis

Trichomycosis, also called trichobacteriosis or trichomycosis axillarum, is a bacterial infection in underarm hair or other areas caused by the bacteria *Corynebacterium*.

A 2013 study found that 92% of trichomycosis cases affected the underarm hair. In rarer cases, trichomycosis can affect the pubic hair.

A person may have yellow, black, or red nodules that stick to the hairs under the arms

or around the genitals and buttocks.

The 2013 study found that 35.7% of cases included odor as a symptom of trichomycosis. A person's sweat may smell acidic like vinegar, or be dark in color.

Hyperhidrosis

A person with hyperhidrosis will sweat excessively from the eccrine glands. A 2016 study estimated that almost 5% of Americans have hyperhidrosis.

There are two types of hyperhidrosis, primary focal hyperhidrosis and secondary hyperhidrosis.

Primary focal hyperhidrosis does not start from another health condition or medication. Focal means that the sweating affects multiple areas of the body. This can include the underarms, hands, feet, and forehead.

Secondary hyperhidrosis means that the cause of a person's excessive sweating is an underlying health condition or is a side effect of medication.

When sweat mixes with bacteria on the skin, a person may notice it smells like vinegar.

Trimethylaminuria

Trimethylaminuria is a rare condition. A person with trimethylaminuria may notice their sweat has an unpleasant smell. This is because the body is unable to break down the chemical trimethylamine, which has a fish-like scent.

This can also cause urine or the breath to smell.

Other causes

Other possible causes for sweat odor may include:

Meat

The body uses energy to digest food. This can increase body temperature, which may trigger sweating.

A 2000 study found that the body uses more energy when digesting animal protein, such as pork, than plant proteins, such as soy. This may suggest that eating meat may make a person sweat more, which may produce body odors.

Additionally, a small 2006 study found that eating red meat had a negative effect on body odor, with participants rating the body odor of meat eaters as less attractive than those who ate a plant-based diet for two weeks.

Dairy

A person may experience body odor after consuming dairy if they have a metabolic disorder. If the body cannot break down trimethylamine, sweat can smell like fish or vinegar.

Spices and seasonings

When a person eats garlic, cumin, or curry, the body produces sulfur-like compounds that can react with sweat and create odor.

Stress



Stress can cause body temperature to rise, which can activate the sweat glands. According to the International Hyperhidrosis Society, the apocrine glands produce the most stress-induced sweat. Sweat from the apocrine glands has a stronger smell than from the eccrine glands, and so a person may notice their sweat smells stronger if they are stressed.

Hormones

As hormones change during puberty, menopause, pregnancy, menstruation, and older age, sweat can smell different.

This is because hormones can make a person sweat more. For instance, decreasing estrogen levels during menopause may increase body temperature, which can cause sweating.

Prevention

People can try the following to prevent sweat odor:

Deodorants and antiperspirants

Deodorants can mask body odors and help cover up sweat that smells like vinegar.

Antiperspirants help keep the skin dry by blocking the sweat glands. By using antiperspirants, a person can reduce the amount that sweat mixes with bacteria on the skin and reduce the risk of odors.

Changing clothes

Changing clothes more frequently can control the amount of moisture that comes in contact with the skin. This can stop sweat from drying on the skin, mixing with bacteria, and producing odors.

Washing

A person can wash with antibacterial soap to reduce the amount of bacteria that may mix with sweat and cause odors. A person may also be able to reduce their risk of fun-

gal skin infections by washing frequently.

Drinking more water

Staying hydrated can dilute sweat and make odors less noticeable.

Diet

A person's diet can influence the smell of their sweat. If a person notices that eating certain spices, seasonings, or foods makes their sweat smell like vinegar, they can try reducing the amount of those foods they eat, or removing them from their diet completely.

Reducing stress

Stress can cause an increase in sweating. By reducing the stressors in their life, a person may be able to also reduce the amount they sweat and any odors that occur because of sweating.

When to see a doctor

If a person notices their sweat smells like vinegar, they should look out for other symptoms of underlying conditions.

For example, other symptoms of diabetes, along with a change in body odor, include:

- Fatigue
- Dry or flushed skin
- Nausea and vomiting
- Breathing difficulties
- Confusion
- Fruity odor on breath, sweat, or urine

Other symptoms of kidney disease include:

- Fatigue
- Sleep problems
- Dry, itchy skin
- Frequent urination
- Foamy urine
- Blood in urine
- Puffy eyes

If a person develops a rash, signs of infec-

tion, or experiences unexplained weight loss or weight gain, they should contact a doctor for advice.

Treatment

The International Hyperhidrosis Society recommends:

- Keeping the skin dry
- Washing regularly with antibacterial soap
- Using antiperspirant to reduce sweating
- Using deodorants to cover up odors

However, there are other treatments that can help a person who is concerned about the smell of their sweat. They include:

Microwave thermolysis

Microwave thermolysis uses microwave energy to destroy the sweat glands and stop them from working.

A 2012 study concluded that microwave thermolysis is effective against excessive sweating. Another 2013 study in Asian people found that microwave thermolysis was effective specifically for sweat with bad odors.

Botox

A person can get Botox injections to stop sweating. Botox is the name for botulinum toxin A, which stops the eccrine glands from releasing sweat. Treatment with Botox can last for 6 to 9 months.

Research suggests that Botox injections can reduce sweating by 75%.

Prescription antiperspirants

A person can try prescription antiperspirants if over-the-counter antiperspirants are not working for them.

Prescription antiperspirants can contain higher amounts of active ingredients such as metallic salts, including aluminum chloride hexahydrate.

A person should apply prescription antiperspirants before bed and follow a doctor's instructions to prevent skin irritation.

Antibiotics

If a person's sweat smells like vinegar because of an infection such as trichomycosis, a doctor may prescribe antibiotics to fight the infection.

A person may also try antifungal skin creams if excessive sweating has caused a fungal skin infection, such as candidiasis.

Summary

A person's sweat may smell like vinegar because of health conditions such as kidney disease, diabetes, or skin infections. A person's diet may also influence the way their sweat smells.

A person can decrease the smell of their sweat by keeping their skin and clothes dry, washing regularly with antibacterial soap, or using medications to treat underlying health conditions. A person can also change their diet if they notice their sweat smells like vinegar when they eat particular foods. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Chemicals in personal care products can be a health hazard

By: Asit Kumar Mishra

Each time you apply sunscreen to your face, you may inhale somewhere between 10 to 30 milligrams of ethanol, the type of alcohol used in alcoholic drinks. While the ethanol in sunscreen may not give you a buzz, it could make you think about what other chemicals you might be exposed to from personal care products.

Products that are applied to the face, like sunscreen, can increase the inhalation of some chemicals by ten times or more than you would inhale from your home air in the entire day.

The levels of ethanol in cosmetics and skincare products may be reasonably safe – although it can still dry out the skin, causing pain, redness and swelling, and irritate the eyes, causing tears, burning and stinging – but personal care products such as shampoos, skin creams, deodorants, cosmetics and perfumes contain fragrances and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which can be inhaled, absorbed through skin or ingested and some are more toxic than others.

Unfortunately, manufacturers of personal care products do not have to disclose every fragrance compound used. This is concerning when you consider the potential effects of toxic compounds that have been detected in the air from personal care products. For example, hair-smoothing products have released formaldehyde, a toxic chemical that can cause a range of symptoms from dermatitis to low sperm count. Some perfumes and deodorants have generated monoterpene, chemicals which can prove toxic for some users.

Some of the VOCs found in personal care products may trigger skin irritation, headaches – and difficulty breathing, which can develop into an asthma attack in some users. The highest or peak concentration of these VOCs are likely to occur within ten minutes of application. But these concentrations may take up to two hours to decrease to background levels, depending on your home's ventilation.

Natural doesn't mean risk-free

But even if the levels of VOCs in personal care products are kept



within safe limits, they can still cause discomfort and a variety of health issues, including irritation of the eyes and airways, migraines and asthmatic reactions, in those who're fragrance sensitive. In the UK, 27% of the population self-reports as fragrance sensitive.

It makes sense then that some people attempt to avoid potentially toxic synthetic chemicals in cosmetics by opting for "natural" or "clean" personal care products. But, natural does not mean safer.

For instance, essential oils are often used in "natural" personal care products as fragrance. Essential oils, though, are a source of terpenes, some of which can be toxic if absorbed, inhaled or swallowed.

Indoor concentration of terpenes are often at levels where you can smell them but not high enough to cause eye or respiratory tract irritation. However, the terpenes from essential oils can react with other chemicals, such as ozone from outdoor air, producing byproducts like formaldehyde, a known carcinogen and allergen.

Beauty salon safety

Beauty salons can be particularly risky environments for exposure to VOCs. Studies have found contaminants such as formaldehyde, ammonia and toluene, a potentially harmful ingredient used in many personal care products, at high levels in salons, putting staff who work there at the highest risk.

Formaldehyde levels in some

salons have reached above safety limits. Methyl methacrylate, which can cause skin irritation, allergic reactions and potential respiratory issues has been detected in the air of nail salons.

These contaminants are not necessarily limited to the places in a salon where a certain product is being used. Beauty salons with poor ventilation are likely to expose workers and customers to much higher levels of contaminants. Some of the components of personal care products are known, harmful contaminants and carcinogens.

Regulations specifically related to ventilation in environments where large volumes of these products are used do reduce exposures. For instance, studies show that after ventilation regulations came into effect in Boston, US in 2011, the air quality inside nail salons improved.

When visiting your nail salon or hair stylist, check with them about their ventilation system and other steps they are taking to reduce exposure to VOCs.

To limit exposure to potential VOCs at home when using personal care products, try to open windows and use extractor fans in wet rooms. Be especially careful when applying products to the face or when using a high temperature application – high temperatures can increase emissions. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Challenges of caesarean operation in animals

By: Dr. Prabinkumar Neog

When the mother is unable to perform childbirth with a normal procedure, the doctor cuts the abdomen and uterus and pulls out the baby. The name of the operation in which the baby is delivered by cutting the abdomen in this way is caesarean operation. This caesarean is not confined to humans alone, but it is now being successfully applied to animals as well. A complex and somewhat expensive operation like caesarean has to be done in animals, when, despite taking all measures, the calf cannot be delivered normally and safely through the vagina. The delivery prospecting mother has to apply the operating procedure only if one or more of the following symptoms appear:

1. When the size of the fetus is larger than the mother's birth canal or uterus.

2. When the fetus has abnormalities, such as tumors, hydrocephalus, or unusual shapes and sizes.

3. There is a definite limit on the time when the calf will remain in the mother's womb. This is called the gestation period. This gestation period varies from species to species. In the case of cows, this pregnancy period is 280 days. For other species it is as follows: Cow: 280 days, Goat: 148-156 days, Buffalo: 290-310 days, Sheep: 144-150 days, Horse: 330-345 days, Pig: 112-120 days and for Dog: 60-62 days. But in some cases, there are no signs of the labour process even after the expiry of the upper limit of the specified time; the cervix and vagina are not open or the uterus is in a state of inactivity at all. In such a situation, the caesarean method has to be applied.

4. Sometimes in some cases, the mother may show signs of miscarriage in case of an injury during pregnancy or due to infection or disease of uterus. Under these circumstances, the mother may attempt to expel the fetus, but due to insufficient cervical dilation or no dilation, natural delivery becomes impossible. In such cases, a Caesarean section becomes essential.

5. Sometimes, labor begins, but the mouth of the uterus does not open. It occurs mostly due to insufficient hormonal surge. In such cases, excessive strain can cause the uterus to protrude with the fetus termed as prolapse of uterus. This phenomenon is common in buffalo, especially in low lying areas where they climb 'mathauries' daily. In such cases the caesarean method has to be applied.

6. If the pelvis is fractured due to an accident before or during pregnancy, the birth canal may be obstructed, necessitating a Caesarean section.

7) Sometimes during pregnancy, the uterus of the cow twists for some reason and becomes an abnormal state. In such cases, an emergency caesarean is required.

8. If the fetus's position, posture, or orientation is abnormal, and despite maternal effort or veterinary intervention, normalization is impossible, a caesarean section becomes



essential.

9. In some cases, it is seen that at the end of the pregnancy, the mother is unable to wake up due to the symptoms related to paralysis. Caesarean operations have to be applied to save the mother and the calf if they do not get the desired results in such cases even after treatment.

When to Consult a Veterinarian?

In cattle, typically, calves are born within 2 hours of labor onset. However, dogs, pigs and cats etc may require more time. Owners can wait anxiously for 2-3 hours after labor begins. If the mother cannot deliver within this timeframe, the water bag ruptures and suspicion of complications arises, then consultation with a veterinarian is immediately necessary. Avoidance of involving inexperienced individual is quite important as it may lead to adverse consequences.

Should not be operated directly:

No experienced doctor thinks of conducting an operation directly in the case of cows or other animals. By applying some force at first and using physical techniques, they naturally try to land the calf through the vagina. If all such attempts fail, one has to think of caesarean operation to save both the calf and the mother.

Operations and some relevant points

Caesarean is a heavy type of operation. It's relatively expensive. This operation has to be applied only for the sake of the life of the mother and the calf. This operation is completed without the mother feeling any pain by applying systematic anesthetics and local anesthetics. It is usually successful in most operations but may fail in some cases.

Some of the reasons for the failure of caesarean operation are:

1) As far as possible, it should be done in a clean, sterile state. All the instruments in the operation should be washed in hot water and wiped with a disinfectant solution to create a sterile state. For the operation, the body part

should also be thoroughly washed and cleaned with the disinfectant solution.

2. The animal should be kept clean after the operation is completed or until the operation wound is healed. The wounds of the operation should be thoroughly washed and dressed daily as advised by the doctor and the entire course of antibiotics prescribed by the doctor should be given regularly; otherwise later the animal will die due to septicemia developed.

3. Vitamin-based medicines have to be given to the cow sometimes after completing the operation. In such cases, it is very necessary for the pastor to take appropriate measures on the advice of the doctor.

4. Sometimes it is seen that the farmers themselves or inexperienced people use force to bring out the calf through the vagina and cause heavy injury on the uterus and vagina. With excessive use of force, sometimes the baby dies inside the uterus and injuries to the other genitals inside and the mother becomes numb due to excessive bleeding. In such cases caesarean operations are more likely to fail. It is an injustice done to animals and is considered a crime to try in vain to deliver by an inexperienced person or a 'bej' by using excessive force.

5. The animal should be given light and easily digestible feeds for 3-4 days after the operation. In addition, vitamins, iron tonics, saline etc. are also may be required in some cases. The operated animal should be kept confined for 2 weeks, i.e. not allowed to move too much.

The point is that the doctor's advice should be followed in letter and spirit. Always to be remembered that after the caesarean operation is done, the responsibility of the owner is more than the responsibility of the veterinarian. (The author is a retired Research Officer, Department of AH and Veterinary, Assam. He can be reached at prabinkumar-neog@gmail.com)

Hammas warned that any attempt to delay or cancel the ceasefire agreement would have 'humanitarian consequences'

Israel cuts off aid to Gaza to pressure Hamas to accept new ceasefire proposal

TEL AVIV, March 2: Israel stopped the entry of all goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip on Sunday and warned of "additional consequences" if Hamas doesn't accept a new proposal to extend a fragile ceasefire.

Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the existing ceasefire agreement and said its decision to cut off aid was "cheap extortion, a war crime and a blatant attack" on the truce, which took hold in January after more than a year of negotiations. Both sides stopped short of saying the ceasefire had ended.

The first phase of the ceasefire, which included a surge in humanitarian assistance, expired on Saturday. The two sides have yet to negotiate the second phase, in which Hamas was to release dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout and a lasting ceasefire. An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the decision to suspend aid was made in coordination with the Trump administration.

There was no immediate comment from the United States on the proposal announced by Israel or its decision to cut off aid.

Hundreds of aid trucks have entered Gaza daily since the ceasefire began on Jan. 19, and it was unclear what the immediate impact of the aid cutoff would be.

Israel says the new proposal is backed by the US

Israel said the new proposal, which it said came from US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff, called for extending the ceasefire

through Ramadan — the Muslim holy month of dawn-to-dusk fasting that began over the weekend — and the Jewish Passover holiday, which ends on April 20.

Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire, according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office. Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said Israel was prepared to negotiate over the next phase of the ceasefire but was insisting on more hostages being freed during the talks.

He said Israel had received a side letter from the Biden administration saying there was no automatic transition between the phases of the truce. "We fulfilled all our commitments (under Phase 1) until the very last day, which was yesterday," he told a press conference. "Our position is that during negotiations, hostages should be released."

Hamas warned that any attempt to delay or cancel the ceasefire agreement would have "humanitarian consequences" for the hostages and reiterated that the only way to free them was through implementing the existing deal, which did not specify a timeline for freeing the remaining captives.

Hamas has said it is willing to free the remaining hostages all at once in Phase 2, but only in return for the release of more Palestinian prisoners, a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces. An Egyptian official said Hamas and Egypt would not ac-



cept a new proposal aimed at returning the remaining hostages without ending the war. The official noted that the agreement had called on the two sides to begin negotiations over Phase 2 in early February.

The official, who was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said mediators were trying to resolve the dispute. There was no immediate comment from Qatar, which along with Egypt has served as a key mediator with Hamas.

Ceasefire has been marred by disputes

Under the first, six-week phase of the ceasefire, Hamas released 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces pulled back from most of Gaza and Israel allowed a surge of humanitarian aid to enter. But the first phase was marred by repeated disputes, with each side accusing the

other of violations. Israeli strikes killed dozens of Palestinians who the military said had approached its forces or entered areas in violation of the truce. Hamas paraded the captives — some of whom were emaciated — before crowds in public spectacles that Israel and the United Nations said were cruel and degrading.

Hamas said Israel's aid suspension was another violation, saying the ceasefire and aid deliveries were supposed to continue as the sides negotiated the second phase of the deal.

Israel was accused of blocking aid throughout the war

Israel imposed a complete siege on Gaza in the opening days of the war and only eased it later under US pressure.

UN agencies and aid groups accused Israel of not facilitating enough aid during 15 months of war, and the Biden administration repeatedly pressed it to do more. Experts warned on several occa-

sions that hunger was widespread in Gaza and that there was a risk of famine.

The International Criminal Court said there was reason to believe Israel had used "starvation as a method of warfare" when it issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu last year. The allegation is also central to South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide.

Israel has denied the accusations and rejected both court actions as being biased against it. Israel says it has allowed enough aid to enter and blamed shortages on what it said was the UN's inability to distribute it. It also accused Hamas of siphoning off aid.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostage. The militants are currently holding 59 hostages, 32 of whom are believed to be dead, after releasing most of the rest in two ceasefire agreements. Israel's offensive has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It says more than half of those killed were women and children but does not specify how many of the dead were combatants.

Israeli bombardment and ground operations pounded large areas of the strip to rubble and at the height of the conflict displaced some 9.3 million Palestinians. The war has left most of Gaza's population dependent on international aid for food and other essentials. (AP)

US court rules head of watchdog agency must keep his job, says Trump



WASHINGTON, March 2: The head of a federal watchdog agency must remain in his job, a judge in Washington ruled on Saturday, saying President Donald Trump's bid to remove the special counsel was unlawful.

US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson sided with Hampton Dellinger, who leads the Office of Special Counsel, in a legal battle over the president's authority to oust the head of the independent agency that's likely headed back to the US Supreme Court.

Dellinger sued Trump last month after he was fired, even though the law says special counsels can be removed by the president "only for inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office." Jackson, who was nominated to the bench by Democratic president Barack Obama, quickly reinstated Dellinger in the job while he pursued his case.

Jackson rejected the Trump administration's claims that the special counsel's removal protections are unconstitutional because they prevent the president from rightfully installing his preferred agency head.

The judge said allowing the president to remove the special counsel at will would have a chilling effect on his crucial duties, which include guarding the federal workforce from illegal personnel actions, such as retaliation for whistleblowing.

"The Special Counsel is supposed to withstand the winds of political change and help ensure that no government servant of either party becomes the subject of prohibited employment practices or faces reprisals for calling out wrongdoing - by holdovers from a previous administration or by officials of the new one," Jackson wrote in her decision.

The Justice Department quickly filed court papers indicating it will challenge the ruling to Washington's federal appeals court. The

case has already gone up once to the Supreme Court, which previously temporarily allowed Dellinger to remain in his job. The ruling comes as Dellinger is challenging the removal of probationary workers who were fired as part of the Trump administration's massive overhaul of the government. A federal board on Tuesday halted the terminations of several probationary workers after Dellinger said their firings may have been unlawful.

"I'm glad and grateful to see the court confirm the importance and legality of the job protections Congress afforded my position," Dellinger said in a statement on Saturday. "My efforts to protect federal employees generally, and whistleblowers in particular, from unlawful treatment will continue."

The judge said the special counsel has a "unique status and mission," which requires independence from the president to ensure he can carry out his responsibilities. The office investigates whistleblower claims of reprisal, can pursue disciplinary action against employees who punish whistleblowers and provides a channel for employees to disclose government wrongdoing.

"If I don't have independence, if I can be removed for no good reason, federal employees are going to have no good reason to come to me," Dellinger told reporters outside Washington's federal courthouse after a recent hearing.

The Office of Special Counsel is also responsible for enforcing the Hatch Act, which restricts the partisan political activities of government workers. Dellinger's firing came as Trump administration employees have touted their support on social media for his policies even though the Hatch Act is meant to restrict political advocacy while on duty.

The Justice Department employed sweeping language in urging the Supreme Court last month to allow the termination of the head of an obscure federal agency with limited power. Acting Solicitor General Sarah Harris wrote in court papers that the lower court had crossed "a constitutional red line" by blocking Dellinger's firing and stopping Trump "from shaping the agenda of an executive-branch agency in the new administration's critical first days."

Dellinger was appointed by Democratic President Joe Biden and confirmed by the Senate to a five-year term in 2024. (AP)

Imran seeks global help for democracy, regional stability

ISLAMABAD, March 2: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has appealed to the international community, particularly the United States, to reaffirm its commitment to democracy, human rights, and regional stability. Dawn reported that in an article published in Time magazine in his name, the incarcerated politician congratulated US President Donald Trump on his "political comeback".

He also expressed the hope that the US would work with Pakistan to foster economic partnerships, promote stability, and prevent conditions that lead to conflict and extremism.

It remains unclear if the article was indeed penned by Khan, and how it was delivered to the magazine. Khan reflected on the 'political turmoil' in Pakistan and his ongoing fight for democracy. He expressed deep concern over the alleged erosion of democracy in the country, describing the current period as one of the most challenging in the nation's history.

He underscored that his imprisonment and the charges brought against him were politically motivated attempts to stifle his advocacy for democratic principles. He claimed his struggle was not personal but addressed the broader



issue of democracy, which had far-reaching consequences, not only for the country but also for regional and global stability. Given Pakistan's strategic importance, Khan emphasised that the international community must recognise the urgency of addressing the crisis.

On the issue of terrorism, Khan criticised the government for diverting resources from crucial counterterrorism efforts to pursue a political vendetta against Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI).

Regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, which have seen an uptick in terrorist activity, were neglected in favour of "military campaigns against political opponents".

The judiciary, Khan alleged, had been reduced to a tool of political persecution.

Speaking on the DawnNews TV show 'Doosra Rukh' on Saturday, Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Chairman Irfan Siddiqui said the PTI was "impossible to predict".

The party was suggesting alliances while simultaneously calling for civil disobedience, sending letters and publishing "explosive" articles in Time magazine, the PML-N senator said.

While discussing the talks with the PTI, Senator Siddiqui said it was impossible to present options during the talks as they did not assess them at any forum; rather, their decisions came straight from Khan. He said the PTI did not know what they were doing until they received instructions from Khan. "When Imran ordered 'no more talks', the PTI committee was completely caught off guard," he said. Asked if the PTI wanted to continue negotiations despite Imran's instructions, he responded in the affirmative. "I remember (PTI Chairman) Gohar Ali Khan went to see Imran, and when he returned, there were still three or four days left before the deadline to meet their demands. Still, they said no more talks." (PTI)

Russia-Ukraine crisis UK PM Starmer hosts crucial Europe summit to find 'lasting peace'



LONDON, March 2: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is hosting a crucial summit of European leaders in London on Sunday to find a way forward with visiting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky following his showdown with US President Donald Trump.

In contrast to his Washington visit, which was cut short, the Ukrainian leader received a royal welcome to the UK with an audience with King Charles at Sandringham before he joins the European leaders for crunch talks.

Starmer told the BBC in an interview on Sunday that he "trusts" that Trump wants to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict and wants lasting peace.

"I'm clear in my view that President Trump wants a lasting peace and I agree with him on that," said Starmer.

Following bilateral talks with Zelensky on Saturday, he said: "I am determined to find a path that ends Russia's illegal war and ensures a just and lasting peace that secures Ukraine's future sovereignty and security."

Zelensky's bilateral talks also took place with Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who joined leaders of France, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Canada, Finland, Sweden, Czechia and Romania at the London summit on Ukraine.

The Turkish Foreign Minister, NATO Secretary General and the Presidents of the European Commission and European Council were also in attendance.

According to 10 Downing Street, discussions at the summit focused on strengthening Ukraine's position, including ongoing military support and increased economic pressure on Russia; the need for a "strong lasting deal" that delivers permanent peace in Ukraine and ensures that it is able to deter and defend against future Russian attack; and next steps on planning for strong security guarantees.

"Three years on from Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, we are at a turning point... In partnership with our allies, we must intensify our preparations for the European element of security guarantees, alongside continued discussions with the United States," said Starmer.

"Now is the time for us to unite in order to guarantee the best outcome for Ukraine, protect European security, and secure our collective future," he added.

Meanwhile, his Chancellor Rachel Reeves and Ukraine's Finance Minister Sergii Marchenko signed the UK-Ukraine Bilateral agreement to deliver GBP 2.26 billion in loan funding to Ukraine. This loan is to be paid back using the profits generated on sanctioned Russian sovereign assets held in the European Union (EU).

"This funding will bolster Ukraine's armed forces and will put Ukraine in the strongest possible position at a critical juncture in the war. It comes as we have increased our defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP, which will deliver the stability required to keep us safe and underpin economic growth," said Reeves.

European leaders are scrambling to come together amid fears of losing American military support in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Starmer is positioning himself as a bridge between Europe and America to help navigate the crisis, making phone calls to both Trump and Zelensky in the aftermath of their White House war of words. (PTI)

Private lunar lander Blue Ghost aces moon touchdown with special delivery for NASA

CAPE CANAVERAL (US), March 2: A private lunar lander carrying a drill, vacuum and other experiments for NASA touched down on the moon Sunday, the latest in a string of companies looking to kickstart business on Earth's celestial neighbour ahead of astronaut missions.

Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lander descended from lunar orbit on autopilot, aiming for the slopes of an ancient volcanic dome in an impact basin on the moon's north-eastern edge of the near side. Confirmation of successful touchdown came from the company's Mission Control outside Austin, Texas, following the action some 225,000 miles (360,000 kilometers) away.

"You all stuck the landing. We're on the moon," Firefly's Will Coogan, chief engineer for the lander, reported. An upright and stable landing makes Firefly — a startup founded a decade ago — the first private outfit to put a spacecraft on the moon without crashing or falling over. Even countries have faltered, with only five claiming success: Russia, the US, China, India and Japan. (AP)

Syrians begin fasting during first Ramadan without Assad family rule in decades

DAMASCUS, March 2: Some restaurants and coffee shops in Syria were closed during the day on Saturday while others opened as usual as observant Muslims began fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, the first since the fall of Assad family rule in the war-torn country.

Syria's interim Ministry of Religious Endowments reportedly called for all restaurants, coffee shops and street food stands be closed during the day and that people must not eat or drink in public or face punishment.

Those who violate the rule could get up to three months in jail. However, it did not appear that any official order had been issued by the government to that effect.

Associated Press journalists who toured Damascus on Saturday said some coffee shops were opened but had their windows closed to that people can't see who is inside.

Insurgents led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, or HTS, overthrew President Bashar Assad's secular government in early December ending the 54-year Assad family dynasty.

Since then, Syria's new Islamist government under former insurgent leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, has been in control and many fear that the country could turn into an Is-



lamic state, although al-Sharaa has so far promised to respect religious minorities.

Under Assad's rule during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when observant Muslims abstain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset, people were allowed to eat in public. This year, many people are abstaining from eating in public fearing reprisals.

Ramadan this year comes with a new flavour. This is the Ramadan of victory and liberation, said interim Minister of Religious Affairs Hussam Haj-Husseini in a televised statement. Most countries around the world, including Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Kuwait being observing Ramadan on Saturday, while a few other countries such as

US aircraft carrier arrives in South Korea

SEOUL, March 2: A US aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea on Sunday in a show of force, days after North Korea test-launched cruise missiles to demonstrate its counterattack capabilities.

The arrival of the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group at the South Korean port of Busan was meant to display a solid US-South Korean military alliance in the face of persistent North Korean threats, and boost interoperability of the allies' combined assets, the South Korean navy said in a statement. It said it was the first US aircraft carrier to travel to South Korea since June.

The deployment of the carrier is expected to infuriate North Korea, which views temporary deployments of such powerful US military assets as major security threats. South Korea has responded to some of the past deployments of US aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and nuclear-powered submarines with missile tests. (AP)

publicly breaking the fast, with violators facing imprisonment, said Damascus resident Munir Abdallah. This is something new, good and respectable, meaning that the rituals of Ramadan should be fully observed in all their aspects.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar; the month cycles through the seasons. The start of the month traditionally depends on the sighting of the crescent moon.

The actual start date may vary among Muslim communities due to declarations by multiple Islamic authorities around the globe on whether the crescent has been sighted or different methodologies used to determine the start of the month. The fast breaking meal is known as iftar and usually family members and friends gather at sunset to have the main meal. Muslims eat a pre-dawn meal, called suhoor, to hydrate and nurture their bodies ahead of the daily fast.

The holy month is also a time when Islamic and charitable organisations frequently provide meals for those unable to afford their own. In the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, Bashar al-Mashhadani, imam of the Sheikh Abdulkadir al-Gailani Mosque in Baghdad said the mosque was preparing to serve 1,000 free meals per day to people coming to break their fast. (AP)

This year, after the fall of the regime, there are many confirmations regarding the prohibition of

Woman injured in leopard attack in Sikkim

GANGTOK, March 2: A woman was injured in a leopard attack in Sikkim's Namchi district on Sunday, Forest officials said.

The woman was collecting cattle fodder in the forested Melli Dara area when the leopard attacked her. Local people hearing her cries for help rushed to the spot and rescued her while the leopard fled away, they said.

The woman was taken to STNM Hospital in Gangtok for treatment, they said. Forest officials have urged local residents to exercise caution while venturing into forested areas. (PTI)

ACF to continue democratic movement despite permission denied

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 2: The Arunachal Christian Forum (ACF) to continue with democratic movement on March 6 with Assembly gherao programme, informed ACF president Tār Miri.

Miri was speaking to newsmen here at Papu Nallah in city after an emergency meeting on Sunday afternoon. Miri said, "We had an emergency meeting of the central executive body meeting. Our already announced democratic movement will continue for which we have submitted representation for approval with the Capital DC and till date we have not received the denial from the administration. The denial of NOC for permission has come but our programme will continue."

ACF General secretary James Techī Tara said that denial of NOC by capital police was something like curtailment of their democratic right.

"We have submitted representation for approval of permission to the Deputy Commissioner about our ongoing democratic, though denial of NOC has been known to us from the police but we will go to DC tomorrow to know about the democratic movement and we also listen to him," James said.

"Recently we have a discussion with the home minister and Law minister at AP Civil Secretariat and briefed him of all our issue with regards of the APFRA-1978 and preparation of rule within six months. We will announce the further course of action on March 6th. It is almost 46 years and we will continue to fight against," he said.

Seven water bodies in Meghalaya dubbed 'polluted'

SHILLONG, March 2: As many as seven water bodies in Meghalaya have been identified as polluted.

This was revealed in the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) annual report for 2022-23 tabled in the Assembly. The MSPCB has established a network of Water Quality monitoring stations in the state.

The present network comprises 84 stations in the state under the National Water Monitoring Programme (NWMP). The monitoring network covers 67 rivers, 4 lakes, 13 springs/wells.

Out of the 81 stations, the following water bodies have been identified by CPCB as polluted stretches in the state of Meghalaya with respect to BOD level, the report said.

Seven water bodies are Umkhrah & Umshyri rivers in East Khasi Hills District, Kyrhukhla river, Lunar river (tributary of Lukha river) at Myndihati in East Jaintia Hills District, Umtrew river (Byrnihat) in Ri Bhoi District, Myntdu River (Jowai) in West Jaintia Hills District and Nambah river (Nongstoin) in West Khasi Hills District, it said. On the measures taken, the board had informed the respective deputy commissioners of the district regarding the status of the water bodies with a request to take necessary steps to formulate an action plan to control the pollution sources. (NNN)

Five arrested, including govt officials in Sepahijala SP Office

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, March 2: Five individuals, including four government officials, have been arrested for their involvement in the embezzlement of Rs 29.04 lakh from the office of the Sepahijala District Superintendent of Police. A case was filed in February 2024 by the Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO) of the SP's office, leading to an investigation.

Bishalgarh Sub-divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Dulal Chandra Datta, who is also the Investigation Officer in the case, stated that the initial FIR named two individuals—one Upper Division Clerk and one Lower Division Clerk. However, further investigation revealed the involvement of three more individuals: another Lower Division Clerk, a Police Constable, and a local resident named Phanilal Debbarma.

"The case was registered in February 2024, and after I took charge, we discovered additional evidence against more suspects. We traced the misappropriated funds in their accounts and verified all necessary reports and evidence before making the arrests. All five accused were presented before the court, which remanded them to police custody for three days. The four government officials involved have been suspended," said Datta.

He further revealed that the accused claimed to have spent the entire amount, which was embezzled through fraudulent transactions since 2018. "The misappropriated sum of Rs 29,04,142 comprised funds meant for TA bills, salaries, and festival advances. Unfortunately, we have been unable to recover the embezzled amount," he added.

The investigation is ongoing as authorities work to determine if more individuals were complicit in the financial misconduct.

Bhagwat emphasises need to balance cultural heritage with modern aspirations

Weekly prayers are held at the Donyi Polo Nyedar Namlo to honour the celestial deities



ITANAGAR, March 2: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday emphasised the need to balance cultural heritage with modern aspirations.

Bhagwat, who visited the Donyi Polo Nyedar Namlo -- a revered prayer centre of the Nyishi community at Naharlagun near Itanagar, spoke on the role of spiritual practices in promoting societal harmony and nation-build-

ing.

The Namlo, located near the banks of the Pachin river, is dedicated to the worship of the sun (Donyi) and the moon (Polo), holding deep spiritual and cultural significance for the region's indigenous people.

Weekly prayers are held at the Donyi Polo Nyedar Namlo to honour the celestial deities. Bhagwat participated in the traditional

prayer ceremony, a statement issued by the Namlo said.

He engaged in discussions with Namlo priests and devotees, appreciating their efforts in safeguarding their traditions, it said.

"Dr Bhagwat also underscored the importance of balancing the preservation of cultural heritage with modern aspirations, emphasising that spiritual practices like those at Donyi Polo Nyedar Namlo are essential in strengthening societal harmony towards our common goal of nation building," the statement said.

His visit reaffirmed the importance of preserving these ancient traditions and their role in fostering cultural unity, it added.

This was the last programme of Bhagwat's four-day-long Arunachal Pradesh visit. During the trip, he participated in a two-day RSS 'Karyakarta Shivir' that saw the participation of members of the organisation from across the state.

His Arunachal visit follows a five-day engagement in Guwahati.

Concluding his Arunachal Pradesh tour, Bhagwat will return to Guwahati for further centenary-related engagements.

The RSS will complete 100 years on Vijaya Dashami this year, with various programs planned across the country. (PTI)

Arambai Tenggol hails Amit Shah's commitment to fostering peace in Manipur



IMPHAL, March 2: The Arambai Tenggol (AT) has lauded Union home minister Amit Shah for his "unwavering commitment to fostering peace and stability in Manipur."

"His leadership has been pivotal during these challenging times, and we are grateful for the concerted efforts to ensure the well-being of the people in our beloved state," said a press release issued by Robin Mangang Khwairakpam, Public Relations Officer, Arambai Tenggol, GHQ on Sunday.

The AT press release comes a day after Amit Shah had directed security officials to ensure free movement of people on all roads in Manipur from March 8 and also called for strict action against those creating obstructions.

Amit Shah had also instructed agencies to complete fencing work

on both sides of the designated entry points along Manipur's International Border at the earliest.

The AT then expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, saying his prompt actions and assurances during the recent meeting with the Arambai Tenggol have instilled a renewed sense of hope among the citizens.

It can be noted here that the AT had laid down 246 sophisticated weapons last Thursday after Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla asked all youths both in the hills and valley to surrender illegal weapons.

Initially, the Governor had given a week's time starting from February 20 to surrender all illegal and looted arms, but the deadline was later extended for another seven days. (NNN)

Manipur: 42 more firearms surrendered, 5 illegal bunkers destroyed



IMPHAL, March 2: Forty-two more firearms and cartridges have been surrendered by the public in five districts of ethnic strife-torn Manipur, police said on Sunday.

The firearms were surrendered in Imphal West and East, Churachandpur, Bishnupur and Tamenglong districts on Saturday, a police officer said.

Five firearms, including two pistols, six grenades and over 75 cartridges were surrendered in Bishnupur district.

Seventeen country-made guns, nine 'pompi' (locally made mortars), and cartridges were surrendered at Kaimai police station in Tamenglong district.

At least 10 firearms and cartridges were surrendered at Yaingangpokpi, Porompat, Churachandpur and Lam-sang police stations, the police officer said.

During search operations at Sairemkhul in Imphal West district, an INSAS LMG with one magazine loaded with 20 rounds of ammunition, one AK-56 rifle, three SLR rifles, one SMG 9mm carbine, one .303 rifle, one DBBL gun, four grenades without detonators, one Chinese hand grenade and other articles were also seized on Saturday.

Security forces also dismantled two illegal bunkers at Mark Hill under Thingsat hill range in Kangpokpi district. Another three illegal bunkers were dismantled at Wakan hill range in the adjoining area in Kangpokpi and Imphal East districts on Saturday.

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

During the seven-day period, more than 300 firearms were surrendered by the public, primarily in the valley districts.

Later, he extended the deadline for the surrender of looted and illegal firearms till 4 pm on March 6 following demands by people from both hill and valley areas for additional time.

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

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

Budget session of Nagaland assembly to begin today

KOHHIMA, March 2: The budget session of the Nagaland assembly will begin on Monday, officials said.

The session will commence with the customary address of the governor, La Ganesan, followed by obituary references to some former legislators who passed away during the intercession period, stated a provisional list of business issued by the assembly secretariat.

Discussion on the governor's speech will be taken up on Tuesday, while Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, who also holds the finance portfolio, will present the supplementary demand for grants for 2024-25 later that day.

He would present the budget for 2025-26 on Thursday and general discussions on it would be taken up on Friday.

Rio would also table the report of the Comptroller Auditor General of India on the last day of the session.

Other business for the six-day session with a recess on Wednesday include discussions on matters



of public importance, laying of annual administrative reports of government departments, and introduction and passing of government bills.

The topics for discussion on matters of public importance have not been finalised, an official said.

However, it is expected that issues related to foothill road construction -- a dream project of the state, delay in completion of various NHIDCL-implemented highway projects and the unresolved Naga Political Issue are likely to be taken up. (PTI)

3 CPI(M) leaders surrender in 2015 assault of judge case in Tripura



AGARTALA, March 2: Three leaders of the opposition CPI(M) surrendered before a court in South Tripura district in connection with the assault on a judge during a shutdown in 2015.

CPI(M)'s South Tripura district secretary Tapas Datta, All India Krishak Sabha's Belonia divisional secretary Babul Debnath and Trilokesh Sinha surrendered on Saturday as per the directions of the Supreme Court.

The three leaders allegedly assaulted District and Session Judge Ruhidas Paul on September 2, 2015, while enforcing a bandh called by Left trade unions at the court. The incident happened when the Left Front was in power in the state.

Police had taken suo motu cognisance of the incident and registered a case at the Belonia police station.

After their initial arrest, the three leaders secured bail from the Supreme Court.

In May 2023, the district and session court sentenced them to two years of rigorous imprisonment after convicting them of unlawful assembly, creating unrest in the court premises and assaulting a judicial officer. They appealed the conviction in the high court where the judgment was upheld.

They then approached the Supreme Court, which directed them to surrender. The SC has set March 18 as the next date of hearing in the matter. (PTI)

Law to regulate pvt agencies recruiting local youth for foreign jobs in Mizoram



AIZAWL, March 2: A bill will be introduced in the Mizoram assembly on Monday, seeking to regulate private agencies engaged in sending youths abroad for jobs, an official said on Sunday.

The Mizoram Private Placement Agencies (Regulation) Bill, 2025, will be tabled by Labour, Employment, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Minister Langleinghlova Hmar, he said.

The bill will seek to regulate the functioning of private placement agencies to legally send youths for jobs, including domestic work, outside the state, particularly in other countries, he said.

Private placement agencies will be re-

quired to register with the government and obtain a license when the bill is enacted, the official said.

The bill was necessitated after some Mizo women, who were illegally sent to foreign countries, particularly Syria and UAE, for domestic work, faced legal issues there, he said.

Last year, the Mizoram government with the help of the Centre rescued several such women, engaged as domestic helps, from Syria and some other Arab countries.

The Mizoram Private Placement Agencies (Regulation) law was enacted in 2015 by the Congress government.

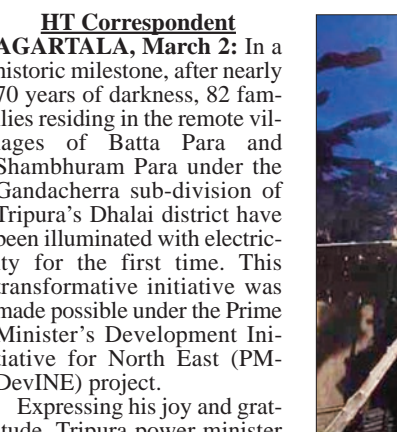
The law, however, empowered agencies to provide jobs to any women as domestic workers within India, the official said.

Hmar, who also holds the portfolios of Sports and Youth Services, and Excise and Narcotics, will table The Mizoram Youth Commission Bill, 2025, on Monday, officials said.

He will also introduce a bill to amend the existing prohibition law to allow the sale and manufacturing of wine and beer from locally produced fruits and grains in the assembly on March 6, they said. (PTI)

82 Families benefited under PM-DevINE Project

Lights glow in Tripura remote villages after 70 years



HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, March 2: In a historic milestone, after nearly 70 years of darkness, 82 families residing in the remote villages of Batta Para and Shambhuram Para under the Gandacherra sub-division of Tripura's Dhalai district have been illuminated with electricity for the first time. This transformative initiative was made possible under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East (PM-DevINE) project.

Expressing his joy and gratitude, Tripura power minister Ratan Lal Nath said, "I feel immensely fortunate to witness the moment when an entire village sees the glow of electric lights for the very first time. This achievement, which once seemed impossible, has now been realized thanks to the vision and leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Through the PM-



DevINE project, the Tripura Renewable Energy Development Agency, under the Electricity Department, has successfully brought light and energy to Batta Para and Shambhuram Para in Ganganagar block, Dhalai district. Every home—46 in Batta Para and 36 in Shambhuram Para—has been equipped with

worthwhile."

Minister Nath further emphasized that while the villages have existed for many years, previous administrations failed to recognize their needs and extend essential services.

"Despite the challenges, our government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is committed to the upliftment of tribal communities and the overall development of our state. Bringing power to these remote areas was an arduous task, but we have taken significant steps to ensure electricity reaches even the most inaccessible households. Apart from these 82 families, another 34 families in nearby settlements also require electricity and water. Under the PM-DevINE scheme, we are installing solar panels and generating power through microgrids to cater to their needs. We have already

initiated the work and are here to monitor its progress. Today, people in these villages can finally enjoy the comfort of electric lights and fans in their homes. Moreover, they will not have to bear any electricity expenses, as the initiative fully covers the costs. There is still much to accomplish, but we remain steadfast in our mission to bring progress and prosperity to every tribal household in Tripura," he added.

This landmark achievement underlines the government's unwavering commitment to bridging the developmental gaps in the region, ensuring that even the most marginalized communities receive access to fundamental amenities. With the flick of a switch, decades of darkness have given way to a brighter future for these 82 families, symbolizing a new dawn for Tripura's rural landscape.

Tripura Congress to hold massive rally on March 11

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, March 2: The Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) has announced a large-scale mass gathering on March 11 in Agartala to showcase its political strength and press for the protection of the Constitution, restoration of democratic rights, and action against corruption under the guise of development.

Speaking on the event, TPCC President Asish Kumar Saha said the rally would be held at Orient Chowmuhani, with participation from leaders and workers of all party wings across the state.

"The central leadership has been invited to attend, including Kanhaiya Kumar and Jignesh Mevani. Campaigning has already begun, and we are mobilizing unorganised workers of the Congress party to ensure the event's success. Despite the challenges that often arise during such rallies, we are determined to hold this one successfully on March 11," said Saha.

He asserted that the upcoming gathering would be one of the largest political events in the state in recent times.

"This will be a historic show of strength by the Congress party after a long time. We are fully committed to making this a success, raising key issues such as saving the Constitution, restoring democratic rights, and exposing large-scale corruption," he stated.

Saha further informed that Tripura Congress' newly appointed in-charge, Saptagiri Sankar, will visit the state on March 7 for a two-day tour to engage with party workers and leaders.

LOST

I. Angthek Derrick Teron son of Mr. Norman Teron lost my original 3rd Semester Marksheet (B.A. English), Roll No. 202101005 of Assam Royal Global University, in the last week of February 2025.

Name : Angthek Derrick Teron
F/N : Mr. Norman Teron
M/N : Mrs. Mallika Terangpi
Address : Rukasen, Diphu, Karbi Anglong

CM Omar Abdullah chairs meeting of coalition partners ahead of budget session in Jammu

'INDI Alliance is committed to restoration of statehood'

JAMMU, March 2: A day ahead of the first budget session of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly in seven years, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday chaired a joint meeting of coalition parties here to discuss smooth functioning of the house.

The meeting, attended by Congress legislative party leader G A Mir and CPI(M) MLA M Y Tarigami, took place shortly after Abdullah presided over a separate legislature party meeting of the National Conference at his official residence here.

The Congress legislature party also met separately at Residency Road party headquarters before Mir joined the meeting convened by Abdullah.

"It is a tradition for both the ruling and the opposition parties to convene their legislature party meetings before the start of the assembly session to discuss the issues needed to be raised in the house," Mir told reporters at the party headquarters after the meeting.

The Congress leader said he is joining the joint legislature party meeting of the ruling coalition.

"Only four-and-a-half months have passed since the formation of the (NC-led) government but many people are questioning the government that it has not done this or that.



They should remember that when the government was formed (on October 16), the budget had already been decided and it was also a big hurdle in the way," he said.

Mir hoped that the budget being presented by the government will address the popular public issues and will also lay the foundation

for the implementation of the manifesto during the financial year 2025-26.

He said the government has already passed a resolution for restoration of statehood in the last session held in Srinagar and so the delay is from the BJP-led central government which has made repeated promises to the

people of J&K on the subject.

"When the prime minister chaired the All Party Meeting of J&K leaders (in June 2021), we were all witness to his statement that re-organization will be followed by delimitation, elections and then restoration of statehood. The centre should have fulfilled its promise after the formation of the popular government in J&K but the delay is on their side," he said.

Mir said the Congress has been repeatedly saying that restoration of statehood was the biggest issue during last year's assembly elections and "INDI Alliance is committed to it. Cong being the largest party in the INDIA bloc has already made it clear in their working committee meeting and during the election campaigns."

Asked about PDP planning to introduce bills to push for the prohibition of alcohol and seek regularization of property rights of residents on public land, he said it is up to the house to decide on such bills.

"It is also a matter of thought that when they were in power with BJP why they did not introduce such bills. The government is more concerned about the issues raised in the election manifesto for which the people voted for it," he said. (PTI)

No place for gangsters and criminals in Punjab, they will be wiped out: CM Mann



HOSHIARPUR, March 2: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday asserted that gangsters, smugglers, criminals and other anti-social elements have no place in the state and will soon be wiped out.

Addressing a gathering here during the passing out parade of 2,490 cops, Mann said this pious land produced saints, seers, martyrs, legendary players and generals.

The chief minister, however, said that smugglers, gangsters and other criminals have unfortunately made this state their abode under the alleged patronization of the previous governments.

Mann said the state government has now started a "crusade" to weed out these anti-national elements, adding they will be behind the bars soon.

The chief minister said Punjab is at a historic juncture as his government has launched a decisive war against drugs in the state.

Mann said the state government has adopted a zero tolerance policy against drugs and Punjab will be made completely drug free with active support and cooperation of the public.

The supply line of drugs is being snapped, drug peddlers are being put behind bars and the properties of the drug smugglers are being confiscated or razed, he added.

The chief minister said that inimical forces have been chalking out nefarious designs to disturb the hard earned peace in the border state, adding the Punjab Police has always foiled such attempts.

Mann said it is imperative the police force is updated as per requirements in the field of investigation, science and technology to further overcome major challenges faced by the state.

Congratulating the new cops, he

said it is a momentous occasion for them as they have become an integral part of the Punjab Police family.

The chief minister exhorted them to discharge their duty with utmost dedication, hard work and commitment, thereby contributing immensely in the progress of the state and prosperity of its people.

Mann called upon the newly inducted cops to play a proactive role in wiping out the menace of drugs from the state.

He said Punjab is fighting the nation's war against drugs and the police have always acted as a barrier for checking its supply.

The chief minister said the time has now come when the cops should uphold the glorious tradition of the Punjab Police for weeding out the scourge of drugs from the state.

More than 10,000 youngsters have been appointed in the police force since 2022, he added.

Mann said the state government has also decided to recruit 10,000 new police personnel for which necessary clearance will be given by the Cabinet soon.

The chief minister said that a dedicated 'Sadak Surakhya Force' (road safety force) had been set up to ensure enhanced security and save precious lives on the roads.

He said since its launch in February last year, the state has witnessed a 48.10 per cent reduction in casualties due to accidents.

The force has been deployed all along 4,200 kms of the highways, prone to traffic accidents, Mann said, adding they act as a deterrent for traffic violations in addition to patrolling.

The chief minister said even Union Minister Nitin Gadkari had hailed this initiative of the state government in Parliament. (PTI)

Duplication of voter card numbers does not indicate fake voters: EC

NEW DELHI, March 2: Amid reports flagging issuance of identical voter card numbers to electors in two different states, the Election Commission on Sunday said duplicate numbers do not necessarily imply fake voters.

It also said that while elector photo identity card (EPIC) numbers of some of the voters "may be identical", the other details including demographic details, assembly constituency and polling booth are different.

"Respective of the EPIC number, any elector can cast a vote only at their designated polling station in their respective constituency in their state or union territory where they are enrolled in the electoral roll and nowhere else," the poll panel said.

It explained that identical EPIC numbers or series were allotted to some electors from different states and union territories due to a "decentralised and manual mechanism" being followed prior to shifting of the electoral roll database of all states to the ERONET platform.

This resulted in certain state chief electoral officers using the same EPIC alphanumeric series and leaving a scope for the possibility of duplicate EPIC numbers being allotted to electors in different assembly constituencies in different states, the poll body said.

According to the EC website, ERONET helps election officials maintain the electoral system "by removing duplicate entries and inclusion of migrated electors".

"To allay any apprehensions, the commission has decided to ensure allotment of unique EPIC number to registered electors. Any case of duplicate EPIC number will be rectified by allotting a unique EPIC number," the EC said.

The ERONET 2.0 platform will be updated to aid and assist in this process, it said. (PTI)

SFI calls for strike in higher edu institutions today to demand Education minister's resignation

KOLKATA, March 2: CPI(M)'s student wing SFI has called for a strike in West Bengal colleges on March 3, demanding Education Minister Bratya Basu's resignation over the injuries of two protesters at Jadavpur University.

The windscreen of the minister's car was smashed by protesters and two of the agitators were injured, one of them seriously, when the tyre of one of the vehicles in his convoy grazed past them on Saturday.

Students Federation of India (SFI) state committee member Shuvajit Sarkar told PTI on Sunday the strike call has been given in university and college campuses in protest against the "entry of outsiders sheltered by TMC who instigated the violence and vandalism in the Jadavpur university campus on March 1."

"As the students only wanted to have a discussion with the education minister in the presence of vice-chancellor, he behaved in a high-handed manner with them and tried to leave the campus in a huff on Saturday. As the students wanted an audience, Basu accompanied by TMC musclemen and outsiders boarded the car and his driver accelerated the vehicle unconcerned about the safety and life of students. His car injured two students, one of them seriously, and he did not

bother to look back but sped away," Sarkar said.

"Basu is responsible for the injury to two students and we demand his resignation from the state cabinet and police action against him for fuelling fire in Jadavpur university campus," he said.

The SFI, however, will extend its help for the smooth conduct of the higher secondary examination, which is slated to begin from March 3, and organise camps near examination centres to help the candidates, he said.

The SFI also took out rallies in the city and elsewhere in the state on Sunday in protest against the "injury to left student protesters by the car of the Education minister who did not bother to listen to the students and brought outsiders inside the campus."

The left student activists took out a rally in the city from 8B bus stand, Jadavpur to Golpark and vowed to continue their protest.

In Bardhaman town, Dinhatia in Coochbehar district, the SFI activists had heated arguments with police who objected to road blockades.

The arson and rampage at JU took place after two students were injured, one of them seriously, as tyres of one of the cars in the minister's convoy grazed past them.

Trouble broke out when Basu went to the JU campus on Saturday to attend the annual general meeting of WBCUPA.

Basu, who tried speaking to the agitating students and received memorandum from one group, was gheraoed by a large number of protesters and his security personnel had a trying time to escort him to his vehicle.

Basu was later taken to SSKM Hospital as he felt uneasiness during the gherao and suffered bruises from broken glass shards but his condition was stated to be stable and he later went home.

Indranjit Roy, a first year student stated to be a member of ultra left Revolutionary Students Front (RSF) and Abhinaba Basu, SFI Kolkata district committee member, fell on the ground as the convoy of the minister was trying to leave the campus with protesters seen hanging from the side of the cars trying to stop Basu from leaving.

"There was so much chaos around. The students had broken the windscreen of my car and the broken glasses left me injured. How can I talk to around 100 students? I was ready to speak to some of their representatives numbering five. But they did not want talks, they only wanted to create chaos," Basu told reporters. (PTI)

I'm loyal Cong worker, anyone questioning my dedication is in illusion: Shivakumar

UDUPI (KARNATAKA), March 2: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Sunday said he was a loyal Congress worker and anyone questioning his dedication to the party and the Gandhi family is in illusion.

He also asserted that the party will come back to power in the 2028 Assembly polls.

Shivakumar was reacting to speculation about his recent meeting with party central leaders in Delhi, and talks about in political circles, especially in the ruling party, about the chief minister change, later this year, under a "rotational chief minister" or "power-sharing" formula.

"I have not put any condition on any one and there is no need to put any condition. I'm a Karyakarta, I work according to what the party tells me. Putting conditions or black-



mailing is not in my blood. I'm a loyal Congress worker," Shivakumar said, in response to a question on speculation about his visit to Delhi and that he had apparently put some conditions on party leaders.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "If anyone, let them be from any party, questions my dedication to the Congress party and the Gandhi family, it is their illusion." Asked whether speculation about the 2.5 years power sharing formula was false, Shivakumar merely said, "I

can only say in 2028. The Congress party will come back to power."

Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress chief, is a strong chief ministerial aspirant and has made no secret of his ambition to become the CM.

There was stiff competition between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar for the chief minister's post after the declaration of Assembly election results in May 2023, and the Congress had managed to convince the latter and made him the Deputy Chief Minister.

There were some reports at the time that a compromise had been reached based on a "rotational chief minister formula," according to which Shivakumar will become CM after two-and-a-half years, but they have not been officially confirmed by the party. (PTI)

Sarpanch murder case chargesheet filed after thorough probe: Fadnavis

THANE, March 2: Police have filed a chargesheet in sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh murder case after a very thorough probe, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has said and expressed confidence that the guilty would get strict punishment.

The state Crime Investigation Department (CID) on Thursday filed a more than 1,200 pages chargesheet at a court in Beed district in Deshmukh's murder and two related cases.

The murder of Deshmukh, sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed, on December 9 last year has triggered a political firestorm in the state as NCP minister Dhananjay Munde's close aide Walmik

Karad has been arrested in connection with the related extortion case.

Deshmukh was abducted, tortured and murdered allegedly for attempting to stop an extortion bid targeting an energy company in Beed.

Three separate cases - murder of sarpanch, bid to extort money from Avaada company and assault on security guard of the firm - have been registered at Kej police station in Beed. The police have invoked the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) against the accused in the murder case.

Talking to reporters here on Saturday, CM Fadnavis said, "The police have conducted a very pro-

fessional investigation in the Santosh Deshmukh case. The chargesheet has been filed in a timely manner and with complete evidence following the new law."

"Now, we will request the court to fast track this case. We have appointed Ujjwal Nikam as special public prosecutor. I am confident the court will give strict punishment to the accused," Fadnavis said, speaking on the sidelines of the Maharashtra police conference in which several topics related to law and order were discussed.

While seven persons have been arrested in the sarpanch murder case, the primary accused, Krushna Andhale, remains at large. (PTI)

They stand as one, united by light of purpose ahead: Rahul on Kerala Congress leaders

NEW DELHI, March 2: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday asserted that the party's Kerala leaders "stand as one" and were "united" by the light of purpose ahead.

His assertion came after the Congress' top brass met Kerala leaders at 'Indira Bhawan' here for a brainstorming session on Friday to discuss the strategy and the way forward ahead of next year's assembly elections.

Posting a picture from the media byte by Kerala leaders after the meeting, Gandhi said in a Facebook post, "They stand as one, united by the light of purpose ahead."

His post was accompanied by the hashtag 'Team Kerala'.

The nearly-three-hour meeting at the Congress's Indira Bhawan headquarters here had discipline, unity and strengthening of the state organisation as its running theme.

At the meeting, Gandhi said leaders should be very careful about the political strategy and should not do or say anything that does not toe the party line, according to sources.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had laid stress on discipline, ensuring unity and filling up the vacant posts to strengthen the party's Kerala unit.

Besides Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, AICC general secretary K C Venugopal, Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Kerala Congress chief K Sudhakaran, Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader in the Kerala Assembly VD Sathesaran, Thiruvananthapuram MP Tharoor and AICC in-charge of Kerala Deepa Dasmunshi, among others, were present at the meeting.

"We got a clear indication from our high command that the Congress is very much connected with the people of Kerala emotionally and politically. People are looking for a change, so we should not do anything that will disrespect the people of Kerala.

"This was a clear indication and if anyone (says) anything personally, we will take strong action. Because we have no right to disrespect the people of Kerala," Dasmunshi had told reporters after the meeting. (PTI)

Polling underway for municipal elections in Haryana

CHANDIGARH, March 2: Nearly 15 per cent of the over 51 lakh eligible voters cast their vote till 12 noon for the election of mayors and all ward members in seven municipal corporations and some other municipalities of Haryana on Sunday, officials said.

Voting is being held for the election of mayors and all ward members in seven municipal corporations of Gurugram, Manesar, Faridabad, Hisar, Rohtak, Karnal, and Yamunanagar.

Additionally, by-elections for the post of mayor in Ambala and Sonapat municipal corporations, are also taking place.

The voting is being held from 8 am to 6 pm.

Similarly, elections are being conducted for the president and all ward members of four municipal councils of Ambala Sadar, Pataudi Jatoli Mandi, Thanesar, and Sirsa. Bye-election is also being held for the post of president in municipal council Sohna, district Gurugram.

Voting is also taking place for the election of presidents and all ward members in 21 municipal committees. Bye-elections for the post of president in Assandh (Karnal district) and Ismailabad (Kurukshetra district) municipal

committee are also taking place.

Among the early voters included Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, who cast his vote at a polling booth in Karnal and appealed to voters to come out and cast their vote.

Casting vote is our democratic right and also our duty to exercise our franchise, he said.

Union Minister of State Krishan Pal Gurjar cast his vote at a booth in Faridabad.

Haryana Minister Anil Vij, who cast his vote in Ambala Cantt, said, "all voters should participate in the greatest festival of democracy."

In Gurugram district, a voter turnout of nearly 13 percent was recorded by 12 noon.

Sunderlal Yadav, BJP Mayoral candidate from Manesar, where the first-ever municipal elections are being held, cast his vote at a polling booth in Manesar area.

According to Gurugram Deputy Commissioner-cum District Election Officer, Ajay Kumar, a total of 1,109 booths have been set up in the district, including for Gurugram, Manesar and Pataudi.

At the beginning of voting, a snag was encountered in an EVM machine at a polling booth in Ward 5 of the Gurugram Municipal Cor-



poration, which delayed the voting process by around an hour, sources said.

A new machine was brought in after which the voting process began smoothly.

Gurugram Police Commissioner Vikas Kumar Arora said that more than 4,500 security personnel have been deployed to ensure smooth polling.

Haryana State Election Commissioner Dhanpat Singh said extensive arrangements, including those pertaining to security, have

been made for the free, fair and transparent elections of the urban local bodies.

Singh said that 39 candidates are contesting for the posts of mayor in nine municipal corporations. Similarly, 27 candidates are in the fray for the posts of president in five municipal councils.

A total of 151 candidates are contesting for the posts of president in 23 municipal committees.

In some wards, only one candidate has filed a nomination, lead-

ing to their unopposed election. The names of such wards include Ward No. 36 of municipal corporation, Faridabad, Ward No. 22 of municipal corporation, Gurugram, Ward Nos. 8 and 11 of municipal corporation, Karnal and Ward No. 9 of municipal corporation, Yamunanagar.

Similarly, candidates have also been elected unopposed in Ward No. 24 of municipal council, Ambala Sadar, Ward Nos. 7 and 32 of municipal council, Thanesar. Besides this, 17 ward members in various municipal committees have been elected unopposed.

Polling for the Panipat municipal corporation will take place on March 9.

After the completion of the election process, vote counting will begin at 8 AM on March 12, and results will be declared on the same day.

Ahead of the polls, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini had exuded confidence that the BJP will win the civic polls and said that after the formation of the "triple-engine" government, work will be done three times faster".

The Congress also appealed to the electorate to give a full majority to the party. (PTI)

UTTARAKHAND AVALANCHE

Death toll climbs to five with recovery of one more body

DEHRADUN, March 2: A missing labourer was found dead on Sunday at the site of the avalanche-hit BRO camp in Mana village of Uttarakhand's Chamoli district as rescuers carried out a search for the three other workers still missing with the help of sniffer dogs, thermal imaging cameras and helicopters.

With the recovery of one more body, the death toll in the disaster has climbed to five, district authorities said.

The avalanche hit the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp between Mana and Badrinath on Friday, burying 54 workers inside eight containers and a shed. Earlier, it was believed that the total number of avalanche-hit labourers was 55 but one of them was on unauthorised leave and had reached home safely.

Fifty labourers were pulled out of snow by Friday.

Army doctors said 46 workers have been brought to the military hospital in Jyotirmath while one with spinal chord injury was airlifted to AIIMS, Rishikesh.

Three of them are critical, Lt Col DS Mardha said.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama visited the Uttarakhand State Emergency Operation Centre here to take an update on the rescue operation.



Speaking to reporters, he said, "The ground penetrating radar (GPR) system is being sent to the avalanche site and help of modern tools like thermal imaging camera and victim locating camera are being taken to trace the labourers still missing. The weather may turn bad on Monday again. The effort is to trace the missing on Sunday itself."

In a post on X, Dhama said he has instructed officials to expedite the ongoing operation.

"The Indian Army, ITBP, NDRF, SDRF and other relief and rescue teams are working on a war footing at the site of the incident," he said.

Chamoli District Magistrate Sandeep Tiwari said the search operation is expected to gain pace as the weather is clear and GPR system from Delhi is expected to arrive here any moment to aid the efforts.

An Mi-17 helicopter is waiting in Dehradun to fly the GPR system to the avalanche site, he said.

State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams with a sniffer dogs are at the avalanche site to help in the search and rescue efforts, he said.

Lt Gen Anindya Sengupta, GOC-in C, Central Command, and Lt Gen D G Mishra, GOC, Uttar

Bharat, are at the avalanche site to monitor the rescue operations.

Six helicopters -- three of the Indian Army Aviation Corps, two of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and a civil chopper hired by the Army -- have been engaged in the operation. Located three kilometres from Badrinath, Mana is the last village on the India-Tibet border at a height of 3,200 metres.

Army officials said the rescue operation on Saturday was mostly carried out by the Army and IAF helicopters as the approach road was blocked by snow at several points, making vehicular movement nearly impossible.

The priority is to bring the rescued workers to the Army hospital in Jyotirmath and look for the four missing workers, they said.

If weather permits, specialised RECCO radars, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), quadcopters and avalanche rescue dogs will be pressed into service to trace the missing workers, Lt Gen. Sengupta said.

"Everything depends on the weather," he added.

More than 200 personnel from the disaster management authority, ITBP, BRO, NDRF, SDRF, IAF, district administration, health department and fire brigade are engaged in the rescue operations, he said. (PTI)

Thane man, siblings held after his paramour commits suicide

THANE, March 2: Police have arrested a man and his two siblings on charges of abetting the suicide of a woman with whom he had been in a relationship in Maharashtra's Thane district, an official said on Sunday.

The 35-year-old victim, who was unmarried and a resident of Mharal area in Titwala township here, was in love with the man, staying in Uhasnagar area, for the last 15 years.

The man used to frequently visit the victim's house.

He had promised to marry her, but did not tie the knot with her giving some or the other reason.

Both of them used to have fre-

quent quarrels due to this, Kalyan taluka police station inspector Suresh Kadam said.

The man's brother and sister had asked the victim to discontinue relations with him as they wanted him to get married to another woman.

Five years back, the man got married to another woman, but still maintained relations with the victim while assuring that he would marry her, the police said.

On February 28, the victim and the man again had a quarrel following which she allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself to the ceiling of her house, the official said.

Prior to her death, the victim also recorded a video message on her mobile phone, in which she purportedly blamed the man and his siblings for her extreme step, he said.

Based on the video and a complaint by the victim's mother, the police on Saturday arrested the man and his brother and sister, all in the age group of 30 to 35 years, the official said.

The accused have been booked under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 108 (abatement of suicide) and 3(5) (criminal act done by several persons in furtherance of common intention of all), he said. (PTI)

India's zoo breeding programmes face poor management, funding challenges: Govt panel

NEW DELHI, March 2: While India's zoos have made "notable" progress in breeding endangered species under conservation programmes that started around a decade ago, a government panel says that persistent gaps in execution, funding and species management hinder their overall success.

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA), which is responsible for overseeing and guiding national-level ex situ conservation efforts, constituted a committee in 2023 to review and evaluate the state of conservation breeding programmes in zoos across the country.

In 2007, the CZA selected 74 species for breeding in 43 zoos. By 2014, 26 high-priority species were shortlisted and breeding programmes began for 23.

According to the report of the committee submitted to the CZA recently, while India's zoos have made "notable progress in housing and breeding several endangered species, the overall effectiveness of conservation breeding programmes is hindered by persistent foundational and operational challenges".

"Addressing these issues will require not only enhanced funding allocation but also the establishment of comprehensive frameworks, adoption of standardised protocols, and improvements in genetic and demographic management practices," it said.

The committee said that Rs 10.81 crore was al-

located for conservation breeding between 2006 and 2011 and Rs 18.13 crore between 2011 and 2021.

Over time, with the decrease in the CZA's funding, zoos now receive limited financial support, mainly for maintenance.

"This reduction in financial assistance has had cascading effects on the implementation and sustainability of these programmes," the report said.

According to the report, Artiodactyla (even-toed ungulates), Carnivora (meat-eating mammals) and Galliformes (game birds) are among the most targeted groups. However, many of their breeding programmes have either not started or are poorly managed.

The report said errors in species identification, such as with the Alpine Musk Deer and Himalayan Serow, make managing populations difficult.

The committee also highlighted that lack of genetic diversity, improper tracking and poor record-keeping reduce the success of conservation breeding programmes.

While some successes, such as the Gaur (Bos gaurus) and Indian Chevrotain (Moschiola indica), demonstrate the potential for growth and recovery, they also "expose broader challenges including inconsistent record-keeping, uncoordinated transfers and inadequate husbandry practices", the committee said.

Primates, Squamata (reptiles), and Perisso-

dactyla (odd-toed ungulates) struggle with low birth rates and poor genetic diversity.

Animals like the King Cobra and Western Hoolock Gibbon have specific environmental needs that are not being met, which reduces their chances of successful breeding.

"Habitat requirements and taxonomic ambiguities constrain the management of species like the Indian Wild Ass and Himalayan Salamander which have shown minimal growth despite decades of conservation efforts," the committee noted.

It said that some birds and reptiles, like vultures (White-rumped and Indian Vultures), have seen population growth. However, problems such as unsexed individuals and poor use of founder stock limit genetic diversity.

Certain species, like the Nicobar Pigeon and Red-crowned Roofed Turtle, have small, stable populations but need better management.

"Species like the Shaheen Falcon and Malabar Pied Hornbill have yet to see any structured conservation efforts, with populations primarily consisting of solitary or rescued individuals," the committee members said.

They said that many species, such as the Indian Giant Squirrel and Indian Pangolin, are declining due to low breeding success and poor tracking.

The Himalayan Salamander has shown recent growth but only at one facility without structured management. (PTI)

40% global population doesn't have access to education in language they understand: UNESCO

NEW DELHI, March 2: Forty per cent of the global population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand, according to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) team.

Despite countries' growing understanding of the role of home language, policy uptake remains limited. Implementation challenges include limited teacher capacity to use home languages, unavailability of materials in home languages and community opposition, it said.

In some low- and middle-income countries, this figure rises to 90 per cent. More than a quarter of a billion learners are affected, GEM officials said, recommending nations to implement multilingual education policies and practices with the goal of creating educational systems that benefit all learners.

The team, which has come up with a report titled "Languages matter: Global guidance on

multilingual education", noted that as migration increases, linguistic diversity is becoming a global reality and classrooms with learners from diverse language backgrounds are more common. Over 31 million displaced youth are facing language barriers in education.

The report was compiled on the 25th anniversary of International Mother Language Day, celebrating a quarter-century of dedicated efforts to preserve and promote the use of mother tongues. The report comes at a time when India is in the process of implementing the new National Education Policy (NEP) that advocates multilingual education. The three-language policy in school education has drawn opposition from some states.

"Today 40 per cent of people globally lack access to education in the language they speak and understand fluently. In some low- and middle-income countries, this figure rises to 90 per cent.

More than a quarter of a billion learners are affected," a senior GEM team member told PTI.

"The first thing to note is that over the course of this decade, which has been marked by the pervasive influence of technology in young people's lives but also by the impact of COVID-19, learning levels have dropped sharply in both reading and mathematics. But the next thing to note is that the impact has been disproportionate on learners who are disadvantaged due to linguistic reasons," the official added.

According to the analysis by the team, the gap between the two groups increased on average between 2010 and 2022, from 12 to 18 percentage points in reading and from 10 to 15 percentage points in mathematics. This suggests that learners who do not speak the language of instruction at home, whether for historical reasons or due to migration and displacement, are at a bigger risk of leaning loss. (PTI)

Delhi Police to intensify crack down on criminal networks

NEW DELHI, March 2: Delhi Police is planning to intensify efforts to combat organised crime and crack down on gangsters operating from jails the country and abroad, police sources said.

Top police officials met at the Delhi Police headquarters on Saturday, a day after a high-level law and order review meeting was conducted by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and attended by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Delhi home minister Ashish Sood, and Union home secretary Govind Mohan.

The review focused on strengthening policing strategies to address the evolving crime landscape in the national capital.

According to sources, at the Saturday's meeting, it was decided that a list of emerging criminals will be prepared and measures to dismantle their networks taken.

"Strict surveillance will be maintained on jailed gangsters, such as Kaushal Chaudhary and Neeraj Bawana. Others operating from foreign locations, including Anmol Bishnoi, Arsh Dala, Golby Brar, Himanshu Bhu, Lucky Patial, Jagga Dhurkot, Virendra Charan, Amardeep Bishnoi, Nani Rana, Mahender Saharan, Rahul, Mahender Meghwanshi and Navender Boxer, will also be closely monitored," said a source.

A senior police officer said that juveniles in direct or indirect contact with these gangsters and have a criminal record will also come



under scrutiny.

He said the police are preparing a list of juveniles involved in heinous crimes and will recommend their trial as adults in court.

Additionally, the authorities will keep a close watch on social media profiles of gangsters and their associates to track illegal activities and connections.

"Those helping the gangsters will be on police radar. Their activities will be closely monitored," the officer added.

The meeting saw top police officials, including the Delhi police commissioner, special commissioners of police (law and order) of different zones, joint commissioners and deputy commissioners of police of the 15 police districts, and deputy commissioners of different units discuss the security measures to be implemented.

The key focus areas included a stringent crackdown on illegal im-

migrants, preventing street crimes, ensuring women's safety and countering organised criminal networks. Efforts to disrupt national and international drug supply chains were also part of the discussions.

Another senior police officer said, "Round-the-clock patrolling will be intensified in every nook and corner of the city, in an effort to curb snatching and robbery. Special emphasis will be laid on safeguarding senior citizens and children. Police stations will be directed to establish more effective communication channels with them."

"Ensuring better coordination and outreach between senior citizens and police personnel is a top priority," he said.

Traffic congestion in the city was also discussed, with plans being formulated to ease bottlenecks. (PTI)

Delhi man duped of ₹ 5 crore in property fraud, 2 held

NEW DELHI, March 2: The Delhi Police has arrested two people for allegedly cheating and forgery in a property fraud worth ₹ 5.78 crore, an official said on Sunday.

The accused, Md Salman and Rani Kapoor, allegedly sold a plot in Gurugram using forged documents and impersonated the original owner, the Economic Offences Wing said in a statement.

According to police, complainant Ajay Kumar Aggarwal was duped after Salman, known to him, approached him with an offer to sell a 1,340 square yard plot in South City-1, Gurugram, it read.

Salman presented forged ownership documents in the name of Rani Kapoor, leading Aggarwal to secure a ₹ 5 crore loan from a bank, read the statement.

The sale deed was executed for ₹ 5.40 crore, with an additional ₹ 38 lakh paid for stamp duty. However, when Aggarwal visited the property,

he discovered that it legally belonged to someone else, who later filed a case in court seeking cancellation of the fraudulent sale, it read.

Investigations revealed that Salman and Kapoor fraudulently transferred the property ownership in Kapoor's name through forged documents. They allegedly used an impersonator to pose as the original owner during registration and issued cheques that were never encashed. Subsequently, they sold the property to Aggarwal using the fake sale deed, the statement of the EOW read.

Salman was arrested from Karol Bagh on February 28, while Kapoor was apprehended on March 1. Salman, a Delhi resident and former trader, has been in the property business since 2018 and was assisted by Kapoor and others in fabricating documents. Police have also linked Salman to two other fraud cases in Delhi and Punjab, it further stated. (PTI)

NOAA layoffs could impact monsoon forecasts, cyclone tracking in India: Climate scientists

NEW DELHI, March 2: Scientists and policymakers have voiced concern over the layoffs at the US climate agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), saying any reduction in observation data could affect monsoon forecasts and cyclone tracking in India.

Hundreds of weather forecasters and other federal NOAA employees on probationary status were fired last week. These included meteorologists who do crucial local forecasts in the national weather service offices.

"We are worried. If NOAA reduces observations, there will be implications on weather forecasts. When ocean observations reduce, there is less data to assimilate. Hence predictability will reduce," M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, told PTI.

Climate scientist at the Indian Institute for Tropical Meteorology Roxy Mathew Koll termed the NOAA layoffs as a global crisis that could impact climate science.

NOAA provides data and models that support weather-climate monitoring, forecasting and disaster preparedness worldwide.

"For India, the monsoon forecasts, cyclone tracking, and climate projections rely on NOAA's models," Koll, who is also among the authors of reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said.

He said the NOAA layoffs were not just a US issue, but a blow to climate science and action worldwide.

"Half of the Indian Ocean's observational network is backed by NOAA. Without this backbone, early warnings for floods, heatwaves, and storms will weaken, putting millions at risk," Koll said.

Another meteorologist said he has been receiving emails from his interlocutors at NOAA informing them about the layoffs and inability to continue work as before.

"This is more than a budget cut. It is a direct threat to climate resilience, research, and preparedness worldwide. The world cannot afford to lose NOAA," Koll, a Rashtriya Vidyay Puraskar awardee, said.

India has deployed a number of argo floats, moored buoys and drifting buoys for ocean observations for various weather forecasting models. While most of the instruments deployed by the Ministry of Earth Sciences are in the Indian Ocean, NOAA also has deployed similar instruments in the Indian Ocean as well as in other seas across the world. (PTI)

From 1954 to 2025, how Prayagraj has learned to live with stories of Kumbh stampedes

PRAYAGRAJ, March 2: "My uncle had saved his sister by pulling her out of the river waters by her hair as she slipped below amid the commotion," says city-based advocate Niranjana Lal recalling the 1954 Kumbh Mela stampede stories he had heard from his aunt who survived it.

This was the first Kumbh in Allahabad after Independence, and the tragic incident took place on February 3 on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya. According to official estimates, several hundred had died in the stampede.

Seventy-one years later, a stampede took place on January 29, again on Mauni Amavasya day as a massive crowd sought to enter into the Triveni Sangam waters for the 'amrit snan'.

Lal, 67, and his wife were camping in a Swiss cottage in Sector 6 of Mahakukbh Nagar, when they got a call from their son at home late night, cautioning them not to go to the Sangam due to the stampede.

"We didn't step out from the camp until the sun came out, and at around 11 am, we went to Dashashwamedh Ghat on Ganga, located near Sector 6. There were huge crowds in the mela area, in the streets and at the ghat. We were aware of the tragedy that had unfolded a few hours ago, and therefore we were alert, and being a local resident knew what to do in case the crowd became unmanageable," Lal told PTI here.

"But, we didn't go back feeling fearful. My wife continued to camp until the 'kalp-was' period was over, continuing the multi-generation tradition of our family," he said.



Lal belongs to an old family of Allahabad (renamed Prayagraj in 2018), many of whose members have performed 'kalp-was' and bathing rituals at all Kumbh melas held here post Independence.

His wife, Saloni Niranjana kept the family tradition, and observed the rituals at Maha Kumbh this year, after her mother-in-law's death in 2019.

"We were married in 1988, and few months later, the 1989 Kumbh Mela happened. And, I and my wife have been part of all successive Kumbh also since then. But, the 1954 tragedy is something my uncle and 'bua' (aunt) used to talk about. She told me how she was saved by my father's elder brother while she was drowning during the incident," Lal reminisced,

adding, his 'bua' who was born in 1920s and also used to observe rituals, died in 1986.

Lal's father, Govind Prasad, a government officer was at the family camp in the mela area when the disaster took place.

The incident of the 1954 stampede was then described as a "national tragedy". Akshat Lal, 32, son of Niranjana Lal, says, he used to hear stories about the old Kumbh Melas from his grandmother and aunt, whose mother was rescued during the 1954 stampede.

"The scale of the tragedy was such that the entire country was shaken. Every other old family in Allahabad either has a personal story attached to it, or they know someone having some link with the

tragedy," he told PTI.

The young scholar, who even wrote a 100-odd-page book "Kumbh: A Divine Show at Allahabad" in 2013, has researched extensively on the subject.

Another stampede took place at Allahabad Junction (now Prayagraj Junction) during the 2013 Kumbh Mela in which scores of people died.

After the 1954 stampede, an inquiry committee was set up and it made a slew of recommendations for better crowd management and ensuring the safety of pilgrims.

"If one looks at the Maha Kumbh 2025, a VIP culture was promoted during it, and aggressive marketing and '144 years' hype was used to draw people to the mela. The authorities were somehow complacent and some so-called celebrities were telling on social media that arrangements were 'great' and people should flock to Sangam, which were a factor for overcrowding and eventually a stampede," he alleged.

The Uttar Pradesh government had, however, maintained that ample arrangements were made, and the theme itself was 'Bhavaya Divya Surakshita Maha Kumbh'. PTI spoke to many other residents of the city who either witnessed January 29 stampede or its aftermath or knew someone who was present there in the mela.

Renu Devi, a domestic help, said, she saw piles of footwear and bags at the ghats and also many floating in the river the day the stampede took place.

"I saw people being taken away in ambulances, it was panic all over," she said.

BOOMBOX CREATES A SPELL-BINDING EXPERIENCE IN GUWAHATI:



Iconic performances by Armaan Malik, Nikhita Gandhi, Ikka and DJ Yogii

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 2: Celebrating the spirit of 'Living it Large', Seagram's Royal Stag marked the commencement of its highly anticipated third edition of Royal Stag BoomBox with a spectacular show at Saru Sajai Stadium Complex, here, on March 1.

Building on the phenomenal success of previous editions, this year's festival pushes boundaries even further by bringing together the best of music and gaming entertainment. The evening witnessed an overwhelming response as thousands of enthusiasts gathered to experience performances by some of India's most celebrated artists. The event delivered an unforgettable night of pulsating music, enthralling performances, and unparalleled energy.

The sprawling grounds of Saru Sajai Stadium Complex, Guwahati came alive with vibrant installations, immersive art displays, curated food experiences, and interactive zones, creating a mul-

tisensory celebration beyond just music. The evening kicked off with an electrifying set by DJ Yogii, who set the perfect mood for the night. The audience was spellbound as rap icon Ikka delivered his electrifying beats, followed by powerhouse performer Nikhita Gandhi who captivated the audience with her versatile vocals. The grand finale saw music maestro Armaan Malik deliver a spectacular closing act that perfectly embodied the festival's signature blend of diverse musical genres, creating an unforgettable experience for Generation Large.

Singer-songwriter Armaan Malik said, "Music has always been my way of connecting with people, no matter where

they're from and what language they speak. Performing for Royal Stag BoomBox across the country last year was an unforgettable experience - the energy from the crowds in every city was truly electric. I got to meet amazing people, experience different cultures, and see firsthand how music brings everyone together."

Singer Nikhita Gandhi added, "Personally for me, Royal Stag BoomBox has always been about experimenting and breaking boundaries through music. Whether it's fusing genres or delivering an electrifying live performance, this platform allows us to push creative limits. Performing at Royal Stag BoomBox in Guwahati was an unforgettable experience."

Artist Ikka expressed, "What makes Royal Stag Boom Box special is how it lets every artist showcase their unique sound and vibe. It's going to be all about real stories, killer beats, and unforgettable moments! Ending the journey in Guwahati with such amazing energy was truly an incredible experience."

DJ Yogii said, "Royal Stag Boom Box is all about making the crowd move and feel alive through music. As a DJ, my goal is to blend beats and genres to create an electrifying atmosphere. I'm stoked to bring my high-energy set this year and turn the event into one big, unforgettable party! It was an absolute thrill to open the night and set the rhythm for such incredible performances to follow."



'Baaghi' franchise gave me an identity: Tiger Shroff

NEW DELHI, March 2: Actor Tiger Shroff, who will next be seen in Baaghi 4, on Sunday credited the film franchise for giving him an opportunity to prove himself as an action hero.

Shroff shared his new poster from the upcoming film on Instagram on the occasion of his 35th birthday. "The franchise that gave me an identity and allowed me to express my eagerness to prove myself as an action hero... is now the franchise that is changing my identity. Hes def not the same this time but i hope you guys accept him the way you did 8 years ago #gratitude #SajidNadiadwala's #Baaghi4 (sic)" he wrote.

Baaghi 4 is directed by A. Harsha and produced under the Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment. It will be released on September 5.

The production banner also wished Shroff on social media.

"Happy Birthday @tigerjackieshroff! Wishing you an action-packed year ahead Ronnie! #SajidNadiadwala's #Baaghi4 Directed by @nimmaaharsha. Releasing in cinemas on 5th Sept 2025," read the caption.

Tiger Shroff made his acting debut in 2014 with Heropanti. However, it was his second movie Baaghi (2016), which cemented his position in the industry as a rising action hero. The film's success spawned a franchise with the two installments releasing in 2018 and 2020, respectively. Baaghi 4 also features Punjabi star Sonam Bajwa and Miss Universe 2021 Harnaaz Sandhu. (PTI)



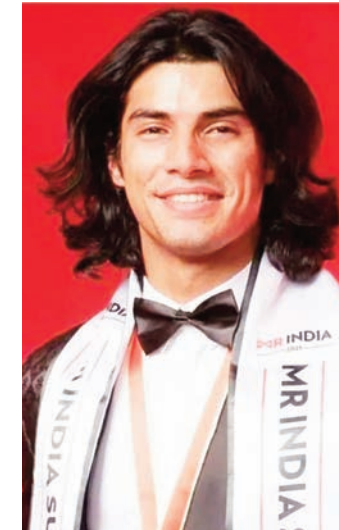
Mr India winner Shubham Sharma to represent country at Mister Supranational 2025

NEW DELHI, March 2: Shubham Sharma, the recently crowned Mr India winner, is set to represent the country at the Mister Supranational 2025 pageant.

The 24-year-old from Maharashtra emerged as the winner out of 80 prospective participants from across India who were shortlisted and invited to Mumbai to compete at the mega auditions for the coveted title.

Sharma said he is honoured to represent the country at Mister Supranational 2025, which will take place in Poland on June 28.

"Winning Mr India 2025 is a dream come true, and I am



honoured to represent my country globally."

"I'm grateful to the Times Group for this life-altering opportunity, and I look forward to making India proud at Mister Supranational 2025," Sharma said in a statement.

During the Mr India 2025 competition, the contestants went through different rounds which tested them on the basis of personality, talent, confidence, intellect, fitness and presentation.

The jury panel comprised Mr World 2016 winner Rohit Khandelwal, who was also the first Indian to win the title; Mister Supranational 2018 Prathamesh Maulingkar; Mister Supranational 2016 - 2nd Runner-up Jitesh Thakur; Miss Supranational Asia 2022 Ritika Khatnani; Femina Miss India World 2023 Nandini Gupta; and Femina Miss India World 2024 Nikita Porwal.

This year, Mr India 2025 also launched a web series titled "The Hunt for India's Most Desirable Man," which documents the journey of the contestants right from registration to the finale. (PTI)

Bobby Deol on playing villain roles: Want to break away from this image

MUMBAI, March 2: He broke away from his hero image by playing a shady godman in "Aashram" and later a villain in "Animal". Now, Bobby Deol says he is trying to do it once again as he has been flooded with offers for negative characters.

Deol, who also played antagonistic roles in "Race 3", "Love Hostel" and "Kanguva", said while it is exciting and challenging to portray villains, he wants to explore new and different roles.

He credits filmmaker Prakash Jha for changing people's perception of him through the character of Baba Nirala in "Aashram". The show recently returned

with the second part of its third season.

"It changed my life, people saw me in a different light. They said, 'Oh, Bobby Deol can play an antagonist, or Bobby Deol can be like this or like that.' At that point in my life, no one was ready to believe that I could do that besides Prakashji.

"But now again, I'm getting typecast a lot. I'm trying to break away from this image also. It's not that I want to play the main lead." Deol told PTI in an interview. The positive reception to his recent performances has been motivating, said the actor, who completes 30 years in the industry this year. He made his acting

debut with 1995's "Barsaat", co-starring Twinkle Khanna.

"The characters I'm playing right now are outside my comfort zone. Initially, I felt shy about it because stepping into these roles meant pushing myself and working really hard.

"There's always a bit of hesitation about how others will react to your work. But when the response is positive, it feels good. Deep down, every human being wants to be told they're good at what they do. And when you put in the hard work and receive so much love in return, it's just an amazing feeling." (PTI)

'CHHAAD' A STORY OF HUMAN EMPOWERMENT: PAOLI DAM

MUMBAI, March 2: Bengali film star Paoli Dam says she decided to be part of the upcoming film "Chhaad - The Terrace" the moment director Indrani Chakraborty told her the title of the movie.

The upcoming Bengali film marks the feature film directorial debut of Chakraborty, best known for her National Award-winning documentary "Ladakh Chale Rickshawala".

"Chhaad - The Terrace" explores the relationship of a writer-school teacher called Mitra with a terrace and eventually her disillusionment attached to it. Dam, known for films such as "Kaalbela", "Elar Char Adhyay", "Sab Charitro Kalponik", "Moner Manush", and "Machher Jhol", plays Mitra in the movie.

"The film is talking about a

woman, but it could have been a man also; it's about human empowerment. That's what made me think of doing it. The first thing I asked my director without even listening to the story was: 'What's the name of the film?' and she said, 'Chhaad'.

"And I said, 'I'm doing the film'. I immediately understood the elements that she was going to put in," the actor told PTI in an interview during a special screening of the film at the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) here. According to the actor, the terrace serves as a metaphor for freedom.

"What resonated with me in this film is that both Mitra and I love the concept of the terrace. A terrace is a place which symbolises freedom

metaphorically.

"Somewhere, even if you're alone on a terrace, you don't feel lonely because you feel closer to nature, you feel happy from within, and you feel so romantic at times. All of these factors together made me accept Mitra. Mitra is extremely different from who I am personally, and her conflicts, her crisis, too, are different," she added.

"Chhaad - The Terrace" weaves together the external and internal journeys of its protagonist, said Dam, adding that she is drawn to roles that are "complicated".

"... Nothing is black or white. There are a lot of grey elements in our lives, which are more real and closer to life. We call cinema a reflection of life and these are the characters which make cinema more real." In recent years, film and OTT platforms have seen a significant shift in women-led narratives, the actor said.

"The writing has become a little more unapologetic, which was needed. I feel (there is a) need for more women directors and writers to come into the industry because of the

way they perceive something... The sensibility and sensitivity that comes in the thought process.

"Feminism is about equality. It's not about you having to show women in a certain way, so you have to demean men, or you have to show men in a certain way, so you have to demean women. So, there has to be a space where there's harmony and rhythm in the storytelling," she said.

Recounting her struggles as an actor, Dam said she faced discrimination based on her skin tone at the beginning of her acting career.

"There was a time when in mainstream film and so-called 'commercial cinema', you needed to look a certain way... With a fair skin tone... There was a categorisation of things, which I felt like this is not the way I've been brought up. There was no discrimination between my brother and me while growing up," she added.

Dam will next be seen in "Bibi Payra", a Bengali action dark comedy film, and a Hindi period web series.

"Chhaad - The Terrace", produced by NFDC, will be released in theatres on March 7. (PTI)



WI should take leaf out of Afghanistan's book to improve, says Vivian Richards



MUMBAI, March 2: "Annoyed" and "hurt" with the absence of West Indies in the Champions Trophy, the legendary Sir Vivian Richards wants the Caribbean side to take a leaf out of Afghanistan's book to re-establish themselves as a force in world cricket.

West Indies and Sri Lanka, the two former ODI World Cup and Champions Trophy winning sides,

failed to make the cut for the eight-team event being played in Pakistan and Dubai.

"I'm just hoping that my West Indies team can take a leaf out of these guys' book, because there is a passion and energy that the Afghans have brought to the game," Richards, who is the governing council member of the International Masters League, told media on Sunday.

"They haven't been in the cricket world for so long as maybe some other teams around the world, but just their fighting spirit. To me, the ability to learn as the years go by, that would have given them the experience that's needed in order for them to be where they're at," he said in a virtual interaction.

"When you can see Afghanistan in the Champions League, and the

West Indies not, it means that Afghanistan is doing something right," he said.

Considered gritty minnows not long ago, Afghanistan have now become a decent force in the Asian region on the back of some consistent showing. Richards said West Indies will need efforts from everyone involved, not just the players, to improve. Apart from missing the ongoing Champions

Trophy, the West Indies had also not taken part in the 2023 ODI World Cup in India.

"In order for us to get ourselves back where we once were, it is going to take maybe not just the players, but individuals from the board, people who are in responsible positions," he said.

"For them to believe that this is not just the players, but it takes people from the board to identify the things that may be missing, (as to) why we are not there."

"I feel very annoyed with the fact that the West Indies team, with such (a) huge legacy, is not in the Champions Trophy and it hurts. It makes me feel very, very sad, because we are much better than that," he said. Richards said West Indies need people on the administrative part to realise what it would take to keep the Caribbean side among top teams in world, or else they would keep struggling.

"The advice that maybe I can give in the future is for everyone who identifies that West Indies need to be at the very top tier of world cricket, (and) until we identify that, we'll be basically in a position where we will continue to struggle," he said.

Not knowing if they would be playing their Champions Trophy semifinal in Dubai or in Lahore, both Australia and South Africa travelled to the UAE in anticipation as their opponent will be decided after the outcome of the India-New Zealand contest on Sunday. (PTI)

Former FIFA officials Blatter and Platini back to court for new trial



GENEVA, March 2: One week before his 89th birthday, former FIFA president Sepp Blatter returns to court Monday for a retrial in a case of alleged financial wrongdoing that has run for nearly 10 years.

Blatter and French soccer great Michel Platini were acquitted in July 2022 by three federal judges on charges including fraud, forgery, misappropriation of funds and mismanagement. They related to a FIFA payment of 2 million Swiss francs (now \$2.21 million) to Platini.

The acquittal came nearly seven years after the investigation was first revealed and removed them from office as leaders of FIFA and European soccer body UEFA. It also ended Platini's campaign to succeed his one-time mentor as FIFA president.

The Swiss attorney general's office appealed against the first verdicts in October 2022 and a fresh trial opens Monday in Muttens, near Basel.

A verdict from three judges is scheduled on March 25.

Blatter and Platini have consistently denied wrongdoing. They claim they had a verbal agreement to eventually pay for non-contracted work advising Blatter during his first presidential term from 1998 to 2020.

Federal prosecutors have asked for sentences of 20 months, suspended for two years.

Blatter was FIFA president in 2011 when he authorized paying Platini, then a FIFA vice president leading UEFA and his expected successor.

Details of the payment made in February 2011 emerged four years later in fallout from the corruption crisis that hit FIFA in May 2015. United States federal investigators unsealed a sweeping investigation of international soccer officials. Swiss authorities made early-morning arrests at hotels in Zurich before seizing FIFA financial and business records.

The Blatter-Platini case upended the expected line of succession at FIFA, where the heads of its then-independent ethics committee suspended and later banned both men.

Blatter was ousted from office ahead of schedule and Platini was removed both from UEFA and as the favored candidate in a FIFA presidential election held in February 2016. That was won by Gianni Infantino, who had been Platini's CEO-like general secretary at UEFA.

Once the two most influential men in world soccer, Blatter and Platini return to court aged 88 and 69, respectively, having not worked in the sport since 2015.

The case is scheduled for four days through Thursday, with reserve days available March 11-12. That leaves Monday March 10, Blatter's 89th birthday, clear.

The verdict from three cantonal (state) judges sitting as a federal court is due on March 25.

The trial is being held in a cantonal (state) courthouse in Muttens, in the suburbs of Basel, instead of the federal criminal court at Bellinzona where the first trial was held over 11 days in June 2022. (AP)

NEUFC EYE PLAY-OFFS BERTH AGAINST CHENNAI FC

CHENNAI, March 2: Just a win away from securing a play-offs berth, NorthEast United FC take on Chennaiyin FC in their Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Monday. The Highlanders are at the sixth place with 32 points from 22 games, and need just one victory to confirm their place in the playoffs. Three points from here will take them to 35, which is an unassailable feat for any team barring Mumbai City FC in the stand-

ings now. Chennaiyin FC have lost three in their previous five games, and are out of the top-six race, since they have 24 points from 22 outings now.

Chennaiyin FC have held the upper hand in their matches against the Highlanders at home, winning each of the last three encounters.

A win here will mark their joint-longest home winning stretch

against a single team in the ISL. Contrastingly, NorthEast United FC are unbeaten in their previous five ISL away fixtures, winning thrice in the period.

They have a goal difference of +8 in this phase, and a positive result here will be their longest unbeaten sequence on the road in the ISL.

Having beaten Punjab FC in their last home fixture, a win in this match would be the second

straight victory for Chennaiyin FC in their backyard in the ISL for the first time since last April.

Chennaiyin FC have been efficient from a crossing perspective, with 19.6% of their crosses leading to a shot (89 shots from 455 crosses) - the highest percentage in the competition this season.

They have made the fourth-most crosses in the league this season. NorthEast United FC have recorded three clean sheets in their

last four away matches.

Overall, they have kept six shutouts in 2024-25, the fifth-most in the competition.

NorthEast United FC have scored 10 goals from outside the box this season, their highest tally in a single ISL campaign.

Only Hyderabad FC (13 in 2021-22), Mumbai City FC (11 in 2022-23), and Kerala Blasters FC (11 in 2021-22) have scored more this way in a single season. (PTI)

We managed workload of pitches well ahead of CT: Emirates Board COO Subhan Ahmed



DUBAI, March 2: The slow pitches at the Dubai International Stadium has given the Champions Trophy matches a unidimensional look, but Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) COO Subhan Ahmed on Sunday said that the "workload" of the decks was carefully managed during the preceding ILT20 tournament.

The gradually tiring wickets have made the matches at the DICS here an invariable middle-over battle, where teams struggled to score off freely when spinners were in operation.

"The moment we learned that we are going to be the host (of the CT), we started preparing (the pitches) even during the ILT20 tournament for these matches. We complied with all the ICC requirements," said Ahmed during an interaction with a select group of media.

"We gave the required rest to the pitches (during the ILT20) that we were going to use for the Champions Trophy. We managed the pitch's workload as soon as we got to know that there was going to be an ICC event. So far the pictures here have played out really well," he added.

The ICC marquee event was decided to stage partially in Dubai after the authorities moved ahead with the hybrid

model.

Ahmed said the venue is ever-ready to host a cricket match of any magnitude. It has been speculated that the Asia Cup too will be played here later this year. "We don't have any official confirmation yet (on hosting Asia Cup) But our unique selling point is that we host events on short notice. This is a plug and play venue.

"If you look at the past 5 years, whether it is IPL, BSL, Asia Cup or the World Cup, we have hosted events on very short notice. We are always in a state of readiness," he noted.

However, the crowd involvement here did not reflect the gravitas that usually surrounds a big cricket tournament in the sub-continent. Even the blue-riband match between India and Pakistan did not see a full house here.

Ahmed explained the scenario. "It was picked gradually. There was not a 100% crowd in India vs Bangladesh. But there was more than 60%. There are some travel challenges in some countries. That can be a factor.

"But you must have seen all the matches after that. Attendance was very good. The India vs Pakistan match too picked up later, according to ticket sales, it was well over 95%. If some people could not turn up, we cannot say," he said. (PTI)

5th All Assam Inter-District Arm-Wrestling Championship in Sivasagar from March 18

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, March 2: The 5th All Assam I-District Arm Wrestling Championship organised by Sivasagar district unit of All Assam Arm Wrestling Sports Association (AAASA) affiliated to Board Of Controlling for Arm Wrestling in India (BCAI) will be held in Temple Town Senior Secondary School premises in Jaisagar from March 18 to March 20.

Announcing this here in a press meet, Kushal Duwori, president of the Organising Committee, said that over 400

participants are expected to join in the prestigious championship.

Hence, the Sivasagar people's cooperation can greatly inspire the young ones to participate in the completion. Arup Rajkonwar, vice president of BCAI, said that the Association under the International Federation of Arm Wrestling has been organizing events to inspire young people to keep physically and mentally fit with the least expensive sporting event.

The last state-level championship held in Dulaijan drew a large crowd and enthusiasts, and

this year's championship is expected to draw more competitors and more spectators. The winners will be able to join the national event, and the Indian team will participate in the World Championship in Azerbaijan.

The inaugural Akon Baruah Memorial 'Talatal Cup' Volleyball Championship on March 6 and 7. The inaugural Akon Baruah Talatal Cup Volleyball Championship-2025 will be held on March 6 and March 7 next in front of the historic Talatal-Ghar, Jaisagar, and most of the reputed Volleyball teams are expected to

participate in the championship.

The theme song of the prize-money invitational tournament, organised by Akon Baruah Memorial Trust, was released in a press meeting by legendary sprinter Arjun Bhogeshwar Baruah.

The press meet was attended by Dr Utpal Dutta, Prof. Sib-sagar University, national level referee Utpal Baruah, Jamaluddin Ahmed, and Rituraj Chetia, president and secretary respectively of Akon Baruah Memorial Trust, Akhil Ahom, and Purusuttam Kalita.



IOC top post contender Seb Coe says India has 'strong case' in 2036 Olympics bid, but competition tough

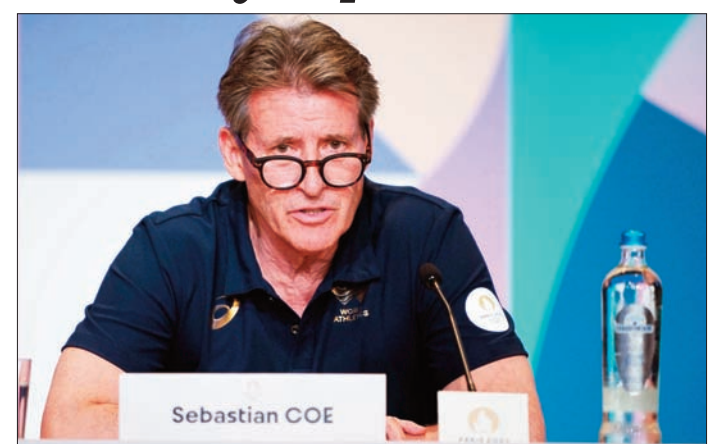
NEW DELHI, March 2: International Olympic Committee (IOC) president's post contender Sebastian Coe feels India's bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games is a "strong case" but competition will be tough with several other countries throwing their hats in the ring.

India has already submitted a 'Letter of Intent' to host the 2036 Olympics and Paralympic Games to the IOC's Future Host Commission, taking the first concrete step in an ambitious plan after months of informal dialogue with the global sport's apex body.

"Well, you won't be surprised given my background to say that I'm obviously very happy that India is committed to global sport and particularly the Olympic movement. I'm very happy to hear that.

"And look, it will be very competitive. It won't be the only bid, but the case that it (India) can make is a very strong case," Coe told PTI in an exclusive interview.

Poland, Indonesia, South Africa, Qatar, Hungary, Turkey, Mexico and Egypt are among other countries which have expressed a desire to host the 2036 Olympics.



The 2036 Games host nation will not be known before 2026. But it is certain that the host will be chosen during the presidency of the winner of the March 20 election of the new IOC chief.

Coe, whose maternal grandfather is an Indian from Punjab, is considered the frontrunner among the seven candidates contesting for elections to succeed Thomas Bach as IOC president.

The 68-year-old Coe, a double Olympic 1500m gold medalist, also advised India to not end its ambition to organise the Olympics if it does not get the 2036 Games hosting rights.

"Plenty of cities have bid and lost and come back. Interestingly, when London won in 2005 (for the 2012 edition), it defeated Paris. We all have just been to the Paris Olympic Games (in 2024)," said the Briton, who is currently heading World Athletics.

"Rio was one of the cities that didn't make it past the initial eval-

uation for the 2012 bid. And they had the Games immediately after Britain in 2016.

"So it is by no means the end of the story. And even the legacy from bidding is an extremely strong legacy."

More than 100 members of the IOC will vote on March 20 in the Greek resort of Costa Navarino, where the 144th IOC Session will be held from March 18 to 21.

Besides Coe, the other six candidates are Prince Feisal Al Hussein of Jordan, David Lappartient of France, Johan Eliasch of Sweden, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr of Spain, Kirsty Coventry of Zimbabwe and Morinari Watanabe of Japan. Coe said South Asia, of which India is the major country, has the potential to help grow the Olympic movement further by bringing more young people to sport.

"I have witnessed in the last few years the growing importance of South Asia in athletics, and athletics is the centrepiece of Olympic movement.

"If you and I 10 years ago said to each other that the men's

Olympic javelin title would be being fought between athletes from Pakistan and India, I think we both would have smiled at each other and moved on," he said referring to Arshad Nadeem and Neeraj Chopra winning gold and silver respectively in Paris.

"But it happened (in Paris Olympics), so there is a huge potential in Asia. What is really important here is we recognise that Asia and particularly South Asia has the real potential to help grow the movement and bring more young people into sport and into healthy lifestyles."

He, however, emphasised that a one size fits all approach will not work in all the Asian countries.

"Asia is a huge continent. There are large parts of Asia like China and Japan, and from Qatar to the Philippines. And there is no one size fits all approach. You can't say that the development programmes you have for China are going to be the same as you're going to have in Bhutan. It just doesn't work like that," Coe said when asked about his blueprint for Asia if he is elected the IOC president. (PTI)

Pakistan fans lose interest in CT after team's early exit

KARACHI, March 2: Pakistani cricket fans have more or less lost interest in the ICC Champions Trophy after the early exit of their team from the competition and the onset of Ramadan.

On Saturday, there were hardly a few thousand people at the National Stadium here for the England-South Africa match, and security personnel posted at the venue heaved a sigh of relief that the tournament was as good as over for them.

"It has been a hard and tense last two weeks for us so we are hugely relieved now. It was also relatively peaceful in the England match," SSP Imran Jamil, deputised at the stadium, said.

At least 7000 police personnel, paramilitary rangers and even some military units were on duty in Karachi for the Champions Trophy matches, which started on February 19 in Karachi.

But Jamil said the work to provide state-level security for the teams, officials, media and fans had begun before the commencement of the mega event because of the three-nation tournament involving Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa in Lahore and Karachi.

"Now the security personnel can get back to normal duties in Ramadan," he said.

Fariha and Faiza, two sisters who came with a group of college friends on Saturday, said without Pakistan in contention the Champions Trophy was over for them.

"We came today because we had already purchased tickets for the match," Faiza said.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has announced that all spectators who brought tickets for different enclosures



will get full refunds for the two matches washed out in Rawalpindi.

The bad news is that the fans who purchased a premium for hospitality and gallery

views will get no refunds.

Three matches in the tournament were rain hit with the last one between Afghanistan and Australia also called off in Lahore due to heavy rain.

Cricket journalist and analyst, Mahmood Riaz, said the Champions Trophy had been a bit of a let down because of the home team's performance.

"We were hosting a big ICC event after so many years and people were excited but the team really let everyone down."

Tauseef Siddiqui, 65, has never missed any international game at the National Stadium.

"Watching Pakistan lose twice to New Zealand in the tri-series final and on 19th March was a huge disappointment for us," he said.

He said he had spent around 60,000 Pakistani rupees for purchasing tickets

for himself and his friend for the matches in Karachi.

Experts believe that with Ramadan having started from Sunday, it will be difficult to bring in the crowds even in Lahore for the semi-final.

"Generally people stay at home and attend Taraweeh prayers after breaking fast in the first two weeks of Ramadan and they only start going out after Iftar, after the first 15-20 days of the holy month," a PCB official said.

The PCB is even working on plans to provide free Iftar boxes for the semi-final at the Gaddafi Stadium, just like the Emirates cricket board has done for the matches in Dubai.

"It would be a bummer if there are no sizeable crowds for the semi-final. Not a good advertisement for Pakistan cricket," he said. (PTI)

Shreyas fifty, Varun's fifer help India beat NZ by 44 runs; Australia await in semifinals

DUBAI, March 2: Shreyas Iyer's pressure-defying fifty and Varun Chakravarty's spin masterclass helped India script a 44-run win over New Zealand here on Sunday to top Group A, setting up the semifinal against Australia in the Champions Trophy.

Iyer made a composed 79 off 98 balls under pressure but New Zealand, led by pacer Mark Henry (5/42), managed to stifle India to an under-par 249 for nine.

Chasing 250 was not a tall order for New Zealand's capable batting unit but they struggled against India's spin quartet led by Chakravarty (5/42) to be all out for 205 in 45.3 overs. Kane Williamson's gritty 81 went in vain.

India will face Australia, who finished second in Group B, in the first semifinal here on Tuesday while the Kiwis play South Africa in the other semifinal in Lahore on Wednesday.

As they have been doing throughout this tournament, the Indian spinners placed efficiency ahead of wizardry, and bowled in a manner suited to the conditions.

Ravindra Jadeja found massive turn off the pitch but the New Zealand batters were done in by the effort from Chakravarty who relentlessly targeted the stumps.

Spinners took over once Hardik Pandya got rid of Rachin Ravindra early.

Williamson, who was dropped on 17 by stumper KL Rahul off Axar Patel, played a refined innings full of placements and elegance, but there hardly was any support for him from the other end. There was a 44-run alliance between him and Daryl Mitchell for third wicket, but just as it was blooming Kuldeep Yadav trapped the latter in front.

They lost Tom Latham (14), Glenn Phillips (12) and Michael Bracewell (2) in quick succession; however, Williamson remained unruffled by the rumbblings.

He used soft hands for deft placement of balls through the gaps, but two lofted cover drives off Jadeja for fours adorned his innings like bright diamonds.

But Axar deceived an on-charge Williamson



with a slightly fuller and slanted delivery, and Rahul just had to remove the bails from the stumps. The dismissal effectively sealed the match in favour of India.

Earlier, Iyer shared a well-paced 98 runs alliance with Axar (42 off 61 balls) for the fourth wicket and Hardik (45 off 45) played a quick-fire innings towards the end to help India survive a top-order meltdown.

It was a slightly different situation for Iyer as in the last few matches, the top three batters had given him the cushion of runs. It had enabled him to bat with some degree of freedom in those matches.

But here he had to build the innings from the scratch and he did that with perfection while making fifty off 75 balls with a single off Ravindra. The natural flair was on show on occasions as Iyer once lofted pacer Will O'Rourke for a six over long on and Axar gave him excellent company on a rather slow pitch.

But Axar departed against the flow of the game when his attempt to scoop Ravindra over short fine leg ended in the hands of Williamson. A century was there for the taking for Iyer but a feeble pull off O'Rourke was gobbled by up Will Young inside the covers.

Rahul, who now bats at a rather inexplicable No. 6 slot, looked promising while making 23 off 29 balls that contained a brilliant hit over long-on for a six off Ravindra.

But Latham latched on to a lovely catch behind the stumps off the edge off left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner, who once again came up with a good spell that contained a series of speed off balls at just over 70 kmp/h.

Those dismissals hurt India but Hardik, who produced some beefy hits, ensured that India reached near the 250-mark. Before Iyer's rescue act and Hardik's fire, India were tottering at 30 for 3 with skipper Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli getting out cheaply. (PTI)

Vidarbha clinch third Ranji Trophy title, emerge champions after taking first-innings lead against Kerala

NAGPUR, March 2: A magnificent run in domestic cricket this season culminated in a third Ranji Trophy title for Vidarbha, who emerged champions on the basis of their first-innings lead in the summit clash, which ended in a draw at their home ground on Sunday. The fate of the contest was all but sealed on the third evening when Vidarbha edged ahead with a slender lead of 37 runs in the first innings, having dismissed a doughty Kerala for 342 after putting on 379 runs batting first.

Kerala, the first-time finalists, fought hard but Vidarbha were rewarded for their incredible hard work and discipline throughout a season in which they not only clinched the Ranji Trophy but also ended as the runner-up in the 50-overs Vijay Hazare Trophy.

It is for the third time that Vidarbha have won the Ranji Trophy title, having done so earlier with their two consecutive wins in the 2017-18 and 2018-19 seasons. Vidarbha's win now also makes them one of the strongest outfits in the Indian domestic cricket, for they had also finished as the runner-up in the Ranji Trophy last season.

The team under the captaincy of Akshay Wadkar and head coach Usman Ghani produced dominant performances throughout the Ranji Trophy season which was, for the first time in its 90-year history, split into two halves.

Vidarbha emerged as the best team across all the four groups in the league stage with six wins in seven matches giving them 40 points.

Unlike Kerala who also had luck on their side in the knockouts when they beat Jammu and Kashmir (quarterfinal) and Gujarat (semifinal) by barest of margins and progressed on basis of first-innings leads, Vidarbha grabbed outright wins. Vidarbha crushed Tamil Nadu, last year's semifinalists, by 198 runs in the quarterfinal and went on to pummel defending champions Mumbai by 80 runs in the semifinal.

Overall, Vidarbha won nine of the 10 matches they played in the Ranji Trophy this season, which reflects the dominance of the team in India's premier domestic competition. On Sunday, Vidarbha did what they had planned — to bat, bat and bat — and reached 375 for nine with Karun Nair making 135 (295 balls, 10x4s, 2x6s), Danish Malewar scoring 73 and Darshan Nalkande chipping in with a 51 not out.

Vidarbha resumed the final day's play with the contest completely in their control, having an overnight lead of 286 runs. Even though Nair could only add three more runs to his overnight tally, Vidarbha batted



for long enough — close to the tea break — taking their overall lead to 412 runs, far beyond the reach of Sachin Baby's side. The triumph was achieved on the back of all-round performances, which had two of Vidarbha's youngest players taking charge of their team's showings on the field. The 22-year-old left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey created the record for most wickets in a Ranji Trophy season with 69 dismissals, going past the previous record of 68 wickets which belonged to Bihar's Ashutosh Aman.

Dubey also implemented the batting tips given by legendary Indian player Ravichandran Ashwin to make 476 runs in 10 matches with five fifties, perhaps to show early signs of another spin-bowling all-rounder in making for India. The 24-year-old Yash Rathod, a bespectacled left-handed batter, amassed 960 runs at 53.33 in 10 matches with five centuries and three fifties to top the charts for batters, which had plenty of his teammates as well.

The veteran Nair, who had joined Vidarbha for this season, not only led their charge in the Vijay Hazare Trophy with five tons but also finished as the fourth highest run-getter in the Ranji Trophy, making 863 runs in nine matches at 53.93 with four tons and two fifties. In the final, Nair struck 86 and 135.

The 21-year-old Malewar, who struck 153 and 73 in the final, finished fifth with 783 runs at 52.20 with two tons and six fifties.

Nair and Malewar were the architects of Vidarbha's win in the final, for they forged partnerships of 215 and 183 runs in the two innings to steer their team out of troubled waters in both the innings.

Skipper Wadkar was not too far behind, at seventh position with 722 runs in 10 matches at 45.12 with two tons and as many fifties. (PTI)

After last year's loss, we started preparing from monsoon itself: Vidarbha skipper Wadkar

NAGPUR, March 2: Losing the Ranji Trophy final to Mumbai left such a bitter taste that Vidarbha started training for the following season from the monsoon itself, said skipper Akshay Wadkar after leading his team to a third title here on Sunday.

Vidarbha got hold of the trophy after earning the decisive first innings 37-run lead over Kerala here.

"Last year, we lost the final. So we prepared during the monsoon itself. Every individual worked on himself. There are four Vidarbha batters among the top-ten run-getters this season," said Wadkar at the post-match presentation referring to the all-round effort of his squad.

"Harsh Dubey is the highest wicket-taker. Yash (Rathod) was the highest-run getter and Danish (Malewar) can turn a game around. "As a captain, if you're playing the Ranji Trophy, I had a dream to lift it. Every first-class cricketer has that dream, and we've fulfilled that. We're ticking all aspects, and we'll look at what we can work on in the off-season," the captain added. (PTI)

Four semifinalists in one city as CT schedule sees tightrope walking

DUBAI, March 2: It's unusual to find two semifinalists of a global tournament stationed in the same city unsure of their future travel plans, but that is precisely the situation of Australia and South Africa in the ongoing Champions Trophy.

If you count India and New Zealand, the last-four stage entrants from Group A, then Dubai at present has all the teams scheduled to play in the semifinals.

This scenario has created a vertical divide of opinions among players — former and current — in the world of cricket, and has also forced the International Cricket Council (ICC) to do the tightrope walking.

Australia flew to Dubai from Karachi late Friday night after their match against Afghanistan was washed out, a result that guaranteed them a semifinal berth.

South Africa drubbed England by seven wickets to swell their points tally to five and boarded the Dubai-bound flight as toppers of

Group B. But which of them will stay in Dubai will depend on the result of India's match against New Zealand on Sunday.

If India win against NZ, then they will top the Group A and will play the Australians, the second placed-team in Group B, in the first semifinal here on Tuesday.

Otherwise, India will face South Africa, the Group B toppers, and Australia will go back to Pakistan to play the second semifinals on Wednesday in Lahore. "The situation is not really ideal. But then that's how the draw is, and the rain in Pindi (Rawalpindi) did not help as exactly those two teams got affected by it. On the other hand, they have got an extra day in Dubai to know the conditions," a source close to the development told PTI.

The rained-off match between Australia and South Africa, in fact, added to the delay in determining the group winners.

South Africa all-rounder Marco Jansen conceded that India will be more familiar with the



conditions but wasn't ready to place Rohit Sharma's side in an advantageous position.

"We'll see how they do against New Zealand because obviously that's going to determine who we play in the semifinal (in Dubai). But if we play in Dubai and it's against India, obviously, they've had training, so they will be more

used to the conditions," Jansen said during the post-match press conference after South Africa's match against England.

"But we've also played in Dubai, so it's not something new. We play spin really well. So, I don't think it's that much or that too much of an advantage," he added.

However, Australian skipper Pat Cummins, who is not playing in the Champions Trophy, did not receive the scheduling well, and thought it did give India some head start over others.

If India win their semifinal match on Tuesday, then the second semifinal winner will have to return to Dubai on Thursday (March 6) ahead of the March 9 final. While it involves less confusion than the current scenario, logistics planning needed some last minute tweaks even though room has been left for such possible scrambles typical of multi-nation events.

Meanwhile, Australia and South Africa are scheduled to train at the ICC Academy on Sunday. (PTI)

Virat Kohli's fighting spirit, energy and passion make him a great: Viv Richards

MUMBAI, March 2: West Indies legend Sir Vivian Richards on Sunday said Virat Kohli's fighting spirit, energy, and passion put him in the category of cricket's "great" and "legendary" players.

Richards, a long-time admirer of Kohli's indomitable spirit and passion for the game, also hailed the India batter for silencing critics through performances on the field.

"Well, I think he answers all of us, really. Before the World Cup for the ODIs, where he wasn't doing that well and then he came back in magnificent form, so, that is true testament to the character that we are speaking about," said Richards, a governing council member for the International Master League, during a virtual interaction. "This is why I put him in the category of being great and legendary... Not all the time that you get players who can come back when they're down. His fighting spirit, energy and passion to do well make him stand out."

Richards said if he was still playing, he would love to have



Kohli's energy on the field. "His energy reflects his passion. He goes to show you that his involvement in the game all the time. There's a passion for that. There's not a moment that goes on that field that Virat Kohli doesn't miss. He's just magnificent in that way," he added. Asked about batters he admires, the former West Indies captain said Kohli reminds him of himself. "A lot of batsmen... Before you had people like Sachin

Tendulkar, who has retired," he said. "But presently, Virat Kohli. He reminds me of myself. He who dares, win. He believes in himself, 120 per cent confident at all times and whenever it needs to be aggressive, and confront opponents, you need guys like that."

"I appreciate seeing guys who, especially when you're a captain, you defend your team and defend the people who you are representing so Virat Kohli, the modern day

guy, I love," he added.

Richards said given his fitness and hunger, Kohli can go on to play ODIs for a long time.

"I'll tell you something. Just the way he is and the way how fit he is and the way he still believes, very passionate about the game. You never know. He could still play when he's 50," he said.

"You never know. But it's just magnificent to see. Sometimes we see guys go on and maybe they come to an age and sometimes you look and you say, 'wow, he doesn't look as good as in the past'."

"But he just scored 100 just recently against Pakistan in Dubai so that says that, and this has just happened. This suggests that he's still very much at the very best, in the best of form," he added.

Richards, however, declined to compare Kohli with Tendulkar. "I don't believe in that. We should be quite thankful that the periods that everyone would have passed through, that the folks who saw these guys then benefited from the fact that they saw some very good

player," he said.

"I will never make comparisons. They all did their time, their work for the time that they represented their countries. And we should appreciate that time because it's not just us alone who would be giving the answer, but all the folks, the fans who would be watching would pay tribute to that."

Richards said India should be patient with the form of their skipper Rohit Sharma, who has blown hot and cold with his form.

"You've got to give him all the opportunity. He would have failed in the past. I just believe that let's wait and see when we get to the semifinals and hopefully when you get to the semifinals, you're hoping to get to the finals," he said.

"Let's see, because sometimes some guys leave it a little late. I still believe that Rohit is still a magnificent player." "Players go through bad times. It depends now on how well he comes through this and if he comes through this, certainly he's going to be all for the better," he added. (PTI)

SITUATION VACANT

Aturkimi Academy, Rukasen, Diphu, Karbi Anglong

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Minimum teaching Experience -2 years experience working as a Teacher in any Secondary School

2. Name of the Post-TGT (Social Science) Required Qualifications - MA/BA with B.Ed.

Minimum teaching Experience -2 years experience working as a Teacher in any Secondary School.

3. TGT(English) Required Qualifications -MA/BA(English)

Minimum teaching Experience --2 years experience working as a Teacher in any Secondary School.

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